



COMPOSING WITH INSTRUMENTS

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JAM SESSIONS

This method builds on existing experience with making music in class. You can try out different methods in an improvised jam session. Provide a set-up for making music in class, and if applicable warm up with an already familiar (and well mastered) piece. First, you explain the rules of a jam session:

- » it is now about being more free with music in order to create new patterns of your own for the song-writing. listen carefully,
- » try to hear all instruments and find your place
- » a little bit of chaos is permitted so that mistakes are always allowed when experimenting
- » the conductor agrees on a hand signal in order to keep a created pattern looped throughout the session (for example thumbs up)
- » the conductor can create a reentry. That can be implemented through a hand signal, for example only 1-2 instrument groups continue to play, and the other instruments start again.
- » If necessary, any hand signals that are already known are explained again or practised.

Depending on age, experience, composition of the group and mood of the day, the teacher is challenged to interact with the group and to methodically react to what is happening. Failure can also be a topic of discussion – making the high even more intense when it finally grooves.

- » It is built up bit by bit, starting with the rhythm instruments. As there is less room for manoeuvre here (for example changes in the time signature should be avoided, there must always be a continuous meter et cetera), there should be variation above all among the rhythm instruments. The individual musicians can drop out one after the other and join back in with new ideas.
- » In order for all pupils to participate and come up with their own patterns, there must be enough time and space for this. Therefore, the group can be reorganised several times so that nobody is challenged too much or little on their instrument.
- » In the case of too much chaos in the arrangement, you can also exchange positions or instruments. It can be a good idea to explore this limit.
- » Less is more: some instrument groups are asked to leave out increasingly more notes in order to balance out what is really necessary. Through these experiences, the patterns can be shaped more variably so that a previously one-measure loop can become an interesting four-measure pattern. A typical form for this would be A B A C or A A A B.
- » The parts that emerge as loops (hand signs) are recorded (hand signals), are recorded (for example with a smartphone) and can remain as basic patterns for the song writing.



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If you created a groove that everyone enjoys, an arrangement step can follow. This is where intuition and creativity are needed:

- » Where can you insert a break, which instruments stop where and which ones continue to play?
- » Which instruments can change their key, for example every two or four measures?
- » Which instrument groups can play a chord change while the others continue to play?
- » Can the bass play other keynotes?
- » Does anyone have an idea for a variation or a B section?
- » Will you add another new instrument, rap, vocal or a melody improvisation?
- » Are there stylistic considerations that may be important (for example characterisation of the piece and the adaptation of the sounds, tempo changes, change to the groove)?

Stylistic specifications and experiments may come from the teacher or from the participants in the rhythm group. A hiphop groove in 80 bpm will sound different to a four beat in 120 bpm. A programmed beat can also be used to support or to (partially) replace the rhythm group, for example using the free app “Pro Metronome”, a one or two bar drum beat can be quickly programmed (select sound 12 in the settings). Alternatively, use one of the music apps recommended on the song contest website under “Digital composition”.

Pupils who find it difficult to actively participate could play together with someone who finds it easier to find patterns or could be given a specific simple function.

These are just a few ideas and methods for running a jam session with the class. Be creative yourself!

The more freedom there is in jamming, the longer the way to a moment of success. Even inexperienced musicians can benefit from reaching the point where musical unity and communication emerge after much experimentation and repetition because of patience, discipline and hard work despite the freedom and the unclear goal. You can sensitize your pupils in this regard by having improvisation play an important part in lessons, for example through background information or regular practices.



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INSTANT COMPOSING

Professional musicians and songwriters develop their patterns either in the studio or in a joint session, in which they carry out lots of spontaneous experiments. The smallest variations are recorded again and again, listened to, rejected and changed. This is particularly important for the melody. At the start of the seventies, bands such as Kraftwerk, already spent a whole day (or a whole night) working on a short melody in order to find the best version. In this process, it is often decisive which sounds are left out or changed, what tension the melodic rhythm generates and disperses, and what repeats when. Today, there is a topliner who does this - a musician who is only responsible for the melody. For example, Taylor Swift often sings her melodies at the first attempt in the way that they end up in the song.

If applicable, the lesson can begin with a short, interesting video on the topic of toplining or instant composing, which means spontaneous composing.

Divide the class in half or into thirds. The first group divides itself into melody/topliners (2-4 musicians, preferably singers, alternatively on instruments), chords (at least 3 musicians for rhythmic chords, melodic chords and extended chords, significantly more for harmonic individual voices), possibly also a bass and rhythm group. The group sits in a circle or semi-circle.

While the first group plays, the other members of the class are actively encouraged to observe. Depending on the group, specific tasks can also be assigned (write a melody in your head, collect ideas for lyrics to go with the pattern), through which at the end creates additional inspiration or cooperation between the groups (for example, somebody can sing an alternative melody or suggest a lyric). Alternatively, everyone is assigned to a member of the music-making group and makes notes what they play.

Now composing is done in a circle (Circle Composing). On the edge of the circle, the first member of the rhythm group begins to play a repeating pattern. Only when he/she is happy with it, do they look right into the eyes of the next person who may then start to play. In doing so, attention must be paid that there is some experimentation at first (the tendency is to quickly hand over), and that the individual musicians take enough time. Furthermore, what is played must be easy enough to be played consistently. Bass, chords or harmonic individual voices and finally, the topliners follow the rhythm group. For the very first time, you can play a "quick round" in order to check the system and reduce inhibitions.



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Here are some suggestions on how to handle the created patterns:

- » By experiencing how differently the musicians tackle the task, a great amount of inspiration can be generated for your own experimentation. By changing the positions and instruments, the participants can try out different roles.
- » The lack of a harmonic structure is a benefit in this regard. When composing and arranging music, it is often intentional that you start with difference voices instead of a simultaneous chord. Therefore, for example by changing just one voice of the chord group, or changing the bass tone, a new harmony can be created. In the process, the groups can experiment, for example each member of the group may try out a change over four bars.
- » In order to make the playing lively, B sections, breaks or variations can be incorporated. By using start and pause signals for individual musicians or function groups, a live arrangement can be shaped by the teacher or the pupils themselves. A popular variation is that the leading person may also give individual musicians a sign to freely change the pattern (depending on the selected key and instruments a stage-wise shift upwards or downwards can be experimented with - that works, for example with keyboards, flutes and mallet instruments in C major but is more difficult for the guitar, bass and transposing instruments as well as in different keys).
- » The ping pong procedure is suitable for the melody. When only the melody group is left, use hand signals to agree with its members, who shall begin (if in doubt, the person who is next in the circle). A short phrase of two bars at most is sung, this can be done either using imagined lyrics without meaning or simply sounds. Now the next person sings a variation of it all etc. The sequences can be designed relatively freely here. However, pay attention that after a period of experimentation, the short melody is fixed so that work can continue. In the case of initial difficulties, the group can also sing together, at first among themselves ("putting their heads together") and then presenting the melody to the group. The group that is not making music can support them if necessary.
- » Regarding instruments in the melody group, it is useful to play melodies one after the other in the normal order of the circle. Possibly a collective melody can be chosen or played in phrases (for example in octaves). It is worth investing some time in experimenting with and finding a two measure phrase.
- » Instead of their own melody, the group members could also create a mash-up with a well-known hit. The familiar lyrics (for example a short section from the chorus) are simply sung over the instrumental pattern. In doing so, the melody and the melodic rhythm may be changed according to taste.
- » The suggestions and the literature examples from the "Jam sessions" method are also essentially suitable for instant composing.



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Once each group has had a turn, work continues depending upon equipment and the results. The patterns can be combined with each other as different components, the class can continue to work together on a part of the piece or can be split into different rooms to create a fixed arrangement from the experiences. The created melodies and fragments of lyrics can be further elaborated. One group can start from scratch.

Alternatively in the case of lockdown, quarantine or to expand face-to-faceteaching:

The method is also suitable for online teaching. With the help of a platform, such as Soundtrap or Bandlab, the musicians record one track after another. It is useful to work on several projects in parallel per group and to follow a timetable that shows who works on what and when. The patterns created in one week of teaching are then further developed in the second week of teaching.