

WIGMORE HALL
Learning

COMPOSITION AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES



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WELCOME!

This resource gathers together a collection of warm-ups, singing exercises and practical compositional processes that have been used by Wigmore Hall music leaders in Key Stage 2 settings over several years.

We hope this collection of ideas can function as a reference point for teachers and creative artists who are developing their own approaches to facilitating active and creative compositional work with Key Stage 2 children in the classroom.

THE WORKSHOP LEADER'S MINDSET

Here are some tips on embracing a workshop leader's mindset – for those of you who are teachers or other kinds of group leaders, many of these concepts may well be familiar, but hopefully you'll find some helpful ideas here...

HAVE CONFIDENCE!

When leading creative activity confidence is best created by being very well planned. If you are comfortable that you know what you want to communicate the job is half done.



Use open body language to 'say' everything is ok



Keep friendly eye contact with the students



When in a circle, stand upright. Have your arms and body open. Embrace the group with your eyes. Make sure no one is feeling left out.

THE WORKSHOP LEADER'S MINDSET

SPEAK CLEARLY!

When we're nervous we tend to speak faster, so make a point of creating a little more space between phrases. You will need to project a little from the diaphragm. Always look at the group when talking to them.

ONE THING AT A TIME

Make sure you give one set of instructions at a time and straight away follow it up by doing it. Doing is the main objective in a workshop; talking is a means to an end.

READ THE GROUP

It is essential that you keep the group with you at all times. Try to read how the group are feeling at any time. For example...

- *Are they all on top of the idea?*
- *Is it time to move on?*
- *Are they frustrated but very nearly there?*
- *Do you think they can do it better even if they think it's pretty good?*
- *Should you make it more simple?*
- *Should you give a bigger challenge?*
- *Is it time for something completely different?*

THE WORKSHOP LEADER'S MINDSET

FLEXIBILITY AND HONESTY

When you are confident with your plan you will begin to see the space for flexible thinking within it. Someone from the group may have a very good idea that runs contrary to your own. It is good to be honest with yourself and be ready to try things. There may on the other hand be a very good reason to not go in another direction. If you can have open honest dialogue with your participants about the music then you are creating shared ownership of the music but also maintaining a strong focus for the group.

WARMING UP

PHYSICAL WARM-UP

Stretching and shaking can energise a group as much as a high energy activity. Always build slowly and keep the group with you at every step...

- Stand in a circle with the group
- Explore various stretches and shake out the body and limbs afterwards
- Work your way around all zones of the body
- Brush down your body and limbs, and follow with 'body drum rolls'. You can create these by asking the group to tap the fingertips of left and right hands alternately as fast as possible like drumsticks on a drum on the chest, then the belly, tops of heads, knees etc.
- Go back to shaking everything and call "freeze" accompanied by a loud clap to emphasise the silence and stillness that should follow
- Repeat a few times and encourage the children to be aware of the contrast between the busy activity and the silence and stillness

WARMING UP

EYE CONTACT

Eye contact is really important when making music together, so it can be helpful to get the group used to this when you're warming up.

- Standing in a circle, ask the group to look at various points in the space (floor, ceiling, any fixed points in the room)
- Then get all to look at each other round the circle. Try to make eye contact with and smile at everyone in the group

CIRCLE AWARENESS

Teamwork is also really important in group music making, and this activity can help to build that team...

- Pass a clap round a circle and accompany it with eye contact
- Then try passing the clap and eye contact to any point in the circle
- Lead a single unison clap for all to follow – model and emphasise the importance of leading clearly with big gestures and eye contact
- Invite others in the group to lead a clap – the point is not to catch people out but to reinforce eye contact as a musical ground rule and to establish a group focus

WARMING UP

BREATHING, POSTURE AND DIAPHRAGM

- Invite the group to stand in a circle with their feet comfortably apart, and arms relaxed
- Bring your heads downwards towards your chests
- Slowly bend down, letting your arms hang loosely in front of you, and bend your knees slightly
- Keep your neck and head relaxed
- Shake your head and shoulders gently to make sure they are relaxed
- Slowly uncurl upwards, straightening each vertebra one by one and finally bringing up your head
- Give your shoulders a roll backwards
- Imagine there is a string from the back of the top of your head being pulled higher, gently stretching your back and neck
- Ask the group to be aware of their breathing but not to alter anything
- Slowly begin breathing deeper and slower
- Ask the group to focus on breathing “into the belly” (which really means into the lower lungs). Participants should experience expansion of back, sides and belly if done correctly.
- Take slow, deep breaths with your hands on the side of your ribcage. As you breathe in your belly gets fatter and as you breathe out your belly contracts.

WARMING UP

- Count an 'in' breath for over five slow beats. Hold it there for another count of five; let the breath out over another five.
- Repeat slowly extending the count up to 10 each time
- Try different arm movements to accompany the 'in' and 'out' breath. This physicalisation can really help. Create your own ways to do this that you feel comfortable with.
- The diaphragm is located a little way below the sternum; if you get everyone to pant like dogs they can very quickly locate it.
- Try blowing an imaginary candle that is a few feet away to connect the breath with the diaphragm. This makes an essential first step prior to voice and singing warm ups.

VOCAL WARM-UP

- Standing in a circle, check that your shoulders are relaxed
- Make the sound of the sea together: say a long 'shhh' and push your arms out in front of you to show the waves coming up the beach
- Say a long 'ssss' and pull your arms back in as the waves fall back
- Repeat and keep the sea sounds slow
- Following on from these breath and sound exercises ask the group to breathe out but accompany this out breath with a comfortable note that is in the middle of their individual normal speaking range. Continue this process of breathing in and singing long notes.

WARMING UP

PITCH

- Standing in a circle, ask the group to trace a line in the air with their fingers and follow the line with their voice, going up and down
- Ask everyone to make this sound together
- Almost touch the finger of the person next to you to pass on the magic finger. If their finger moves up and down, so should the pitch; if their finger stays in a horizontal line, then the pitch should stay on one note.
- Keep passing it on
- Try drawing a zig-zag and make your voice do a vocal zig-zag

ENERGIZE: 8-4-2-1

- Standing in a circle, lead the whole group in a unison countdown
- Pat your head 8 times, whilst counting out loud to 8
- Without missing a beat, do the same on your shoulders...
- And knees... And feet
- Without missing a beat, repeat the whole sequence but only counting to 4
- Next time, only count to 2
- Last time, only count to 1
- Then... relax, have a laugh and shake out your limbs!
- Repeat the whole thing several times getting faster
- Loudly call the number 1 and whisper all the other numbers
- As a compositional development, ask the group to compose a new sequence of numbers e.g. rather than all the even numbers, try all the odd ones, or a mix of both. Make sure the numbers still follow the decreasing pattern and finish on the 1,1,1,1.

EXTENDING A WARM-UP INTO A CREATIVE COMPOSITION

There are many ways you can develop a warm-up activity into a composition. It can be a good way of developing a piece of music in an 'organic way', where you as the leader don't bring a musical starting point to the group, but rather that the composition is naturally developed by the group from a simple exercise.

EXAMPLE

A body percussion warm-up exercise in which you ask the children in the group to make up their own body percussion riffs (ostinatos):

STAGE 1: Stand in a circle. Clap a steady pulse together making sure everyone is feeling it. Ask everyone to try to create or invent their own repeating clapping pattern. Count in 1, 2, 3, 4 and begin altogether. The leader could play the steady pulse on a woodblock or cowbell to ensure everyone can hear it. Try a few times as whole group until everyone has settled on their particular individual idea. These repeating patterns are called ostinatos.

EXTENDING A WARM-UP INTO A CREATIVE COMPOSITION

STAGE 2: Play around with the ostinatos created by the children by using a simple conducting signal to stop and start the group. Perhaps a 'start' signal could be both hands in the air with a count of 1,2,3,4, and stop with both hands coming together with fingers closed. Try stopping some of the ostinatos while leaving others going

STAGE 3: Divide the group into small units and give all the small groups the same task:

Create a new rhythm that you all play together using your bodies. The rhythm should be different from the tutti rhythm but you could make it up using parts of the solo rhythms.

Give the groups 10 – 15 minutes to complete the task and then bring everyone together to share their work.

STAGE 4: You now have 6 short musical pieces to put together: the solo rhythms, the tutti rhythm and the 4 small group rhythms. Agree an order for the rhythms and play through the whole piece.

STAGE 5: Now you can transfer the piece onto instruments (this could be instruments the group already plays or classroom percussion) and carry on developing it.

STAGE 6: Perform your piece to friends, family, teachers or other classes!

EXTENDING A WARM-UP INTO A CREATIVE COMPOSITION

SONGWRITING

A song can be written about absolutely anything. With a Key Stage 2 class it can be helpful to choose a theme for the songwriting process, for example The Battle of Hastings, 1066.

- Get plenty of large sheets of paper and marker pens
- Ask the group to name as many things about (for example) the events of 1066 as possible
- Write down everything that is offered and try to write it down in the exact way it is said by the students
- Keep an eye out for phrases that have a poetic quality or rhythmic potential, or are a powerful statement
- After this initial collection of ideas, follow up with a more nuanced question, for example: Imagine they were about to be involved in this battle – how would they feel?
- Again write down everything that is said in the way that the students say it
- By this stage the leader should be engaging in a shared discussion about the ideas with the students and still writing down developments of the concepts put forward.

EXTENDING A WARM-UP INTO A CREATIVE COMPOSITION

- Look out for:
 - Ideas that are linked
 - Phrases that have similar sounds
 - Phrases that have similar structures
 - Potential 'hook' phrases
 - Phrases that have distinctive poetic quality
 - Phrases that have distinctive rhythmic potential
- You should now have a range of lyrical possibilities for a chorus/refrain, couplets, and/or verses
- As a group sort the phrases into sub-groups and write them out on separate sheets. These are rough drafts at this stage; they don't need to be ordered or edited just yet.

Ask the group what the 'feel' for the song should be (and possibly what it shouldn't be). Try to avoid musical genre types and rather go for what the desired quality of the music the group might want to achieve. Should it be strong, slow, fast, melancholy, spooky, dramatic, joyful etc?

- Choose the opening lyrical phrase from one of the sheets. Ask for one person from the group to say the lyric phrase/sentence, and to repeat it. Notice the way the individual student says it. Get them to repeat it a few times and everyone will start to hear the sounds within the phrase and not just the words. Ask everyone to copy that particular phrasing. Does it suggest a rhythm or a style?

EXTENDING A WARM-UP INTO A CREATIVE COMPOSITION

- Try to find some notes to sing the words with and make it a simple tune. Ask individual students to try this or try it yourself to get the process going. You might use a xylophone or metallophone to help with choosing notes.
- Looking back at the words on the sheets, is there a phrase that naturally follows? When this is decided, get the group to suggest the next part of the melody.
- Repeat with the next phrase from the piece of paper and then see if you and the group can sing one after the other. How do they join up? Do they run into each other or is there a gap? Four lines of words and melody will be plenty for a verse. Two to four lines will be plenty for a chorus too.
- When you have made two or three sections of words with tunes in this way it is time to put them together. Use clear names for the component parts when structuring the final song. You can label the sections 'Verse' 'Chorus' 'Refrain' 'Bridge' etc. You may prefer letter or number tags – AABCA etc.
- Get the students to invent movements to the song as you go. This really helps the students to remember the words and encourages an enhanced sense of performance. Moreover, it often allows students who have maybe not felt so confident in offering melodic ideas to contribute in a different way.

EXTENDING A WARM-UP INTO A CREATIVE COMPOSITION

- Through all of this, listen to, accept and sing back immediately the offerings of the group, no matter how small. The effect upon the group of this simple action can be transformative. Once one student's idea has been accepted and transformed by a singer or played back on an instrument there are almost always 29 more students who want to have a go!
- When the component parts are structured and given an overall form, rehearse and enjoy!
- Remember that the leader is an active part of the creative process alongside the students. Involve the group as much as possible but if you have an idea that will enhance the song you can propose it. If it works everyone will be upbeat about it and if it doesn't then that is fine too.

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