

# Project 1

## Music for special occasions

### Composing a birthday piece

#### Suggested listening

Birthday pieces:

- Purcell: *Duke of Gloucester's Birthday Ode*
- Bennett: *Week of Birthdays*

Other pieces based on initials:

- Dutilleux: *Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher*
- Poulenc: *Valse-improvisation sur le nom de Bach*
- Schumann: *Abegg Variations*
- Warren: *Harriet's Dancing Dolls*  
(free download available from [www.sibeliusmusic.com](http://www.sibeliusmusic.com))

For hundreds of years, composers have written anniversary pieces for family, friends, fellow musicians, patrons and dignitaries such as monarchs and other important people. The occasions at which these sorts of pieces are performed can vary enormously: some are private, others family gatherings, birthday parties and full-blown state occasions (for example, the concert for Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee in 2002 was broadcast on live TV).

In this project you will write a birthday piece for someone, using the musical notes of their name. It could be a family member, a friend, or someone you admire such as a sporting hero, a musician or a celebrity. If you can't think of anyone, you could also choose a group of people (such as a football club, charity or band), or even a building or a historical event (such as the Tower of London or the first landing on the moon).

Write down the name on which your birthday/anniversary piece will be based:

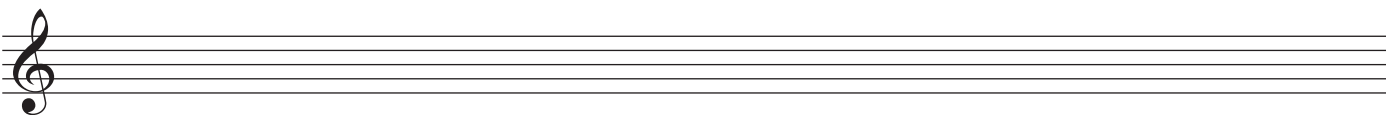
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The first step is to decide upon, and create, some key ingredients: these will form the basis of your composition.

#### Melody

Start off by inventing some melodic material from the musical letters of your chosen name. You will need about four to eight notes. If their first name doesn't include enough musical letters, you could use the person's full name, the place where they live, or some other connection.

Write down your letters and notes in the space provided:



#### Rhythm

Your next task is to make a short melodic idea or riff out of these notes, by setting them to a rhythm. You could use the subject's characteristics to help you here: if they are outgoing or if they like sport, you might want something energetic and rhythmic; equally, if they are quieter, a gentler rhythm might be better; and if they have a good sense of humour, a jig-like rhythm in  $\frac{6}{8}$  might work well. The next example shows three melodies based on the musical letters of David Beckham's name - D, A, D, B, E, C and A.