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by David Ashworth

## INTRODUCTION

This resource follows on from one of Britain's biggest exam boards changing its A level music syllabus to include female composers, after a student launched an online campaign calling for better female representation on the course. In 2015, Jessy McCabe noticed that Edexcel's A level music syllabus featured 63 male composers and no female ones. Since her intervention, the syllabus now refers to a range of composers including Clara Schumann, Rachel Portman, Kate Bush, Anoushka Shankar and Kaija Saariaho. Women musicians included elsewhere across the specifications include Joni Mitchell and Beyoncé (AQA A level), Esperanza Spalding (Edexcel GCSE), Bette Midler, Kylie Minogue and Adele (OCR GCSE), Ella Fitzgerald (OCR A level), and Sally Beamish (Eduqas A level).

It's important that we now build on this initial momentum by showcasing the work of even more women composers. The ones included by Edexcel and the other boards are only the tip of a very large iceberg.

However, in this resource I want to go beyond just raising awareness. I want to help teachers and students get 'under the bonnet' by looking at some of the rich and diverse composing approaches and strategies used by some these women composers, not only to understand these ideas but also to guide students into trying some of them out for themselves.

Our selected composers all work within what can loosely be referred to as a contemporary classical idiom, often drawing their influences from a much wider range of musical styles and genres. For each featured composer, a brief background biography is followed by some key works with links to online listening where possible. We find out about their approaches to composition, which include ideas about harmony, structure, instrumentation, styles and genre.

We then provide some suggestions for composing activities that students can work on, based on strategies used by these composers. For teachers or students who wish to explore music by women composers further, there are some links at the end of the resource. All pieces referred to in the activities are available on CD, or from the usual online streaming and download services.

## MEREDITH MONK

### Background

Born in 1942, Meredith Monk is an American composer who was one of the first to incorporate extended vocal techniques into her performances and composition. A description by her publisher Boosey & Hawkes sums her up as follows: 'Her groundbreaking exploration of the voice as an instrument, as an eloquent language in and of itself, expands the boundaries of musical composition, creating landscapes of sound that unearth feelings, energies, and memories for which there are no words.'

Like her contemporaries Steve Reich and Philip Glass, she has formed her own ensemble, Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble, which is dedicated to exploring new textures and ways of working with voices – sometimes with minimal instrumental accompaniment. Her work is often multidisciplinary, combining music with elements of dance and theatre.

Again, like many composers of her generation, her work does not sit neatly within the confines of a single genre or style. Although her work might be best described as contemporary classical, her pieces have also been performed by a diverse range of artists including Björk, John Zorn, DJ Spooky and Bang on a Can.

## KEY WORKS

- *Astronaut Anthem* (1983): a cappella chorus.
- *Panda Chant II* (1984): a cappella chorus.
- *A Celebration Service* (1996): 12 voices, keyboard (four hands) and melodica.
- *Possible Sky* (2003): chorus and orchestra

### **Our Lady of Late for solo voice and wine glass (1972)**

Creative composition involves more than just an ability to develop and arrange musical material. It is about finding refreshing new ways of creating and performing music. In *Our Lady of Late*, Monk uses a single wine glass to provide original accompaniments for solo voice. Some of these pieces sound quite conventional, but others are more uncompromising and might prove less accessible to young listeners unaccustomed to listening to contemporary music. From the collection of 18 pieces, we have chosen three of the more accessible:

## PROLOGUE

This piece is purely instrumental – a solo for wine glass. Monk taps a wineglass with a beater or spoon creating rhythmic patterns using open and muted sounds, similar to playing a triangle. The glass used in this piece either has a natural resonance of E flat or has been partially filled with water to tune to that note.

Here is a notated extract of a few bars near the beginning (the cross note heads indicated muted notes):



## UNISON

A steady drone is created by continuously stroking the rim of the wine glass, which is now tuned to a high E flat. The voice plays with the note, initially singing in unison, before gently gliding up and down in pitch over a narrow range. Later on, the vocal part develops a heavy vibrato on the note.

## WALTZ

This piece has a more conventional sound. The wine glass is used to provide a steady pulse in triple time. The finger glides rapidly on the surface of the glass creating a sustained note on a high F over a three-beat duration. Monk uses this to accompany a folk-like vocal melody using the F Mixolydian mode. Here are the first few bars of the vocal part:



The melody is sung using a long 'a' sound, as in 'hay'.

## ACTIVITY

This could provide the basis for a composing/performing project for confident singers who don't play conventional instruments. Using wordless vocal sounds also obviates the need to write lyrics!

Students should develop a basic facility for coaxing notes from a wine glass by gently striking or stroking the rim with a moistened finger. The glass can be tuned by adding water and matching the note to a chime bar. Adding more water will cause the pitch to rise.

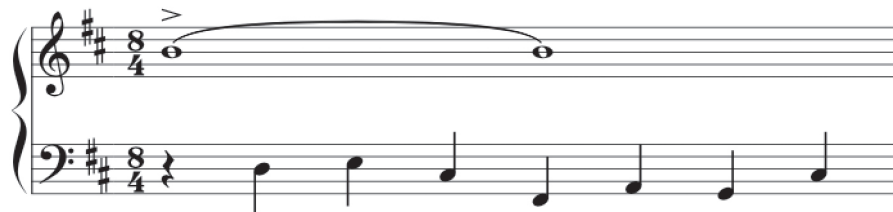
A vocal melodic part can then be devised to go with the wine glass accompaniment. This could be a piece for solo, duet or vocal ensemble and wine glass player. The wine glass sound can be amplified by close miking or placing the glass on a resonant wooden surface. Alternatively, the wine glass sound can be sampled and played from a keyboard for a safer but visually less compelling performance.

## Steppe Music

Of course, composers will not always want to write pieces that are particularly groundbreaking or innovative. Many see themselves working in a developing tradition and will use ideas from other contemporary composers – and from those who have gone before.

For example, Monk freely acknowledges that Bartók's collection of piano pieces *Mikrokosmos* has been an important influence – one that shows clearly in this piece. The short pieces in *Mikrokosmos* provide ideal starting points for developing compositional ideas, including the use of unusual scales, rhythmic patterns, canonic procedures and much more.

In *Steppe Music*, Monk uses drones and parallel harmonies that might well have been drawn from Bartók's work. The piece opens with a sustained ostinato on B. After a few bars, a meandering folk-like melody emerges. Both parts are played in octaves, but notated here as single notes for simplicity:



A gentler passage follows, using a similar principle:



This is followed by a more aggressive passage where the right hand plays a high-pitched ostinato chord against a more angular melody in the left hand.

### ACTIVITY

This piece would make an ideal basis for listening and appraising exercises. It is slow-moving and the parts are clear.

It could also be used as a starting point for composition and performance for one or two players. A less confident keyboard player could take on the right hand ostinato parts while the other student plays composed or improvised melodies against them. Use of octaves will help to thicken the sound.

## Earth Seen from Above

This is a piece for vocal ensemble, where members of the ensemble create their own chordal accompaniment backing. Chords are built up by layering long overlapping sustained sounds, overlaid with fragmented, echoing patterns of shorter notes. The long notes are sung to 'nn' the short notes are sung to 'doh'.

### ACTIVITY

This could provide a starting point for composing for voices and combining elements of simple chordal accompaniment. Students should map the chord progression out in advance before arranging for voices. Either use Monk's sounds to delineate long and short notes, or choose different wordless sounds. Vowels and humming sounds are good for sustained notes. Consonants with a clear attack are more appropriate for short sounds.

A reasonably priced vocal score of *Earth Seen from Above* is available from the publishers Boosey & Hawkes for school choirs wishing to extend their repertoires.

## Further reading and listening

- Meredith Monk's own website.
- An online score for *Possible Sky* (and other works by Monk) is available from the Boosey & Hawkes website. They are free to view once you've registered on the site.
- This is an excellent video of a location-specific performance of another work by Monk, *Songs of Ascension*.
- See also Björk's performance of one of Monk's most popular works, *Gotham Lullaby*.

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# DELIA DERBYSHIRE

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## Background

Delia Derbyshire (1937-2001) was a British musician and composer, best known for her work with the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Her background in a working-class family from Coventry did not preclude her from getting offers from both Oxford and Cambridge universities – something very unusual in the 1950s. Despite graduating with a degree in mathematics and music, she was turned down for a position with Decca records, who told her the company did not employ women in their recording studios. In 1962 she began working for the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, where she would go on to create music and sound for over 200 programmes. Her best-known work is undoubtedly her electronic arrangement of Ron Grainer's theme tune for the *Doctor Who* series.

## KEY WORKS

- *Circle of Light*
- *Science and Nature*
- *Blue Veils and Golden Sands*
- *The Delian Mode*
- *Love Without Sound*

## Composing ideas and activities

Watch this short documentary, *The Delian Mode*, which clearly explains the processes used by Derbyshire to create her music. The film documents the founding of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop and demonstrates how its practitioners would manipulate tape recordings of 'found sounds', combined with simple electronic sound-generating devices, to create audio collages for use in TV and radio.

The results generated considerable controversy at the time, with many viewers and listeners complaining about this 'bleak, crazy music' coming out of their TVs and radios. The technology has moved on radically since the film was made, but it did help create an aesthetic that has inspired many of today's composers who use electronics in their work. And many cite the work of Delia Derbyshire in particular as an important influence.

## ACTIVITY 1: FOUND SOUNDS

In the documentary, Derbyshire talks of being 'born, bred and blitzed in Coventry' during the war. She vividly recalls the loud sirens indicating air raid warnings and the subsequent all-clear. She recalls being evacuated to Preston and hearing the percussive, early morning sounds of clogs on cobbles as workers walked to the mills.

Environmental sounds such as waves and thunder, and 'found sounds' such as tapping wine bottles or metal lampshades, were a continuous source of fascination and inspiration for Derbyshire's work. She would make tape recordings of these sounds and painstakingly manipulate and edit them in her electronic music making.

Listen to some of the extracts from Derbyshire's work at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, and some of her pieces on the album *An Electric Storm* by experimental electronic band White Noise. Clips can easily be sourced on Youtube, Spotify and other sources.

Set students the task of recording a collection of interesting sounds that they will manipulate and combine in creating short pieces in this electronic style. Recordings can be made using standard recording equipment or

tablets/phones. They can then be downloaded into an audio editing programme such as Audacity, where they can be edited and combined into musically coherent structures.

Editing using software is, of course, much more straightforward than the cutting, splicing and speeding tape procedures showcased in the documentary, but the results are much the same. The challenges of creating something musically rewarding are just as demanding, however. Close listening and a musically sensitive imagination are required.

### ACTIVITY 2: DOCTOR WHO COVER VERSION

The original *Doctor Who* theme was a fairly innocuous TV theme tune written by Ron Grainger. However, it is Derbyshire's electronic treatment and arrangement of this music that make it such a memorable and popular piece of electronic music.

Set students the task of arranging and performing a 'cover version' of the original *Doctor Who* theme. A recommended preparatory activity is to watch this short film, which gives some background to the piece.

Students will need to work out the main melody by ear, or they could possibly work from sheet music. This melody line should be played using a synthesizer sound. Underpinning it is the distinctive, driving bassline played using a fat bass sound, based on the following pattern:



Suitable sound sources can be found on even basic electronic keyboards under the 'synth' collections. Alternatively, students could use virtual synthesiser apps on mobile devices, such as Alchemy, Animoog or Thumbjam.

What makes the track really distinctive, however, are the menacing sound effects that enhance the texture considerably. Listen carefully to these 'sounds of war' and try to replicate them. Instruments, voices and found sounds can be processed using audio editing software and then triggered using a virtual sampler such as Soundplant on a computer, or SampleToy or GarageBand on a tablet.

### EXTENSION

Students could take another well-known theme tune, or indeed any melody, and give it the *Doctor Who* treatment.

### ACTIVITY 3: SOUND ART

Sound art and new Music organisation Octopus Collective, based in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, commissioned a new piece of radio/sound art in honour of Delia Derbyshire Day 2017. The piece was recorded and produced by Cumbrian artist Jenn Mattinson, exploring the time Delia spent in Cumbria in the 1970s. Using testimony from two female oral history recordings, Mattinson also mixed the voices with her own sonic composition to reflect the stories relating to the time she spent drinking in the local pub, a failed relationship, working for construction firm John Laing which was laying gas pipelines across the country, and working as an administrator at an art gallery. You can find out more information on the project here.

This is just one example of the impact women are making as sound artists. Sound art is about using sounds as a fundamental source for creating work. One of the best-known sound artists is Susan Philipsz, a Scottish artist based in Berlin who works with spaces, narrative and sounds. In 2010 she won the Turner Prize, the first time a sound work had been nominated.

In sound art, sounds are usually recorded and combined in different ways, with the emphasis often more on timbre and texture than on considerations of pitch, harmony, rhythm, time and so on.

Students should research and listen to examples of sound art by women, as use them as a basis for creating an original work.

- **Planning:** decide what your piece is going to be about, then decide what sounds might be useful for telling that story. For example, if your piece is about tranquil places in cities, you might want to think about locations such as urban canals, churches, waste ground, back streets, and so on.

- Use a mobile recording device to capture a collection of sounds on your given theme.
- Decide how best to structure and combine these sounds, using basic audio editing software, to put together an interesting and coherent piece.

### Further links

- Delia Derbyshire Archive, John Rylands Library, Manchester.
- Delia Derbyshire website.

## KIRSTY DEVANEY

### Background

Born in 1990, Kirsty Devaney grew up in the north-west of England and now works as a composer in Birmingham. She started her musical journey in primary school where she was offered free flute lessons and later discovered composing through arranging music for her school band. At the age of just 20 she was shortlisted for a British Composer Award. Her music has since been aired on BBC Radio 3 and performed by professional contemporary music ensembles across Europe.

Devaney's music explores freedom and includes moments of improvisation over carefully constructed and composed textures, to create new and unusual soundworlds. Influences commonly come from the natural world, personal experiences and modern society.

Devaney is committed to promoting creativity as something we all have the capacity for and she regularly composes with and for non-professional and young musicians.

### KEY WORKS

- *Hadal Zone* (2011): flexible scoring.
- *Nebula* (2012): piano trio.
- *Letters* (2013): cello and piano.
- *Star Cluster* (2016): electric harp and loop pedal.
- *Gore Point* (2016): voice, violin and clarinet.

### Composing methods and activities

Devaney herself describes her composing methods in this way:

'My music is commonly inspired by something in the natural world or from the wonders of the universe. I have composed orchestral music based on the Galilean moons of Jupiter, created works inspired by the deepest parts of the sea, and devised music influenced by the long grass and creepy crawlies in my garden.'

'I tend to work with a wide range of musicians with different skills and musical interests. I sometimes use the musicians themselves as a starting point – I listen to them play, ask them what they enjoy playing, what styles they like to play in, what they find tricky. This can be a good starting point to a piece.'

'When I start composing, I don't go to the piano as some might expect. Instead I sit in a quiet room and I imagine the sounds. I don't have perfect pitch so can't work out the exact notes, but instead I see the shape of the piece, what events might take place, where the climaxes are, etc. I even sometimes imagine what the piece will look like performed, where it will be staged, how the musicians will look. I then physically draw the music using graphics, shapes, words, and notation. This way I have a blueprint of my piece.'

'A lot of my music uses freedom or semi-improvised parts. This way complex textures, rhythms and sounds can be made without making the music look very complicated. I use improvised cells which are small fragments of musical ideas with some information for the performers to follow. For examples, sometimes I will give the pitches but not the rhythm, sometimes there are no barlines.'

### ACTIVITY 1: PERFORMERS AS INSPIRATION

Hearing your own music live can be inspirational, but it can also be tricky to find the musicians to perform it – especially if the music is hard or you don't play their instrument. So start to think smaller. Find one or two musicians (maybe friends) who you know would be happy to try out a few ideas. Ask them to play some music they know to you and then ask the following questions:

1. What do you really enjoy about playing your instrument?
2. What does the instrument do well?
3. What can *you* do well on the instrument?
4. What does the instrument not do so well?
5. What do you find hard to play?
6. Do you like to play certain styles?
7. Do you like to improvise?
8. Do you have a favorite note?

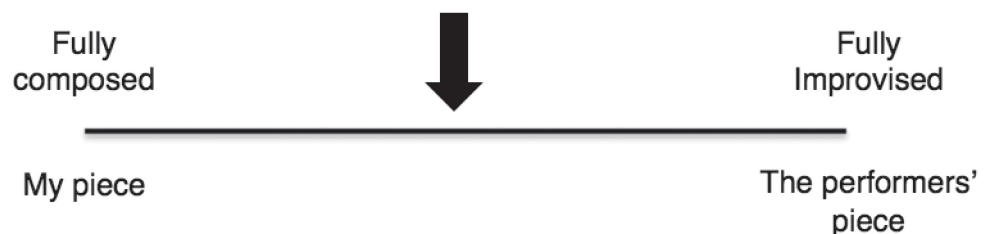
Flute example:

1. What do you really enjoy about playing your instrument?  
*That it was the first musical instrument I played.*
2. What does the instrument do well?  
*Fast scale runs and high notes.*
3. What can *you* do well on the instrument?  
*Trills and a very quiet top E.*
4. What does the instrument not do so well?  
*Loud low notes.*
5. What do you find hard to play?  
*Flutter-tonguing.*
6. Do you like to play certain styles?  
*I have an affinity for Baroque flute music.*
7. Do you like to improvise?  
*A little, with some help.*
8. Do you have a favorite note?  
*Top E.*

Look at your list and pick a couple of the answers as a starting point for your solo or duet. Be careful not to get too carried away and create something that is too hard for the performer(s) to perform. As you are composing the piece, keep sending it to them and asking them for feedback and advice on it.

### ACTIVITY 2: LEARNING TO LET GO

Devaney explains: 'As composers we sometimes want to control everything about the piece. When we compose on a computer, everything can be performed with mathematical accuracy. However, musicians are not machines, and they can make their own decisions too. When I first started using improvisation I felt like it wasn't my piece anymore, but now I try to see this as a spectrum with one end being fully controlled/composed by me, and the other fully improvised by the performer:



'Different pieces move along the spectrum depending on the music.'

Compose between three and five small musical cells or ideas that can fit together in different ways. Examples you could give include:

- a rhythm
- a series of pitches
- a chord, or chord sequence
- a melodic shape
- a melody without barlines

Give the cells to a performer or ensemble, and ask them to use them to create a piece of music. You might want to set some ground rules, such as: start with cell 1, only play each cell once before moving on, get louder each time you repeat. Feel free to change the rules as you hear the piece and keep adding more if needed. Notice how each new rule changes the music.

If you don't have access to performers you can loop or record yourself playing each cell at different times. Try to create three versions and see how different you can make them.

### Further links

- Kirsty Devaney's website
- Kirsty Devaney's Soundcloud site

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## BUSHRA EL-TURK

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### Background

Bushra El-Turk's music reveals the influence of her Lebanese roots, and straddles Eastern and Western idioms.

She has been selected by the BBC as one of the most inspiring hundred women today, and her music has been both performed and broadcast on radio and television globally, in collaborations with the London Symphony Orchestra, BBC orchestras, London Sinfonietta, Royal Opera House, Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra, Latvian Radio Choir and multi-ethnic Atlas Ensemble, among others.

She is artistic director of Ensemble Zar, a cross-genre ensemble whose mission is to express the Middle Eastern artistic temperament in its rawest form, blurring written and improvised textures, contemporary and ancient sound worlds.

### KEY WORKS

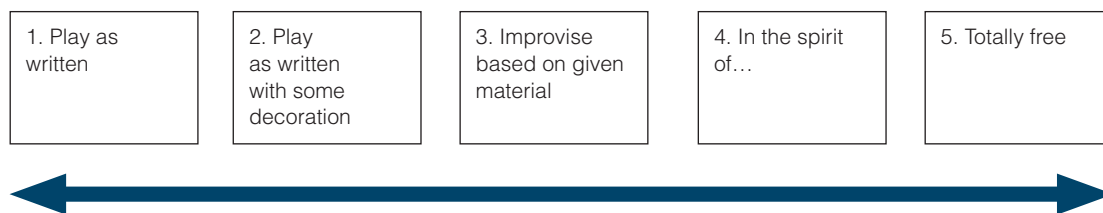
- *Tmesis* (2013/2015): symphony orchestra.
- *Lisaniki* (2015): choir and Near-Eastern ensemble.
- *Zwareeb* (2014): violin, Chinese erhu and Azeri kamancha.
- *Dramaticule III* (2011): eight stringed instruments of different traditions (erhu, kemenche, kamancha, sarangi, violin, viola, cello and double bass) and Japanese sho.
- *Eating Clouds* (2006): string quartet.

### Composing methods and activities

Bushra El-Turk writes: 'I have, in recent years, been interested in working with musicians from different cultural traditions, as well as those from the Western classical tradition, often in the same ensemble. Sometimes I combine musical elements and ancient song forms from the Near East, and further East, within Western contemporary classical structures. Most often my scores range on the spectrum between the notated and the improvised, in order to create the right environment for the seeds I sow to grow, so I can allow the musicians I am working with to flourish. Even more importantly, I have to imagine I am working with different personalities rather than purely writing for the instruments.'



This is the spectrum to show the range from the strictly notated towards free improvisation:



She continues: 'In *Zwareeb*, for example, I am catering for three different bowed-string instruments from different traditions – an Azeri kamancha player, who mainly improvises on a mode (the mugam) would play based on nos 2, 3 or 4 on the spectrum. The Chinese erhu player, who mainly reads detailed Western notation but may be able to improvise, would play based on nos 1 and 2; and the violinist who would prefer to read from a detailed score would play no. 1.

'With regard to the different musical elements I combine, I often juxtapose different musical parameters together. For example, *Lisaniki* for choir and Turkish instruments, I borrow the derbakki (Arabic drum) rhythm cycle and juxtapose it onto a set of pitches of my own with a longer pitch-cycle. Both cycles of different lengths repeat in the same fashion as an isorhythm. I sustain selected notes to form harmonies that gradually thicken, which, in turn, become rhythmically, harmonically and texturally more complex when combined.'

### ACTIVITY 1: COMBINING MUSICAL STYLES TOGETHER

Choose two musical parameters from below:

- Rhythm
- Melodic phrase
- Phrasing/articulation/gesture
- Form (ABA, call and response, etc)

Choose a piece of music from a tradition you're not familiar with, then transcribe one of your chosen parameters from it. For example, with a melody you could use its rhythm (take away the pitches) or its notes (take away the rhythm).

Repeat the process above with another piece of music from a different tradition and a different parameter.

Combine the material from the two previous steps. For example, you could take the melody from a Persian piece, but with the rhythm of an Indonesian gamelan piece. Perhaps a more interesting example would be the same Persian melody played utilising the bending technique of the Indian sitar. You could then go further and use this melody as the basis for call and response, as found in blues.

### ACTIVITY 2: SUSTAINING MELODIES

Pick a number between five and seven. Then take a melody you have already written, and sustain each note according to the number you picked. For example, if you picked the number five, every fifth note of the melody will sustain while the other notes of the melody carry on. As the number of sustained notes build up, they will begin to form a harmony. You can then extract this harmony and use it as the starting point for other ideas or as a new section of the piece. What happens if this harmony comes before the melody in the piece? How would different dynamics and articulations affect this material?

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# ERROLLYN WALLEN

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## Background

Errollyn Wallen is a composer, pianist and singer-songwriter. She studied Music at Goldsmiths, University of London; King's College, London; and King's College, Cambridge. Her works include symphonies, ballets, operas, chamber music and film scores. Recent large-scale commissions include two works featuring the London Symphony Orchestra for the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games – *PRINCIPIA*, for massed choirs and orchestra, and *Spirit in Motion*, for soprano and orchestra.

She formed her own group Ensemble X whose motto is: 'We don't break down barriers in music: we don't see any.' She was the first woman recipient of the Ivor Novello Award for classical music and the first black woman to have her work performed in the BBC Proms. She was awarded an MBE in the 2007 Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to music.

## Key works

- *Another America*: opera series
- *What's up Doc?:* pop song
- Cello Concerto
- Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra

## Thoughts on composing

In teaching composition in the classroom, we often tend to focus on the 'nuts and bolts' procedures involved in writing music: how to develop a melody; harmonising a tune; creating arrangements, etc.

Sometimes, however, we need to stand back and consider the bigger picture. Composers like Wallen, who have written extensively about their composing philosophy, can help us do this. Consider this passage from the book *Navigating the Unknown*, where Wallen writes:

'I often dive into composing a piece of music without knowing where I am going structurally. I believe and trust in my intuition and the fact that I do know at a deep and non-linguistic level exactly what it is that I want to achieve. I have learnt that starting is what is important, and that it is how one manipulates the material that defines the process. It doesn't lessen the fear that is concomitant with voyaging out into new terrain, but the knowledge that intuition will be my compass and companion in the wild maze of creation is a source of reassurance.'

She recalls as a young girl reading a biography of a composer in which the biographer described one of his abilities as being able to see the wood for the trees. This made a significant impact on her own thinking and approach to music making. She attempts to activate this perception when composing, considering how intuition can operate at various levels and in various ways. These might include the influence of intuition on historical research, social perception and interpretation, in the writing of words and music, and in musical structuring.

So although we often have good reasons for providing structured, guided composition tasks for our less experienced young students, there may sometimes be a case for allowing them to explore more freely.

## Activities

### ACTIVITY1: DRIVING RHYTHMS

Baroque music has been an important influence and source of inspiration for Wallen, especially the driving 'funky' rhythms that can be heard in much of the repertoire. She hears this in Stravinsky, marrying contemporary sounds with Baroque-type rhythms, and the strong driving rhythm patterns that underpin much rock music.

The first movement of her piece *Photography* opens with this driving rhythmic phrase on violin:



Listen to how this phrase is subsequently picked up by cello, then double bass, before becoming the basis for an ostinato figure in more of an accompaniment role.

Other features of this piece include:

- single notes as well as short phrases being rapidly passed around different instruments.
- careful control of the addition of layers, coupled with dramatic contrasts in texture.
- relentless driving rhythms.
- sections where instruments come together and merge to play tutti.

Use these ideas as a basis for composing an original piece.

### ACTIVITY 2: TIME MANAGEMENT

From an interview on The Arts Desk website:

‘By the time I begin a work, I have a lot of material ready to draw upon. The beginning is always tricky – I think it’s tricky for everybody. You have to just take a deep breath and start, and accept that what you’re writing is probably not very good! Sometimes I play a game, for instance starting anywhere in the middle, so that the motor skills are going and you’ve got something on the page. It could be that what you start with is later chucked out, or you find it’s not the beginning but the middle or the end, or another piece. I set the stopwatch, decide how much I need every day and try and stick to that. If I concentrate on putting the time in, a piece will emerge eventually. It took me a while to understand my processes. More and more I think the revision stage is crucial, making sure the piece is what you want it to be.’

This highlights one of the hallmarks of professional composers. They are organised and efficient in how they use their time. It’s not a matter of waiting for moments of divine inspiration. It’s more about rolling your sleeves up and getting on with it. Share these observations with your students and set them a composing task as follows:

- Set out a composing schedule timeframe. For example, you might decide that each day at 7.30pm you are going to spend half an hour writing some music.
- Don’t be too critical in the early stages. Keep everything you write.
- A linear approach to composition is not required. You might want to start on a bridge section or a repeating chorus.
- Once you’ve created a pool of ideas, however disparate, it’s now time to think about how you might use them. You may need to be flexible and open-minded. What you had envisaged as a middle section for the piece might work better if adapted to make a good introduction or ending.
- Look at ways of combining your ideas horizontally (perhaps creating effective contrasts or unusual progressions) or vertically (using one idea to provide a counterpoint for another, for example).
- Be prepared to adapt your material during this crucial revising/editing stage. For example, one idea that you had thought of as a melodic idea might be tweaked to make an interesting bassline.
- Allocate as much time in your timeframe to revising and editing as you do to writing the initial bank of material.

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## FURTHER READING AND LISTENING

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The **Women of Note** website celebrates '300 years of music by women' and has a fully searchable database of biographies, key works, sound clips and website links.

**Sirens** is an Association of British Orchestras Trust fund that aims to raise awareness and appreciation of the music written by historical women from around the world.

**Exchanging Notes** is a composing resource from the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group that features the work of Tansy Davies, Liz Johnson and Errollyn Wallen.

The **BBC Ten Pieces** project includes repertoire and resources by Anna Clyne, Kerry Andrew and Anna Meredith.

**Judith Weir** is a British composer and Master of the Queen's Music with a special interest in music education. Her website contains many links to audio and video clips of her work.