

Ensemble Research

Simple ideas for music-making

The starting point for these suggestions came from the need to encourage more people to incorporate the use of music technology into general music-making, and the possibility of supplying equipment with some guidelines not only into setting it up but also into using it. It is aimed at the untrained musician: teachers, special needs teachers, carers in respite homes and hospices, people working in child development centres etc. It is intended that an instrument using midi technology is simply regarded as another musical instrument.

Creating pieces of music from scratch, even small ones, can seem daunting, but there are some simple techniques which can demystify the process. Here are a few:

Structure

The single most important aspect of making pieces is structure. Very basic frameworks are fine. For example:

- work on one section, then a contrasting one, then return to the first, which may be changed in some way
- use patterns and transform them
- use repetition of patterns as a background to give individual players freedom
- use a constant background (support) and super-impose dialogues between instruments
- use a particular sound or group of sounds to signal changes
- use refrains to give shape; eg. refrain - verse - refrain - verse - refrain - repeat refrain.
- call and response patterns
- base pieces loosely on stories (avoiding the temptation to get too literal)

Texture

- Choose groups of instruments with care - are you aiming for like sounds or contrasting sounds? This includes choosing sounds of midi instruments.
- Build up / reduce the textures gradually.
- It often works well to allocate slower (and possibly pulse) movement to the lowest instrument, a 'tune' to middle ranges and 'twiddly bits' to the highest instruments. The lowest instrument is then responsible for changes.
- Use silence creatively; listen attentively

Variety

Remember all the elements which go to make up music: all can be varied.

- Speed
- Volume
- Rhythm
- Articulation
- Pitch
- Tone
- Silence

Caution: it's usually best not to vary too many elements at the same time.

Note patterns

- Pentatonic (five note scale) improvisation is usually very effective and has the advantage of no note ever sounding wrong. Any five note group is good, eg. all the black notes on the keyboard, or C D E G A, or D E F A B (which sounds more melancholy). Having established a pentatonic group, 'blue' notes (those outside the 5 of your scale) can be added for effect.
- Chords: the '3 chord rule' is simple and satisfying: C major, F major and G major.
- The above chords can be the basis of a '12 bar blues'

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Jessie's Fund

Jessie's Fund is a registered charity committed to helping sick children through the power of music. It is the Fund's objective to ensure that every child who could benefit from this unique medium of communication and expression should be given the chance to do so, wherever they may be.

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