Guide to Classroom Workshopping

This section is designed to introduce teachers/practitioners to the process of large-group composition. By creating a clear framework for the first few lessons, we hope that you will gain the confidence to attempt this approach, integrating and embedding it into your classroom practice.

The techniques highlighted here are those developed at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (www.gsmd.ac.uk/connect). Over the past two decades they have established solid pedagogical foundations for this type of work, exemplified by their CONNECT Ensembles. The original film, commissioned by Musical Futures, demonstrates Guildhall CONNECT’s practices, illustrating the process from warm-up exercises through to final performance. If you are completely new to the concept of creative workshop techniques, we strongly advise that you view the film (at www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping) before embarking on this section.

USING THE MATERIAL

The two mini projects that follow explore the initial stages of facilitating group composition. The process is detailed in step-by-step fashion, supported by accompanying film clips.

These materials illustrate a process that should work for practitioners relatively inexperienced at leading creative ensembles. Each project begins with non-instrumental warm-ups that prepare students for listening, improvising, composing, arranging and performing activities. The projects demonstrate how small musical ideas can be developed into complete compositions.

While the instructions illustrate the direction a creative process could take, they are not designed to be followed to the letter – doing so would eliminate two vital elements in the methodology: spontaneity, and your own musical skills. It’s a basic tenet of creative workshops that participants/students should feel that they co-construct the material. This applies equally to the music leader/facilitator. Use your creativity, and awareness of the participants’ abilities, to shape the process. Treat the instructions as a framework, not a recipe.

There are some important principles inherent in this methodology that may make demands upon you as a musician and music leader: ensembles
should consist of the instruments that the participants bring or enjoy playing, meaning that the ensemble is unlikely to resemble any standard instrumental group; use of notation should be seen as an independently chosen aide-memoire, not a pre-requisite for taking part; and musical starting points should be open so that participants can contribute their own compositional ideas to the final piece. The trade-off for these additional challenges will be the sense of freedom, ownership and creativity that this process should engender among your students.

Freedom, however, should not be equated with ‘anything goes’. Your students need to understand that even basic exercises need to be performed **musically** and with precision, and that generating musical ideas requires re-working and refining, not endless repetition of the first thing that comes to mind.

By its very nature, this work encourages creativity and experimentation that often results in the music evolving and developing in new and unexpected directions. If a workshop is functioning well, this is precisely what should happen and ultimately is what you should aim for. Be prepared to follow the creativity of your sessions, to change, develop and discard anything that is written here, and to devise and create projects that are unique to your students.

**TEACHING/FACILITATING STYLE**

If you’re new to facilitating large-group music-making, we hope that the two mini projects introduced here will be sufficiently detailed to give you a solid start. It’s a way of working which can provide opportunities to genuinely personalise each session of music-making. Participants can make an important contribution, within their competence levels. Don’t expect miracles: the first few completed pieces will not resemble typical ‘orchestral’ scores, and they will inevitably reflect your students’ personalities. But, if you consistently create a shared, open and democratic musical environment we believe you will see increased motivation and enjoyment levels among your students. If, after trying out these materials, you re-visit the original CONNECT films (see [www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping](http://www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping)) you’ll see that such approaches can result in subtle and sophisticated group performances.

The music will work most successfully if you allow it to develop its own character according to the make-up of the group. This material is merely a starting point that gets a group playing and listening. As you gain confidence in the process and in your students, be prepared to pick up on ideas they have, or intricacies in the way they play, and use that to inform the music.

Some tips for teacher/practitioners leading creative group composition:

- Instill confidence among your students from the outset by giving positive feedback – this way of working may be new to them, especially improvising in front of their classmates
- Don’t be afraid of playing yourself – it can help to clarify what you’re saying, and students like hearing something that impresses them. Be practical in your method of teaching, refining and nurturing the music
Keep students in their comfort zones during the first session/sessions and gradually move them out, so that they feel challenged but at a level with which they are comfortable.

Don’t worry as things get messy. This music is all about the groove. If the rhythm section is tight, you can have the luxury of chaos over the top of it in the knowledge that at anytime you can count everyone out except the rhythm section. Over time, students will learn to listen better and lock in with the groove.

Find ways of tapping into the repertoire of music the students are already familiar with.

So many interesting things happen by accident – allow mistakes and build from them.

The sessions won’t always evolve at the speed you expect. Sometimes you may need to do more or less than you planned for in a session, so always have some back-up ideas.

Give boundaries within which students can make their own decisions and contributions to the music. For example: ‘Can you use these four notes and come up with a short melody?’ or ‘Do you want to play A or B – which do you think sounds better?’

Make sure that you balance talking and doing: allow plenty of time for playing and punctuate it with a few focused, inspiring and insightful points.

Develop a conducting repertoire and technique. A few visual cues can indicate a wealth of information.

**INTEGRATING THE MATERIAL INTO YOUR PRACTICE**

The two mini projects explore the initial stages of facilitating group composition. This process should work for practitioners relatively inexperienced at leading creative ensembles. Each project begins with non-instrumental warm-ups that prepare students for listening, improvising, composing, arranging and performing activities. The projects demonstrate how small musical ideas can be developed into complete compositions.

The accompanying DVD (which is also available on the website to download at [www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping](http://www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping)) illustrates in practice most of the processes outlined below. We recommend that you watch relevant DVD clips, as indicated in the text, as you are reading through the material. It takes you through all of Project 1 in detail (Project 1 particularly is designed for beginners to this approach), and Project 2 shows you some slightly more creative and challenging ideas. Tim Steiner is the project leader in this film, as well as being the author of these materials. He worked with a group of mixed-ability Year eight and 9 students from Morpeth Secondary School, Tower Hamlets during the recording of these clips. You will notice that the group is about half-the size of a ‘normal’ class; this approach works just as well with larger classes although it can sometimes be helpful to have the support of an additional music leader (peripatetic teacher, older student, etc).
SECTION 2: NON-FORMAL TEACHING

NOTATION

Notation has been used throughout the materials to explain musical ideas. These are intended for your use only and should not be used with the students.

TECHNOLOGY

Using technology within live, creative group sessions can be challenging and it is important to set clear and achievable challenges for students working with computers. The most straightforward method is to use a computer as a synthesiser that can be played via a keyboard. A more complex process could involve programming the core groove of a project and using this as part of the rhythm section. Alternatively, textural soundscapes developed independently on computers can be played to create alternative sections of a project, or as a colouristic textural part of a groove. Also NUMU ([www.numu.org.uk](http://www.numu.org.uk)) is a useful resource for storing recordings (audio and video) of each lesson in its ‘Projects’ facility.

OPTIONAL OUT-OF-HOURS LINK

These projects could form starting points for developing out-of-hours ‘creative ensembles’, made up of students of different ages, abilities and with varying musical backgrounds and interests. As part of their Approaches to Personalising Extra-Curricular Learning the Leeds pathfinders developed a model for ‘all-comers’ ensembles. See the Breaking the Mould resources on [www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping](http://www.musicalfutures.org.uk/classroom+workshopping).
Project 1: Groove, Head and Solos

NON-INSTRUMENT WARM-UPS AND PREPARATION
Before starting arrange the group in a circle without instruments.

WARM-UP PART 1
DVD Project 1 Track 1
- One student plays a steady beat on a cowbell throughout the exercise
- One by one, indicate to each student to begin clapping a steady beat, until all the students are clapping a steady beat together
- Following a count of four students clap any rhythm they like
- Following another count of four students switch back to clapping a steady beat
- When this process is working well, experiment by cueing different groupings of students to clap rhythms, while others clap the pulse

WARM-UP PART 2
DVD Project 1 Track 2
- One student plays a steady beat on a cowbell (or similar) throughout the exercise
- One by one, indicate to each student to begin clapping a looping rhythm over the beat. This process continues until all students have been brought in
- Point to a small group of students indicating to them that following the next count, they should continue to loop their rhythm while everyone else stops
- Following a few bars of the small group playing, count everyone else back in again
- Continue this process experimenting with differing small group combinations

TIPS
- If you are limited for space in your classroom, you will need to find a way to arrange everyone so that most people can see most other people. At the very least, everyone needs to be able to see you and you need to be able to easily point to individuals or groups. If keyboards are facing the wall arrange them so that players can sit behind them and see you without needing to turn their heads
- If you don’t have a cowbell, a woodblock works just as well. The important thing is that everyone can clearly hear the pulse, and that it can be played competently
INSTRUMENTAL WORK

Arrange the group in a circle with instruments. This project works best with a mixture of tuned and untuned instruments together with voices. If students already play an instrument, it can be good for them to play it here. However, they may also benefit from trying something new. In the following exercises, you can regularly ask the group to swap instruments in the early stages. You only need to fix them when you start to pin down material.

TIPS

- If a student refuses to play an instrument, this can be the result of a lack of confidence. If this is the case, let the student sit and watch for a while. Look for an opportunity to encourage that student to play – for example, a moment in which the class really needs someone to strike a cymbal, and there is no one to do it.
- If you have an issue with everyone wanting to play the same instrument (for example drums), consider leaving them out initially, and then gradually introduce them to key individuals later on.

RIFF WORK PART 1

DVD Project 1 Track 3

The process for this exercise is the same as for Warm-up Part 1 but with the students now playing instruments. Tuned players should use the pitch D at any register. Guitarists should use the chord Dm. Un-tuned players can use any sounds.

- One student plays a steady beat on a cowbell
- One by one, indicate to each student to begin playing a steady beat along with the cowbell:

ALL PLAY D ON THE BEAT

- Continue the process until all students are playing
- Following a count of four the students should play any rhythm they like
- Following another count of four the students switch back to playing the beat
RIFF WORK PART 2

DVD Project 1 Track 4

The process for this exercise is the same as for Warm-up Part 2, but with students now playing instruments. Tuned players should use only the pitch D at any register. Guitarists should use only the chord Dm. Un-tuned players can use any sounds.

Exercise A: Improvised rhythms on D

- One student plays a steady beat on a cowbell
- One by one, the leader indicates to each student to add a looping phase played in time with the pulse

The following are some examples of simple riffs on D that might be used:
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Exercise B: Conducted tutti and solos/groups

DVD Project 1 Track 4

- With the class playing the groove made in Exercise A, point to one or more players indicating that after the next count, they should continue to loop their riff while everyone else stops. Following a count of four, everyone stops playing with the exception of the selected players. Look for good combinations of 2, 3, 4 or 5 participants to continue looping their riff.
- Following a few bars of playing by the selected group, cue the rest of the group back in with a count of four.
- Continue this process experimenting with differing soloists or small group combinations.

Exercise C: Composed/arranged riffs

In order to develop the music from the basic improvised version above, begin to make decisions with your students about the riffs they are creating. It might be useful to group students playing similar instruments together so they can share their ideas and come up with a shared riff. Take time with this process and listen out for strong ideas. Be prepared to suggest changes to riffs and arrange them for the best overall effect. By the end of this process you should have a clear, strong musical groove.

Assign this groove the cue ONE. As the project develops, Cue 1 indicates to players that they should play the riffs developed in this exercise.

FAQS: RIFF WORK

By the time five or six players have joined in, the groove becomes very full and it is difficult to hear the beat

Players often overcomplicate riffs and fail to leave space. Encourage good listening and creative playing. Players must listen to the whole texture and should pay attention to the beat. Don’t be afraid to keep a groove going the first few times even if it is a bit messy. It may take time to settle down.

The riffs are all a bit ‘samey’

Discuss with your students what makes a good riff. Encourage them to include the use of space, and sustained as well as short notes. Some examples of contrasting riffs are given in the musical example on page 53.

Almost all of the group end up playing the same rhythm

This commonly happens in clapping and playing exercises. Encourage your players to invent individual patterns. Give them ideas of patterns with lots of space. Challenge them to create riffs that are different to the people next to them.

When everyone is playing any sense of regular beat is lost

When students first play in large groups, they tend only to listen to themselves. Encourage good listening, especially to the beat. You can even tell them to listen only to the beat, and not to themselves. Start and stop your groove while keeping the beat playing. Focus on beginnings and endings. Work towards a feeling that the class is playing as part of a large band. Eventually, it should fall into place.
When everyone is playing the groove gradually gets faster
Expect this to happen! Start and stop your groove many times while keeping the beat playing and encourage good listening. If the core beat-keeper speeds up, stop them playing and count them in again at the correct tempo.

There is one participant who just can’t play in time
Be tactical with the instruments. Don’t consistently give a cowbell to a player who may be challenged in a rhythmic context. Pair up your stronger players with the weaker ones and encourage them to help and lead those who are struggling. You may also consider assigning punctuating roles to players. A cymbal crash once every 32 (or so) beats can really enliven a groove.

The whole thing is really loud and it is difficult to tell what’s going on
Expect things to get loud and be prepared to embrace the volume. What on the surface may sound like chaos, can be the result of 30 people working hard on their own part in their own time.

How can I get the group to play more quietly?
Use big contrasts in dynamics. Contrast the instruction ‘as loud as possible’ with ‘as quiet as possible’. Get used to using your hands and arms to control dynamics while a groove is being played.

**REFINE THE RHYTHM SECTION (CUE THUMB)**

*DVD Project 1 Track 5*

Select a group that will act as the core rhythm section. This should be a combination of tuned and un-tuned instruments (for example drum kit/ hand drums, bass guitar, keyboard, guitar).

Listen to the combinations of your players and form the rhythm section by selecting a group of four or five students who are playing strong underpinning parts. If necessary, suggest changes or developments to their parts in order to refine the rhythm section. It is essential that this group can confidently play the groove. An example of the sort of thing to aim for is:

**EXAMPLE OF SIMPLE RHYTHM SECTION**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuned Instruments</th>
<th>Un-tuned Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acoustic Guitar</td>
<td>Tambourine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Bass</td>
<td>Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drum Kit</td>
<td>cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
The rhythm section is the heart of the music and will underpin much of the work later on so it is important to get this team working well together.

- Rehearse the rhythm section so they can reliably start playing together after a count of four
- Rehearse cuing in and out other riffs over the rhythm section
- Assign the rhythm section the cue thumb. This means as the project develops, the cue thumb indicates to players that following the next count, only the rhythm section plays

**TIPS**

- Use a combination of players and personalities in your rhythm section. At its core, you need one or two reliable rhythmic players to hold the groove down. A combination of a kit player or hand percussion player, with a bass guitarist, piano player or guitarist is ideal. If you don’t have this, you can ground everything with a cowbell and tambourine
- If your rhythm section sounds shaky and unreliable, experiment with different players and instruments. If you regularly ask players to change what they are doing, they will get used to change. It can be useful to discuss with your group what the rhythm section needs

**TEACH THE HEAD (CUE HEAD)**

**DVD Project 1 Track 6**

- Teach the notes of the melody one by one
- Indicate to all the tuned players to play a D as a drone or tremolo
  - note 1: D
- Work sequentially through the remaining notes, 2–5.
  - note 2: E
  - note 3: F
  - note 4: G
  - note 5: A

The melody works simply with four beats per note gradually rising and descending through the scale. It is likely that as you teach these notes, at least one student will naturally begin playing the scale. This is then easily developed into the melody

- Select a volunteer to demonstrate the melody:
Teach alternative simplified parts to tuned players if necessary

- Ask the group to play the melody together. Allow it to be rough and ready at this stage. Allow students to give each other help.
- Rehearse small sections playing the melody over a beat.
- Assign the melody the cue Head. As the project develops, the cue Head indicates to players that following the next count, the head should be played.

At this stage, you may hear a student playing the melody in a different way, or with some incorrect notes. However, it might sound better the way they are playing! Be prepared for the possibility that you might drop the original version for the newly-created one.

**TIPS**

- If only a few of the players have tuned instruments you can send a small group of tuned players off to work on the head by themselves. If appropriate, assign one player to lead the group. This is especially good if you have a player who is learning an instrument or who learns very quickly.
- Missing notes on tuned instruments are easily accommodated by adapting the melody to the notes that are available.

**ARRANGE THE HEAD OVER THE RHYTHM SECTION**

- **DVD Project 1 Track 7**
  - Clarify the cues for the group:
    - Cue ONE – Riffs on D, percussion riffs
    - Cue Head – Melody
    - Cue Thumb – Rhythm section players only
  - Indicate that the rhythm section is to be played by giving a Thumb cue
  - Cue in the rhythm section with a count of four
  - Indicate the head is to be played by pointing to your head
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- Cue the playing of the head with a count of four
- Experiment with different combinations of instruments playing the head. For example, the rhythm section begins to play. The leader cues in a single player on the head. Following one repetition, more players are brought in. Eventually, all the players are in

**ARRANGE THE HEAD OVER THE RHYTHM SECTION**

1. cue in the rhythm section
2. cue in the head
3. experiment by cueing in different groupings of head players

Rehearsing the head should be one of the most inspiring parts of the workshop. Use this as a way to rehearse the entire group. Set the rhythm section going and then explore different combinations of instruments playing the head. Experiment with contrasting dynamics and dramatic changes in texture.

**SOLOS (CUE 2)**

- Explain the process of solos to the group. A solo is made up of the notes of the melody, in any order, with any rhythm
- Set up the music so that everyone plays for four bars, followed by cowbell only for four bars:

**GROOVE AND SOLOS**

Once this is established stop the groove and give the group time to practice solos in their own time. Solos should last four bars. Students may choose either to compose their solo, or prepare to improvise their solo. Reassure students that they can bring in some other notes if they like, or make a solo that is ‘sound-based’. The important thing is that each student comes up with something, and that they begin to be creative and confident with their ideas

- Set up the groove and indicate soloists play during the four-bar breaks
- Assign solos the cue TWO. This means as the project develops, the cue TWO indicates to players that following the next count, the cued player should play a solo
FAQS: SOLOS

The solos are tentative and timid. How can I get soloists to play more confidently?

Allow time to practise all together with solos. Set the rhythm section and let the group practise as a whole. Gradually, pair things down to small groups or individuals playing solos. Let solos be short and have pauses.

Do the solos have to be improvised?

No. You can set an assignment for soloists to compose their solos.

Do the students need to stick to the notes of the mode?

No, they should be used as a starting point. Students should be encouraged to explore and experiment.

REHEARSE THE MATERIAL AND CUES

DVD Project 1 Track 9

The group should have now developed music to four cues:

Cue Thumb – Rhythm section players only
Cue ONE – Riffs on D, percussion riffs
Cue TWO – Solo
Cue Head – Melody

- Rehearse each cue by showing the cue, and then count the group in and out
- Rehearse switching from cue ONE to cue Head
- Experiment by cueing different combinations of players
- Rehearse building cues gradually
- Use the core rhythm section players to underpin everything. If parts slip out of time, strip the texture back to the rhythm section and count the other players in again. This process should be a creative and energetic playing and exploration of material. Don’t worry about things not sounding right yet. Allow the students to play and get comfortable with their material. Over time, students will start to feel the groove and begin to listen to things as a whole. This process cannot be rushed! Allow time and roughness in the process. Get a good feel about the sound, strengths and weaknesses of the group

ARRANGE A STRUCTURE (FIXED)

DVD Project 1 Track 10

- Discuss an order of events with the class. Write this on the board
- Try out the structure and discuss it further with the students
- Be prepared to modify things and try out ideas even if you don’t think they will work
- Try out the modifications
ARRANGE A STRUCTURE (CONDUCTED)

DVD Project 1 Track 11

As an alternative way to create a performance, use the cues as a way of conducting an improvised structure.

Give clear cues to the players as individuals, small sections and tutti to shape the music as you go.

This process allows for a more responsive and dynamic performance. If a section of the music is going particularly well, you can let it run for longer. If a section fails to work well, you can easily take players out and bring others in.

FINISHING THE PROJECT

Real excitement with this process of music making can happen at the end of a project. Therefore it is always good to arrange a performance. This can be very informal, for example to another class, or even a couple of other teachers. Any audience will give the group a sense of purpose and achievement, as well as having a real focusing effect on a group. Equally, an opportunity to make a recording or a video is also good. This can be done very simply and gives another context for a focused performance combined with an opportunity for listening and appraisal.
Project 2: Groove with Devised Parts, Head, Fills and Solos

This project allows for more creativity and experimentation from the group than Project 1. It is highly probable that students will come up with ideas that are surprising and outside the limits of this project. Take these ideas on board and be prepared to try some of them out. The project is merely a starting point to loosen the creative juices of a class. It is a beginning rather than an end.

NON-INSTRUMENTAL WARM-UPS AND PREPARATION

WARM UP 1: BODY RHYTHM

DVD Project 2 Track 1

- Arrange the group in a circle without instruments
- One student plays a steady beat on a cowbell throughout the exercise
- Gradually teach a body-rhythm such as the following:

Start this on your own and ask the students to join in. Begin with just the chest slap, then the hand-claps, and finally add the thigh-slaps. If necessary, slow the process down and mark the moves through with the class before performing it at speed

- When the students are reasonably comfortable with the body-rhythm, instruct them to play the chest only. Following this, switch to claps only, and then thighs only
- Keep working through until the group has established a confident feel for the body-rhythm
TIPS

- Try to fill the silent beat with a vocal ‘HEY!’ or a finger-click if the students struggle with the silent 3rd beat. This should help students to understand the structure and to ‘feel’ it better. You can then lose the ‘HEY!’ or finger click to reveal the beat of silence.

- Body rhythms aren’t for everyone. Some of the world’s finest musicians struggle to perform a body-rhythm. Therefore if you have students that struggle with this, they may excel with the vocal version below.

WARM-UP 2: EXPLORING THE RHYTHM

DVD Project 2 Track 2

Having learnt the body-rhythm, try clapping the entire pattern with the class. Then, turn it into a rap or chant, for example:

```
voice
You can’t help what I’m saying if you don’t stop me playing
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Ask the students for ideas for words that could work with the rhythm. Try drawing on ideas for words from the whole group. The ultimate aim is to develop a natural feel for the rhythm. Some students respond well to working with words, some to working with the body, some to neither. The aim of warm-ups such as these is to offer a range of ways into learning and feeling a rhythm. If one technique doesn’t work, it is important to find an alternative.

BUILDING THE GROOVE

DVD Project 2 Track 3

Each student plays a tuned or un-tuned instrument, or works as a vocalist.

- Arrange the group in a circle with instruments.

- Ask the un-tuned percussionists to find a way to play a version of the body-rhythm on their instrument. Either set this as a solo task, or pair students together. Give them a minute or two to work and then have each one perform their realisation to the rest of the group.

- Work to help the students refine their parts. It may work well to combine the ideas of two or three players. Look and listen for strong, complimentary patterns. If appropriate, suggest some modifications or even ask for new parts to be created. Don’t be afraid to ask students to learn patterns created by other students and then for those students to play as a section. If students are struggling to find a pattern or play with the right feel, refer them back to the body-
rhythm and the chants that were created around it. Some examples of the kind of complimentary patterns that could work are:

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**DEVELOPING THE GROOVE**

**DVD Project 2 Track 4**

As the percussion groove begins to emerge, start to build tuned parts.
- Begin by teaching the following mode to the tuned players and singers:

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\[ \text{tuned instruments} \]
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As a starting point for bassists, show them the following bass line while giving them the freedom to develop the part and make it their own:

```
Begin with the bass line and cowbell

Tempo Blocks

Cow Bell
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- Begin to establish the core rhythm section with the bass combined with key percussion parts and any core guitars or keyboards
- Gradually instruct other players to add parts to the groove
- Assign this groove the cue ONE. As the project develops, the cue ONE indicates to players that they should play the riffs developed in this exercise

At this stage, the session should be quite messy. This is important. Allow students time to find their own parts and to try things out. As long as you are confident that they know what is required and that you’re looking for clear, useful musical patterns the mess and noise is fine. Some students will work very comfortably in this way, but others may struggle. Use your strong students to help out the weaker ones.

When the majority of the class has developed parts, cue in the rhythm section and begin to conduct students in and out of the groove. This is a good stage to invite ‘guest conductors’ to direct the class. Some students relish the opportunity to direct others in this context, and this can really help to focus the class and the music.
Throughout the work on this groove, you are aiming to develop a feel that draws on the individual ideas of the group, but which works well as a whole. The sorts of things that might emerge are:

**EXAMPLE OF GROOVE WITH PARTS (CUE 1)**

DVD Project 1 Track 4 shows the group having just developed some parts. The groove is still a little untidy but it works because the rhythm section is already fairly tight.
FAQS: DEVELOPING THE GROOVE

I have no bass instruments.

If you have a few keyboard players, assign them different roles with some playing a bass sound, others piano sound, string sound, organ sound, etc. If you have a piano, use a player dedicated to the lower registers working as a bassist. If you have bass bars, or large xylophones, include these as bass instruments. If you have a few electric guitarists, allocate a couple to play bottom string riffs.

There is a lot of noise and it is difficult to hear what is going on. How can I make it work?

- Bring in your strongest players first. Allow them to establish the feel. This will make it much easier for others to find a way in
- Encourage your drummers and electric guitarists to play quietly
- Embrace moments of chaotic ‘working-out’. Expect things not to sound great at first. It will take time for the groove to settle down
- If things are not falling into place, teach participants parts they can play and that you know will work

Should the singers use words?

Words can really help the singers. Either give them a lyric, suggest a theme, or leave it free for them to come up with their own ideas. However, take care that they do not spend all their time writing words – get a couple of phrases sorted quickly. The rest can be developed later.

Should I include MCs with the singers?

No, MCs should work out their own words and develop their own style.

This process is too sophisticated for my group. Can I simplify it?

As with any of the steps, if something doesn’t work, simplify it, take a step back, or put the instruments down and do a warm-up or non-instrumental exercise that helps develop any skills that are lacking.

You could consider using the initial processes from Project 1, but instead using the notes and core rhythm of Project 2.

Some of the participants are playing notes that are not in the mode. Does this matter?

The notes of this mode give the piece a certain musical flavour. But they just provide a starting point which can be developed in many ways.

The bass player keeps playing a different rhythm

The body rhythm that begins this project is a starting point. The bass player may come up with something that is more interesting or that works better for their style of playing. Be prepared to go with it as long as it does not undermine the rest of the music.

I have 30 different parts which are all individually good but which don’t really work well together.

It is good to draw ideas together. For example, if you have three or four djembe players, encourage them to share their ideas and to develop a part that they all play together.
REFINE THE RHYTHM SECTION (CUE THUMB)

If the groove is not yet flowing, spend time focusing on the rhythm section. As in all groove music, the rhythm section is the key. If the rhythm section works well, it makes it easy to create parts, solos and melodies over it. However, if the rhythm section is not secure, it makes everything else extremely difficult.

- Choose a group that will confidently and reliably act as the core rhythm section. Typically this will be a combination of core accompanying tuned and un-tuned instruments, for example drum kit/hand drums, bass guitar, keyboard, guitar. Refine it as much as you need for it to really work. Experiment with different combinations of instruments and personnel
- Rehearse your core rhythm section so they can reliably start playing together after a count of four
- Rehearse cueing in and out other riffs over the rhythm section
- Assign the rhythm section the cue Thumb. As the project develops, the cue Thumb indicates to players that following the next count, only the rhythm section plays
DEVISETING A HEAD (CUE HEAD)

DVD Project 2 Track 5, 6 and 7

- Teach the tuned group and singers the following phrase:

- Divide the group into pairs or groups and ask them to create a second phrase to fill bars 3 and four. Explain that you would like them to come up with a killer second phrase to the first two bars of the melody.
- Ask each group to perform their newly-created phrase.
- Discuss with the class which of the new phrases are the most effective.
- Choose one or two of the most effective phrases and begin to build a longer phrase. This might be a combination of two or three phrases. The aim is to produce a long melody that everyone will ultimately learn. In DVD Track 6, the keyboard player creates a clear and strong answering phrase that ultimately gets taught to the whole group. The following shows how a longer melody might be created by the use of three newly devised phrases:

- Teach this newly-created head to all the tuned players.
- Rehearse the head over the rhythm section and parts from cue.
FAQS: DEVISING THE HEAD

What happens if the groups fail to come up with a useful phrase?

Give them some examples, such as those above. Often, participants will feel they need to create something complex. Show them that simple is good. Give examples that use only one or two notes, or which end on notes other than E or B.

What happens if the groups still fail to come up with a useful phrase?

Take fragments of one or two of their ideas and piece them together to make a new answering phrase. A fragment may even be a couple of notes with a simple rhythm.

I have lots of phrases that I want to include. Can I have two or more playing at the same time?

You can do this. However, there is a power of big unison or octave melodies that can be very inspiring and energising. This can really help to contribute to the character and structure of the music you are creating. There is scope elsewhere in the project for layered material so balance this with moments of unison.
SOLOS (CUE 2)

- Explain the process of solos to the group. A solo is made of the notes of the melody, in any order, with any rhythm.
- Set up the core rhythm section in a way that allows for soloists to play over it. It might be necessary to thin it out or to coach the players in adjusting their volume according to the needs of the soloist.
- Once this is established, stop the groove and give the group time to practise solos in their own time. Solos should last four bars. Students may choose either to compose or improvise their solo. Show them the following notes, but also reassure students that it is fine to bring in some other notes if they like, or to make a solo that is ‘sound-based’:

![Solo example images]

The important thing is that each student comes up with something, and that they begin to be creative and confident with their ideas.

- Set up the groove and cue soloists to play. Some examples of solos students might aim for are:

![Solo example images]

If students are stuck for ideas, play some examples to inspire them.

- Assign solos the cue TWO. As the project develops, the cue TWO indicates to players that following the next count, the cued player should play a solo.
TIPS

- In this context, a solo is a featured part, not a student playing alone. A solo may be improvised or composed. It may be very short and simple. The important thing is that it is an individual taking the limelight, albeit for a short time.
- If your students are stuck for ideas inspire them with some examples. Demonstrate that solos can be very simple. Play them a solo that for example uses only a couple of notes and/or uses lots of space. Reassure them that their solo might be exactly the same as their riff.

CREATE THE B SECTION (CUE 3)

EXERCISE A

- Arrange the group in a circle without instruments.
- Teach the group the following rhythm loop:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutti</th>
<th>Drum Kit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Begin with one student playing a steady beat on a cowbell. Start clapping the rhythm yourself before instructing the group to join in. While you are clapping, begin to add the count. Get the group to join in and work to develop a good energy.

Leading this exercise without instruments prepares the group for instrumental work. Although it seems very simple, this ensures the students really understand what the groove is. Moving away from instruments also provides a natural break for the ear.

EXERCISE B

- Arrange the group in a circle with instruments.
- Arrange the section B groove on instruments so that all players play the two quaver beat phrase followed by the count. It may help to double the count on the cowbell or hi-hat (see the example in Exercise A). Loop this groove a few times, gradually working towards a good feel.
- Assign the B section the cue THREE. As the project develops, the cue THREE indicates to players that following the next count, the group play cue THREE.
**EXERCISE C**

- Divide the group into pairs or small groups and ask each to create a phrase to fill the seven-beat break. Tuned players and singers may use any notes. Un-tuned players may use any sounds. They can be as creative as they like with their fills.
- When all the groups have created a fill, count the class in to play the basic cue B without fills.
- In turn, indicate to a group that they should play the fill in the next seven-beat break by pointing to them. You should end up with a structure similar to the following:

**TIPS**

- If some of the groups finish more quickly than others, make sure those groups have rehearsed it, and that it is as creative as they can make it. Set them the challenge to make their fill more creative or interesting.
- When groups struggle to find anything, give them some ideas to inspire them. Show them a few simple possibilities for their fills that they could choose from.
- It can be useful to assign a leader to a group, especially if some of the groups aren’t working as well as others. The job of the leader is to ensure that the job gets done.
REHEARSE THE MATERIAL AND CUES

The group should now have developed music to five cues:

Cue **Thumb** – Rhythm section players only
Cue **ONE** – Riffs on D, percussion riffs
Cue **TWO** – Solo
Cue **THREE** – B section with fills
Cue **Head** – Melody

- Rehearse each cue by showing the cue, and then counting the group in and out
- Rehearse switching from cue **ONE** to cue **Head**
- Rehearse switching from cue **ONE** to **THREE** to **ONE**
- Experiment by cueing different combinations of players
- Rehearse building cues gradually

Use the core rhythm section to underpin everything. If parts slip out of time, strip the texture back to the rhythm section and count the other players in again. This process should be a creative and energetic playing and exploration of material. Do not worry about things not sounding right at first. Allow the students to play and get comfortable with their material. Over time, students will start to feel the groove and begin to listen to things as a whole. This process cannot be rushed. Allow time and roughness in the process. Get a good feel about the sound and of the strengths and weaknesses of the group.
ARRANGE A STRUCTURE (FIXED)

Discuss an order of events with the class. Write this on the board. For example, you might end up with:

- Rhythm Section (RS) x4
- RS + Riffs (Cue 1) x4
- RS + Head x4
- RS + Solo Keyboard x4
- RS + Head x4
- RS + Solo Piano x2
- RS + Head x4
- Cue 3 + No Fills x2
- Cue 3 + Fill 1
- Cue 3 + Fill 2
- Cue 3 + Fill 3
- Cue B + Fill 4
- RS + Head x4
- RS + Solo Guitar x2
- RS + Head x4
- Cue 3 + Conducted Fills
- RS + Head x4

- Rehearse and refine the structure
- Be prepared to develop and change it. Take time experimenting with the structure. It is likely that students will have strong opinions about this. Try to engage everyone in the decision-making process. Write a few ideas down, and then play them with the class. Assess how well it works, then try an alternative

If it is difficult to remember the structure without looking at the board, you might have made a structure that is either too complex, or very irregular. For example a basic rondo form is much easier to remember than a form which incorporates many irregular shifts.

ARRANGE A STRUCTURE (CONDUCTED)

As with Project 1, an improvised, conducted performance provides a quick and easy way of developing a performance. This kind of performance is energising and allows for the possibility of playing sections for longer (if they are going particularly well), or cutting them off (if they aren’t working). You can also play with the structure and the
dynamic of the performance. When this is working well, new things can begin to happen.

Remember: be experimental. If things fall apart, you can always bring everyone in for a chaotic tutti moment with everyone playing crazy solos, and then dramatically direct a switch back to the solo rhythm section. The more you play with it, the more fun and more creative it will become.

Make sure your cues are clear and can be seen by everyone, to avoid students missing your cues. If the cues suggested here don’t feel comfortable, change them to your own cues. Encourage all of your students to look up. Spend time rehearsing stops and starts without speaking. Eventually the group will focus on the cues.

**ARRANGE A STRUCTURE**
*(STUDENT CONDUCTED)*

Developing the skills to conduct an improvised structure can take time. Some students will relish this challenge and will quickly learn whether it is the sort of thing they enjoy or not. Having to clearly hold the energy of the entire group and confidently and creatively guide can be a real challenge. It is not always the case that the best players are the best directors or conductors. It is worth spending time allowing students to try conducting. You can always divide the class into smaller teams to play paired-down versions of the music, each with its own mini-rhythm section, parts and conductors.

**FINISHING THE PROJECT**

As in Project 1, find an opportunity for a performance or performances. By the time your group has worked through the challenges of this project they will have developed a good range of creative and performing skills that will be further enhanced by performances. It might even be possible to give two or more performances. In this case, with each performance, the group’s confidence and experience will grow. There will be plenty of opportunity for the group to experiment in each performance and solos can become longer, grooves tighter, and the structure more ambitious.

Following a project of this nature, the group should be ready to fully create its own music drawing on the techniques explored here. It may even be appropriate for the class to split into three or four smaller groups, each with the job of making their own performances.