Composition

When you start composing at university, as well as refining your technical craft and skills, we challenge you to find new ways to express yourself through music.

One way to develop your voice is by experimenting with different aspects of your musical language. Here are some ideas for you to try:

1. *Write a piece to respond to a painting or photograph.* What aspects will you choose to respond to in your music, and how will you do that? (For example, consider colour, light/shade, emotive content, the perspective, what is depicted, how your eye moves over the image, impressions of motion or stasis, and so on.)

- For example, the first movement of Einojuhani Rautavaara's Symphony 6 was inspired by Vincent van Gogh's 'Starry Night' (right).

How does Rautavaara reflect the painting in terms of…

Timbre and instrumentation?

Gesture?

Structure and drama?

Textures?

How could you do the same with your composition?

2. *Explore tonality by constructing your own scale, and use that as the basis of your piece.*

- The 'acoustic scale' (0,1,3,4,6,8,10) was used by French composers of the so-called impressionist school, as in Debussy's 'Nuages'.
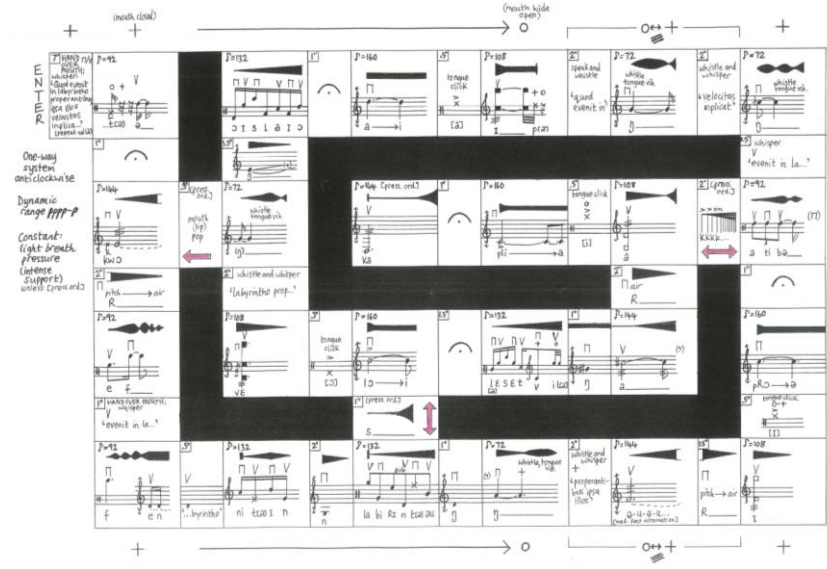
Pitches of 'acoustic scale'	0	1	3	4	6	8	10
On A#	A#	B	C#	D	E	F#	G

The opening melody of Debussy's Nuages, showing the use of the 'acoustic' scale.

3. *Try composing a piece that uses a different form or structure to your normal process*

o For instance, Nina Whiteman's maze pieces ask the player to explore the score as a maze or game.

4. *Try composing a different style or for a different media.*

You have been hired to write music for a sequel or video game adaptation of a film (of your choice). You have to make your music match the style of the original, but because of legal issues, you cannot quote the original themes. Listen to the original, and try to work out the composer's style for that film, including instrumentation, textures, melodic style, harmonies, and other stylistic elements.

o Listen to how Shirley Walker replicates Danny Elfman's style when she writes music for the *Animated Batman* series in the style of Elfman's 1989 film score for *Batman.*

o Listen to how Richard Jacques makes his *James Bond 007: Blood Stone* score sound like James Bond without directly quoting the theme.

If you are writing for a video game, write your piece as a loop with three layers of increasing intensity, which can be added or omitted as the action progresses.

		Loop 3
	Loop 2	Loop 2
Loop 1	Loop 1	Loop 1

Consider:

o Instrumentation – which instruments will be in which layers? Will some layers duplicate instruments?
o Register – will layers add higher or lower instruments?
o Rhythm – will layers increase the rhythmic density?
o Texture – will layers use fragments or constant textures? Chords or counterpoint?
o Melody – will there be a melody? Which layer will it be in?
o Dynamics – how will the layers add to the dynamics?
o Harmony – how can you make sure the layers don't clash?
o Structure – how will the cue start and end?

Send us your compositions, and we'll be delighted to offer feedback and thoughts on them.

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