

COMPOSITION **CHALLENGES**

**Open up the world of composition and
invite your students to write music for the
London Sinfonietta.**

For KS2 and KS3 (all levels of experience and ability)

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

Welcome to the London Sinfonietta's Composition Challenges. This series of special commissions for schools invites young people to compose music for us.

We want to support young people to become composers, develop their creativity, explore different sound worlds and craft interesting and innovative new music. With each challenge we encourage you and your class to think like composers and ask these key questions:

Why do you want to create a new piece of music?

How will you do that using different sounds, structures and musical techniques?

Who are you creating it for?

I love the sound of the violin,
I want to show off those
beautiful sounds for
other people to enjoy

I want to write music to
warn people about
climate change

I want to experiment with sounds
to invent something that nobody
has ever heard before

Sitting in the park on a warm,
sunny day makes me feel
really happy, I wonder if I
can recreate that feeling
using music?

I want to write a piece of music
that tells the story of my culture
and where I come from

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

Each challenge consists of three simple steps:

- 1. Watch the composition challenge film.** This will be your starting point for creative composition. It will introduce your students to how they can compose and invite them to listen, evaluate and discuss what they see and hear.
- 2. Use this teacher resource** to help support practical composing in the classroom.
- 3. Submit your students' compositions to the London Sinfonietta** for the chance to be featured on our website and for the pieces to be played in our annual Sound Out Schools Concert and celebration films.

Submit your compositions to compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk

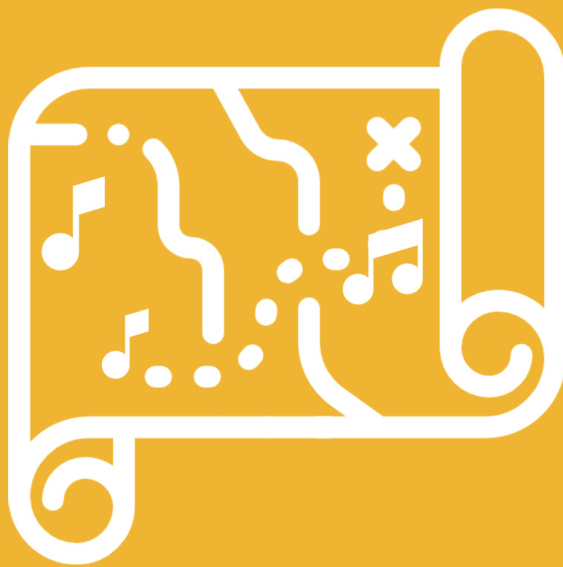
Curriculum learning

Each challenge will support KS2 and 3 curriculum learning as well as developing young people's wider creative and musical skills. Challenges are focused on composing but also include listening and performing activity. Young people will develop their skills;

- as composers working on their own and with others
- to understand how music is created and communicated
- to organise and manipulate ideas within musical structures (including pitch, duration, texture, structure and musical notation.)

COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #5: MUSICAL MAPS

INTRODUCTION



One of the most exciting and special things about live music is that the unexpected can happen. Some composers write very detailed instructions for their musicians, while others give the players more freedom and choice in what they play. For example, they might let the musician **improvise** by choosing what pitch or rhythm to play, or they can leave sections of the music up to **chance** – the musicians choose which order they want to play the sections in. The musical term for this is **Aleatoric music**. The Musical Maps challenge is inspired by a number of different composers who use improvisation and chance to write their compositions.

Challenge 5 invites young people to build their own Musical Maps, filling it in with improvisations. Improvisation as a compositional tool features heavily in the Model Music Curriculum and this resource guides you through three improvisation exercises designed to get your class **improvising** (making up music on the spot) and then **composing** (making conscious decisions about how to organise sound and its characteristics) by plotting their improvisations onto a Musical Map.

Structure

We suggest that you use this structure over three weeks – however you can mix and match the exercises or move through some quicker than others to meet your classes' needs.

Week 1 Get Started and **Exercise 1: Exploring Texture**

Week 2 Revisit **Exercise 1** and complete **Exercise 2: Musical Conversations**

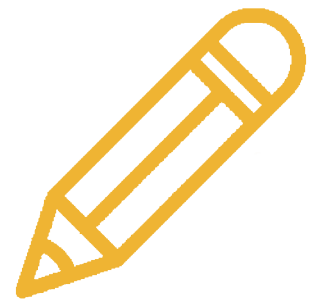
Week 3 Exercise 3: Play Your Own Solo and Make Your Musical Maps

TEACHING TIPS:

- Watch the video in advance
- Bring ideas for your classes' composition based on your current topic
- Prepare adjectives relating to your current topic
- Prepare adjectives for texture both in images and music
- Revise musical terms relating to pitch, dynamics, rhythm and tempo

RESOURCES

- Classroom Instruments: pitched and unpitched percussion
- Paper
- Pens and Pencils, including colours



If available, exploring sounds using classroom instruments is a great way to develop your students' compositional skills. Although we suggest pitched and unpitched in the exercises, use what is available to you. You can also complete this Challenge using body percussion, voice or digital instruments.

Use notation suitable to your classes' level. If they can notate rhythms and notes encourage them to do so – however, there is no need to use any traditional notation. For a more detailed example of graphic notation, look at Composition Challenges 1: Postcard Pieces.

COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #5: MUSICAL MAPS

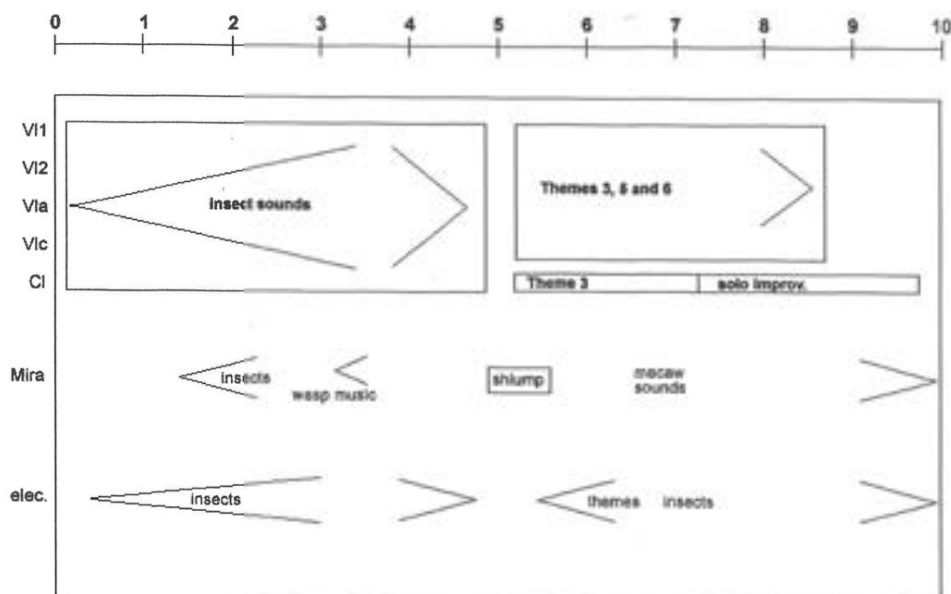
WEEK ONE

GET STARTED

Watch the video with your class. Pause it whenever you like to talk about what you are seeing and hearing and encourage observations and comments. The **aim** of this introduction is to learn different ways of writing down compositions.

Task 1: Discuss the scores

Look at the way Mira Calix, John Cage and Pauline Oliveros set out their music in three different ways. How do they communicate what they want to players? What instructions do they give to describe the sounds they want? How do they communicate pitch, dynamics, rhythm and tempo? What do you think their compositions are about?



Piece: Nunu

Composed: 2003

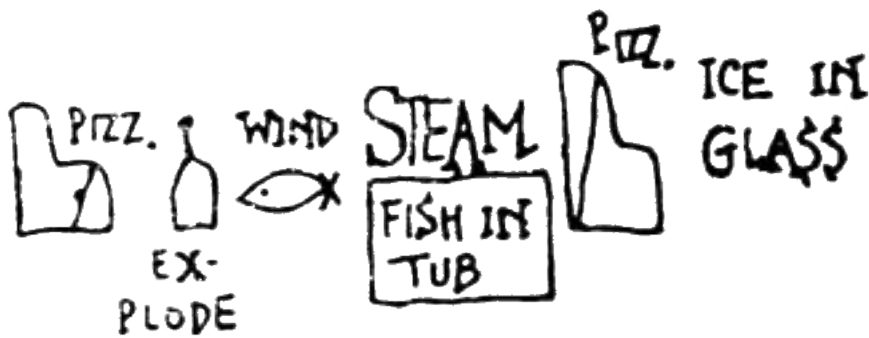
Composer: Mira Calix

Born: 1969

15

20

25

**Piece:** Water Music**Composed:** 1959**Composer:** John Cage**Born:** 1912

ROCK PIECE—PAULINE OLIVEROS

EACH PARTICIPANT chooses a pair of resonant rocks to use as percussive instruments.

EACH PARTICIPANT establishes an independent pulse with the rocks.

THE PULSE is to be maintained steadily without any rhythmic interpretation or accents.

WHILE LISTENING to the overall sound, if the participant perceives that s/he is synchronizing exactly, or in a simple multiple or division by 2 or 3 of another participant's pulse, s/he stops in order to listen and begin a new pulse which is independent in rate from all other pulses.

IN THE BEGINNING the participants may be dispersed throughout the performance area.

AFTER LISTENING for environmental pulses each participant begins independently, or on some agreed upon cue.

THE PARTICIPANTS move slowly and freely, sounding out the environment in all directions with their rock pulses and gradually converging into a tight circle for the ending.

PARTICIPANTS MAY END independently, or on cue. ROCK PIECE might begin and remain out-of-doors, or move indoors. Conversely, ROCK PIECE might begin in a tight circle indoors and move out-of-doors with the participants gradually dispersing until all the pulses can no longer be heard.

LENOX, MASSACHUSETTS
16 AUGUST 1979

**Piece:** Rock Piece**Composed:** 1979**Composer:** Pauline Oliveros**Born:** 1932

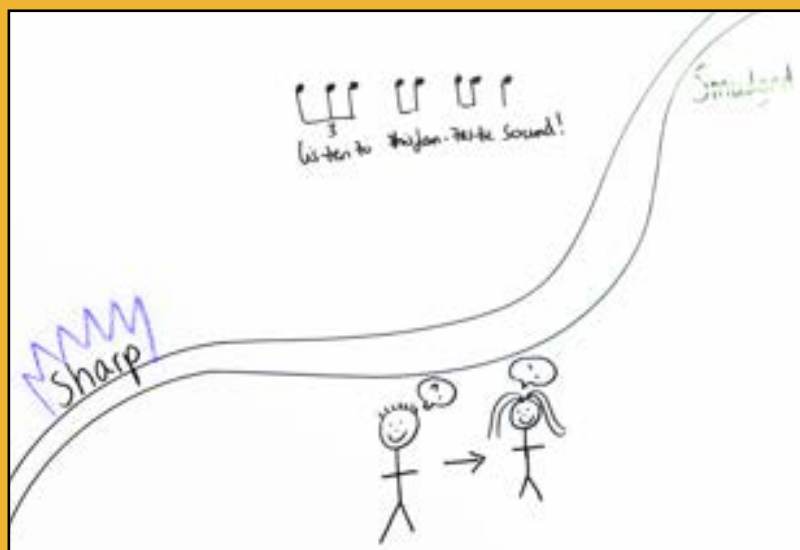
Task 2: Ask your students to make decisions about their composition

What will it be about? Will it tell a story? Go on a journey? Or is it more abstract? About a thought? Or feeling?

You could link the composition to another part of your curriculum, such as your current topic.

Task 3: Encourage your class to think like composers

Explain that at the end of the Challenge they are going to write down their music like the composers have done above. Ask them to start thinking about how are they going to set out their Musical Maps. Will they map out a path, timeline, graph or use a set of instructions? What method will best match what their composition is about?



Example of a path map



Example of a grid map

COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #5: MUSICAL MAPS

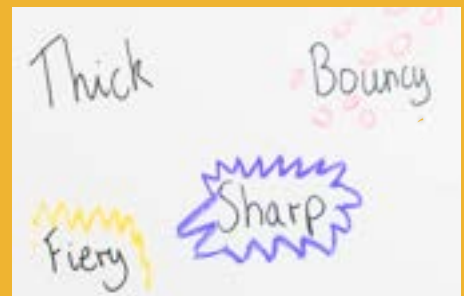
EXERCISE 1: EXPLORING TEXTURE

In music, **texture** is made up of the combinations of sound. No one sound is more important than an other. The **aim** of this exercise is to get each group to create a series of musical textures and shift between these textures.

Task 1: Texture In Images

Look at these videos and images. Ask the class to write down words that come to mind.

- Birds <https://youtu.be/UVko9jyAkQg>
- Forest canopy <https://youtu.be/4uOGCQ2fdQA>
- Snow Falling <https://youtu.be/jX6jkuqb2A8>



Discuss what makes this texture? What makes it interesting? The combination of similar things that are not exactly the same but make an interesting image?

Task 2: Texture In Sound

Listen to these pieces of music. This is music that has no melody, no harmony and no audible pulse. It is music where the texture of the music is the most important element.

- Ligeti <https://youtu.be/deSU4r2POdY>
- Joanna Baillie <https://joannabailie.com/music/audiovisual/horizons/>

Task 3: Create Musical Textures

In small groups give each student an instrument. Have each group play instruments of one type i.e. in one group have only shakers or instruments that make their sound like a shaker; one group to have drums or instruments with skins on; one group to have metal instruments like triangles.

Ask each group to choose one of the images below (you can also find your own)



Discuss how to imitate these images in sound.

What sound on their instrument best imitates the small part of the pattern, the 'dot' – on a drum this might be a gentle tap with your finger tip. Or, if the image has more lines in it, the sound on a drum might be the scrape of a fingernail across the skin. Explore the different sounds you can get from an instrument.

What dynamic (volume) should this be at – this might shift if you follow the image – from quiet to loud or many journeys of this nature?

Do all the players start together, or pass the texture around their group, or start with one player and add each player in turn to allow the texture to accumulate?

Once the group has worked this out (and their texture could last anywhere from 10 seconds to a minute), give this texture a name: i.e. 'the rocky path'.

Extension

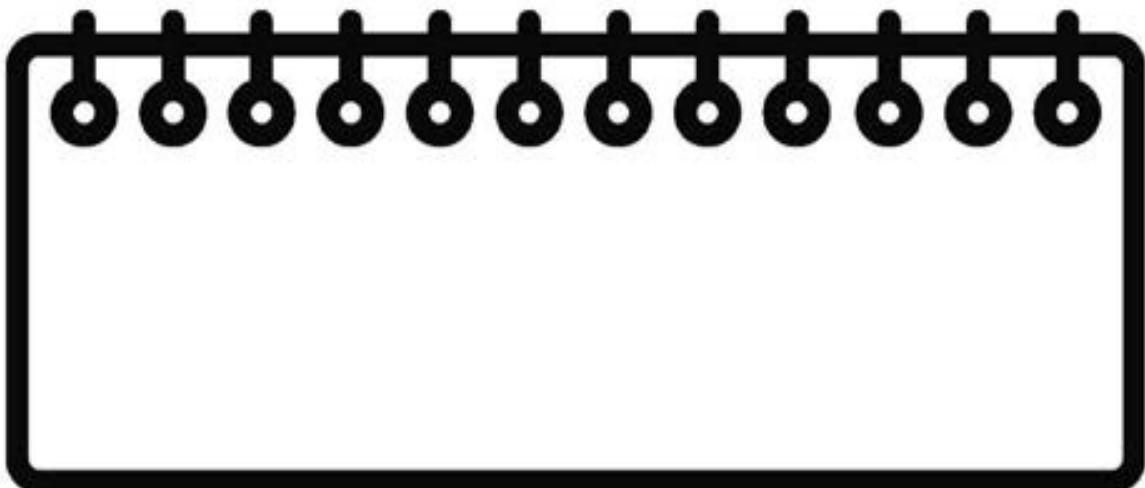
Link each groups' textures together to form a longer piece of music. Get the class to think about which texture should start, which one come second. Do any or all of them repeat?

How do you join them – seamlessly? With a gap and a fresh start? Overlapping so one starts before the other has finished?

You could even appoint a conductor who gives clear visual clues as to who plays when.

When you rehearse it – use a stopwatch to time each section and make a note of how long each section took.

Write everything down – titles, times, who plays when.



COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #5: MUSICAL MAPS

WEEK 2

TEACHING TIPS

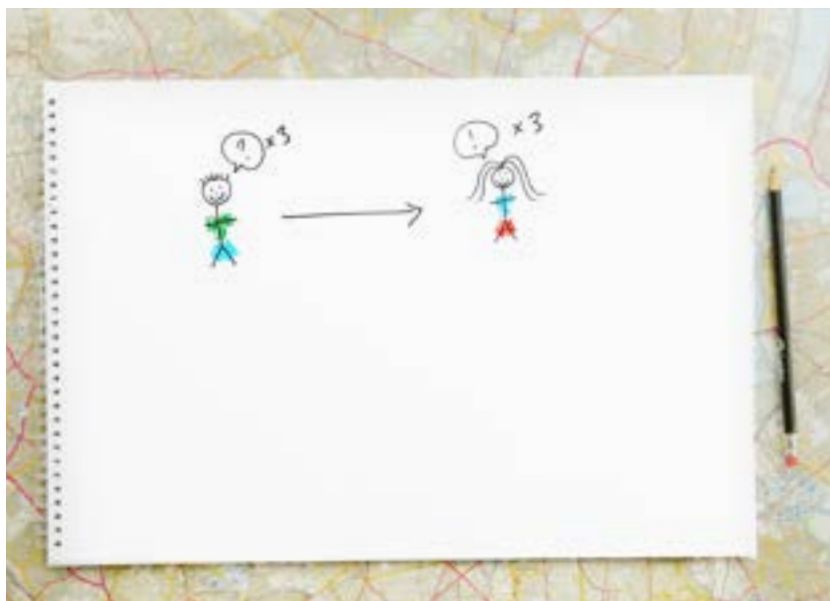
- Watch Wicca Wacca Ow in advance of the lesson
- Retrieval: spend some time at the beginning of the lesson recapping the Challenge and Texture exercise

RESOURCES

- Selection of unpitched percussion, separated by type e.g. shakers, wooden, metal, drums
- Pitched percussion
- Paper and pencils

EXERCISE 2: MUSICAL CONVERSATIONS: CALL AND RESPONSE

In a **Call and Response** section – one person offers a call and the other musician or musicians respond either by copying the call or responding with something similar that they improvise. It's like having a conversation but with music. The **aim** of this exercise is to build up some musical conversations in the class.



Task 1: Listen

Listen to this part of Zoe Martlew's piece *Wicca Wacca Ow* – your class can join in!

After the body percussion episode, the presenter offers a short musical phrase which the audience respond to (this begins: “when I’m feeling *Wicca Wacca Ow*” and ends when we say ‘change of key’ and start singing. Though feel free to follow to the end as the singing is fun and there is one further short Call and Response section).

<https://youtu.be/7-vKBBL584w?t=2175>



Task 2: Call and Response

In pairs or groups: take turns in being the ‘call’ and the ‘response’. For this task, make the ‘response’ an exact copy of the ‘call’.

Remember to vary the sounds you make on your instrument (you can also use voice and body percussion) and also the dynamics – try some really quiet calls!



Task 3: Call and Response Extended

Imagine your 'call' is a question. And imagine that each 'response' is a different answer. The first answer could simply be 'yes' or 'no' – one short sound. The second answer could be a bit longer – a musical version of something like 'I'm not really sure'. The third answer could be much longer – like an explanation!

It might sound like this:

Call



Very short response

Call

Slightly longer response



Call

Much longer response



(are the three 'calls' here the same or do they vary in dynamic or sound?)

Go round the class listening to each group make their three call and responses.

Make a note of who started, who followed, who ended.

COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #5: MUSICAL MAPS

WEEK 3

TEACHING TIPS

- Spend some time at the beginning of the lesson recapping the Challenge, Texture and Musical Conversation Exercises by questioning your class
- Have the film or scores ready to share as starting points for pupils' musical maps
- Ask the students to share in small groups as well as with the whole class

RESOURCES

- Unpitched percussion (avoid shakers for this exercise)
- Pitched percussion
- Larger pieces of paper and coloured pens and pencils (for making the Musical Map)

EXERCISE 3: PLAY YOUR OWN SOLO!

In a **solo**, one musician stands out from the ensemble by playing something completely different. The **aim** of this exercise is to give your students starting points for solos. Playing a solo is a vulnerable moment, but brings a huge sense of achievement – ask the students to focus on the musical content or inspiration and make sure to congratulate them when they play their solos.

Task 1: Listen

Listen to the closing section of this colourful and characterful piece by Alex Paxton which he wrote for London Sinfonietta in 2022. It has a great name: Candyfolk Space-Drum.

In this performance, Alex is playing the trombone and improvising a solo over the top of the choir and orchestra. Alex is playing with great energy in these places – using some very high and low notes and being very busy. Sometimes, he also plays a blues-y tune as well.

https://youtu.be/U-_isxHBw4g?t=1791 (the section is at 29:46)



Task 2: Make a Motif

When you are playing a solo, it's good to try and use the same idea more than once. We call this little idea a motif. You can try this!

If you are playing a unpitched instrument, like a drum or tambourine, make up (compose, improvise!) a short idea – maybe 4 or 5 notes long. Give it a distinctive rhythm – combining long and short sounds. You can use a sentence to get you started e.g. “listen to this fantastic sound!”



Next, try playing this rhythm on different parts of your instrument to get different sounds. E.g. on a drum or djembe we would hear it on the skin, on the side of the drum, scraped on the skin with a finger nail. We might hear it loud and hear it soft.

Working in pairs or in small groups let all unpitched instruments have a go at this.

If you are playing a pitched instrument, like a glockenspiel or xylophone, make up (compose, improvise!) a short idea using 3 or 4 notes. Find a pattern using the pentatonic scale:

C – D – E – G - A. Start and finish on C (could be the low or high C) and add 3 notes in between. Repeat this pattern, could you start on a different note? Or alter the pattern slightly each time you do it?

Working in pairs or groups let all pitched instruments have a go at this.

Task 3: Play Your Own Solo

Working in small groups get all but one of the players to create a texture (see above) or play a pulse. Then your nominated soloist can improvise a solo. They could start with the motif and its repetitions and then explore from there. There are different ways of thinking about a solo:

- Go on a journey: will you go high then low or round and round? Should you walk or run? Use your wildest imagination and go on an adventurous journey! (Can you fit your motif in anywhere?)
- Paint a picture – what's in your mind? Are you going to paint huge shapes with your solo or small dots. What does 'red' or 'blue' sound like? Are you painting on the back of a postcard or filling up an entire wall? Can you fit your motif in anywhere? Is it a landscape? A cityscape? Are you in outer space?

How are you going to end your solo? Are you going to go out with a bang or come back to earth with a gentle landing. Or will you simply disappear into the mist?

IT'S YOUR SOLO – THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG! GO FOR IT.

Record some solos and listen back to them.



Task 4: Write Your Musical Map

Time to bring together all of the improvisations into a **Musical Map**! The **aim** of this final section is to put the improvisations into a structure and make decisions about how the composition will be played.

Although you know how your piece goes, how would another musician understand your intentions? The musical map is a way of writing down what you did AND writing down what someone else should do.

Discuss

- How are you going to set out your musical map?
- Will you map out a path, timeline, graph or use a set of instructions?
- What method will best match what your composition is about?

Use as many elements from the activities as you like but think about the order in which everything happens.

- Will it be clear to the musician what order to play the elements in?
- Will you leave it up to the musician to decide which order to play the elements in?
- Will you leave it up to chance and make a game out of the piece? You could number each section 1-6 and instruct the performers to roll a dice!
- Can you think of any other games that would work well as the structure for your composition?

Examples: use the video and scores earlier in this pack to spark ideas.

Remember that you can decide and change your mind about the composition – it's yours! When you have practised and are feeling confident that it is in the right order – give your piece a name and make sure you've clearly written down the instructions.

SHARE YOUR COMPOSITION

Once you have composed your piece, send us your score or perform and record it for us to listen to. We look forward to receiving your compositions!

Send your compositions to

compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk

To submit large files to us, please use a file sharing website like WeTransfer.



GLOSSARY



Aleatoric music: is music in which some element of the composition is left to chance, and/or some essential element of the composition is left to the performer to decide.

Composer: someone who creates music. In Latin, the word means 'one who puts together'.

Commission: the act of inviting someone to compose a piece of music or another art form.

Dynamics: a term that relates to volume in music. We can use English words like loud or quiet, or more commonly in music, the Italian words for these: forte and piano.

Graphic Notation: a way of writing music using non-musical symbols which can include almost anything from abstract colours to the written word.

Improvisation: Creating and inventing music in real time, i.e. 'on the spot'.

Motif: a short, recognizable musical idea that captures the essence of a piece. Motif are like a 'riff', 'lick' or 'phase' in a song, and are often repeated throughout. Motifs can be melodic, harmonic or rhythmic, and can vary in length although generally are short.

Pentatonic Scale: A scale with five notes, C D E G A (or D E F A B), very common in folk music. A useful composition tool as any of the notes combined will sound well together.

Phrase: a musical phrase is akin to a sentence or even a clause in written language. It may be only a few notes long or it may last several bars of music.

Pitch: the musical notes from the lowest to the highest. In science, these terms relate to the frequency of vibration. Low notes have a low number (the unit is hertz or hz). The note we call 'A' which an orchestra traditionally tunes to (the A just above the note middle C on the piano) has a frequency of 440hz i.e. the sound vibrates 440 times a second. Interestingly, if you play an A one octave higher than this, the frequency is exactly double – 880hz.

Pitched instruments: instruments that have been pitched to particular notes, and are usually set out like a piano or keyboard. Classroom instruments such as a glockenspiel or xylophone are examples of pitched instruments.

Unpitched instruments: instruments that do not have a particular note. Classroom instruments such as a drum or tambourine are examples of unpitched instruments.

GLOSSARY CONTINUED

Rhythm: is a pattern of beats, sounds or movements.

Solo: A section of music, of any length, played or sung by one performer alone.

Structure: refers to the shape of the whole piece and the journey through the music. This can be heard really clearly in pop music where we refer to verse and chorus.

Texture: The overall effect of how melody, harmony and rhythm are combined in a piece of music. It describes how dense or light a piece of music is. If there are many notes being heard at once, the texture is often described as dense. If the music has fewer instruments or perhaps the notes move more slowly, the texture can be described as lighter. There are many imaginative ways of describing texture in music as there are in visual art or even food.

Tempo/Tempi: The speed or pace of music (fast/slow, faster/slower)

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

The London Sinfonietta is one of the world's leading contemporary music ensembles. We focus on performing works by living composers. We often commission composers to write music especially for us.

**For more information please contact us at
compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk
or visit our website www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk**

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