



CREDIT SUISSE
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The Very Young Composer

A Child Composes for the Orchestra: A Guide for Educators



By Jon Deak and New York Philharmonic Teaching Artists
Compiled by Paola Prestini

"Whether conducting works composed by schoolchildren in Tokyo or New York City, I am delighted by the depth and variety of their expressions and their inventive orchestrations. I know the whole orchestra looks forward to these concerts, and we are proud to nurture this experience."

Alan Gilbert, Music Director, New York Philharmonic,
The Yoko Nagae Ceschina Chair

"I so enjoyed the imaginations of the young composers whose works I performed at Vail. Through the Very Young Composers program, Jon Deak and Bill Gordh have created a unique path for students to discover music, introducing them to both the art of listening and the vocabulary of music so they can create their own stories in sound."

Yo-Yo Ma

Contributing authors: James Blachly, Bill Gordh, Richard Carrick, Jon Deak, Danny Felsenfeld, Justin Hines, Paola Prestini, David Wallace

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cover art: "Antares to the Sea", Claire Kurronen, Bravo! Colorado VYC, age 9
Instruments follow the constellation Scorpius to the find the ocean.

Preface

Some 30 years ago, Howard Gardner wrote that a full artistic education requires exploration of four essential and complementary roles in the arts: creator, performer, audience and critic. Almost all music education in the U.S. prioritizes the performer and audience roles, allows for some natural play of the critic, and seriously stints the opportunity for young people to create. The creator's role may be the most potent, the most catalytic for the expansion and empowerment the arts can bring to young lives. But as a field, we have been stuck and avoidant about how to introduce the composer's role and skills, given the limitations of time, musical literacy, and instrument ability.

Enter *The Very Young Composer*. This one delightful, practical, and inspiring guidebook blows away a history of excuses and avoidance about young people and composing, and effectively leads all of us into a world of possibility. Jon Deak and his colleagues are global leaders in teaching artistry, and bring the best of their skills and experience to this book. I have followed the growth of *Very Young Composers* (VYC) since its inception, and watched it refine into the award-winning, worldwide program it is today. I am so grateful that Jon and his team have paused long enough to gather and share the architecture and some of the furnishings of the VYC process that has lit up so many young lives, classrooms, teachers, parents and musicians around the world.

In these pages you will find the process that enables every child to find, use, refine and extend her musical voice before she has mastered an instrument.

This child-friendly process (musician-friendly too) taps innate musical competence and curiosity to make something she cares about. In the process, she learns the fundamental elements of music by doing, the way humans learn best—through joy, through the serious play of creative engagement, through the intrinsically-motivated project of crafting something unique and beautiful.

The VYC Teaching Artists and dedicated colleagues provide the steps that any teacher or composer can follow to become a composition coach. They give us just enough guidance to invite us to personalize the process to our own style and enough inside tips to hold our hands through the beginnings. Student voices are heard throughout this guidebook, reminding us just how radically learner-centered this process is. Use this process, trust this process, change music education with this process.

As I have witnessed the growing success of the VYC I have wished there were a way to extend its effectiveness further—now they have created this way to put the process in your hands and the benefits in many more young hearts and lives. Thank you Jon and team for the work that opens a door that has been closed for so long, allowing all young people to explore the artistry they were born to express.

Eric Booth, Arts Learning Specialist

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above, by Lucas McGill

below, by Nikkomi Weiss



New York Philharmonic music director Alan Gilbert congratulates young composer Isaac Draper.
Photo: Michael Di Vito



Foreword

When Jon Deak first began developing the ideas that would develop into Credit Suisse Very Young Composers (VYC), one might have been forgiven for being skeptical. He was Composer in Residence with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra (through Meet The Composer, where I was his Program Manager) and he was trying to get inner city middle-school students to imagine new sounds. But Jon stuck with his vision, leading to children's premieres with the Colorado Symphony, and then brought it back to New York where he really developed the idea at PS 199 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He trained Teaching Artists to work alongside him, they branched out to other schools, and by now the Very Young Composers idea is being accepted in countries around the world where we have demonstrated it. VYC demonstrates again and again that students are not empty vessels, but bring vital ideas, experience, and personality to learning. It forces professionally trained composers to rethink some assumptions. And it holds the promise of contributing to a flowering of musical creativity.

When the full New York Philharmonic performs children's compositions for children's audiences, the level of attention spikes, and afterward, the music from the canon of greats is far less remembered than the 10-year-old who composed about her grandmother's stories. It is a privilege and a great responsibility for us at the New York Philharmonic to nurture the evolution and dissemination of VYC. By reading this book and applying any part of it, you too become part of this process and we crave your ideas and experience to help us along. Thank you for joining in this movement for education, for children, for the future of music itself.

Theodore Wiprud
Director of Education
The Sue B. Mercy Chair
New York Philharmonic



Nikkomi Weiss, Bravo! Colorado VYC

Founder's Note

It has long been thought that the creation or composing of music of any depth or artistic significance whatsoever, was an activity solely limited to a highly-trained elite group of adults: certainly an authoritarian state of affairs. Even "Children's Music" was composed by adults **for** children. Yet I noticed that children's paintings, for example, were not only taken seriously by major visual artists—Picasso, Klee and many others—but even closely imitated by them! This led me to ask the simple but extraordinary question: "What IS children's music?"

Music, and the creating of music, is an art form that children appear to understand implicitly, as opposed to most fact-based subjects. What, then, was preventing children from composing music of profound significance? Two apparent barriers immediately stood out: *notation* and *performance*. That is, most children lack the ability to write down their musical ideas, and are not able to perform with great facility on an instrument. (While it is true that a few exceptional children have mastered these elements at an early age, we had seen evidence of deep creativity in virtually all children.) We proposed that just as some great poets have been blind and therefore unable to read or write, that many fine composers were also not exactly great at reading music, or performing. Therefore we professional composers, mentors, or Teaching Artists, could, with patience, with good faith and without editing, offer ourselves as scribes for child composers. Basically, we've been turning the usual sequence of "First technique, then

creativity" on its head. We validate and support the child's instinctive creations, then offer technical aid as they voraciously expand their horizons. After all, kids of all cultures and conditions have always been making brilliant music in the streets or wherever they can—we just haven't listened; we haven't welcomed them into the concert hall, and our symphonic culture is much the more impoverished because of that.

In short, the technique, first introduced in 1995 in the Denver Public Schools, met with striking results. It was later developed with the New York Philharmonic, and we are thrilled to find that the "Very Young Composer" concept has become an award-winning program that has proven itself in over a thousand individual children—all performed in concert by professionals—and has spread to a number of U.S. cities and introduced on four continents as of the year 2010. In addition, we are finding a nurturing quality to the VYC programs: We are building an international network of composers who are eager to find their own work enriched by broadening the "creative base" of young people around them. We have learned from *El Sistema* in Venezuela that graduates of the program have an enormous gift that they can impart to future classes if they return to teach and coach. Thus the VYC's new "Bridge" program for middle school kids is staffed largely by Teaching Artist Interns who are graduates of the VYC, Bridge, the New York Youth Symphony's Making Score, Face The Music, and other programs.

Our ultimate aim is not to produce

"spectacular" one-time concerts celebrating children's art - as laudable as these kinds of events have been. We are truly dedicated to learning **from** children, nurturing an art that takes root, flowers, and develops into a truly indigenous expression - and we are talking about small towns in Spain, in the snows of Wisconsin and the mountains of Colorado or Japan, as well as in the streets and barrios of New York, Seoul, Caracas or

Helsinki. Another thrilling aspect of this work is cherishing the small but detectable local differences between an instinctive, true kids' art from any of these places. What an incredible treasure awaits us!

-Jon Deak

**"Now I want to be a professional composer."
-Luis Pichardo, Jóvenes Compositores de
Venezuela**

Introduction to the VYC Process

Guiding Principles

- 1) VYC is founded on the belief that within the child is contained a creativity which can revitalize the repertoire of both orchestral and general concert music.
- 2) VYC takes children's creations seriously and allows the child to have his or her *unedited* musical creation writ large upon the canvas of the orchestra.
- 3) The Teaching Artist is a facilitator who acts as a creative conduit or catalyst and provides an essential link in realizing each child's compositional vision.



Left to right: Sophie Millar, Isabelle Hasslund, Jon Deak, Ian Goldstein, Bo Henry
Photo: Michael Di Vito

Teaching Philosophy

As a Teaching Artist it is helpful to act primarily as a cheerleader and a scribe for your students. Here again we may draw an analogy to visual art. If a child draws a picture of a house and his sister in which the sister is larger than the house and you tell the young artist that the proportions are wrong the child only hears that it is wrong. This can result in the child putting down the crayon, sometimes forever. When a young person comes up with something from his mind, an image, it is a precious jewel. We see the musical creation of children in this same light even if the child laughs at it or if it is produced out of anger or frustration because the validation of that musical idea shows the child that every emotion is acceptable.



Rachel Brenner, PS 199

*"When I was in the composers class, I learned that little things can grow up to be big things. I learned never to give up on myself. Just keep writing."
-Chantal Loaiza, Songcatchers, age 8*

How to use this book

This manual is set up to emulate our twelve lesson Credit Suisse Very Young Composers lesson format at the New York Philharmonic. Each lesson tackles a different compositional tool that can clear a new path to writing music for each student. Think of it as a choose-your-own-adventure handbook in that you may introduce the concepts presented here in the order and manner that you, as Teaching Artist/mentor, see fit to meet the needs of your students while still building to a culminating event (the final concert) worthy of their creative work.

*"When I compose, I feel like I'm taking part in today's culture. I wrote a piece based on a painting by Piet Mondrian, and a piece dedicated to the earthquake victims in Haiti."
-Isabel De Luca, VYC Bridge, age 13*

The Essentials

Helpful Composition Tools

Journals:

Give the students journals with staff paper and blank pages. Make sure that they take notes and suggest that they create a dictionary section for terms that are new to them.

Instruments:

Recorders are advisable as students can take them home to practice; any additional instruments for classroom use are helpful. It's OK if they are not familiar or proficient on recorder as long as they have some piano skills or are willing to hum or sing.

Sound Journal:

Students are asked to collect four sounds each week in preparation for their discovery of musical ideas in and out of the classroom. This experience helps them define sound in words and eventually in their own notation. Many times these collected sounds will open up the door to extended techniques during instrument demonstrations. Wind blowing becomes a clarinet sound effect or a violin harmonic; a siren becomes a notation exercise in tremolo.

Composer Etiquette

There is no talking or distraction when one composer's sketch or experiment is being tried by the instruments, and certainly at the concert, where we all applaud each other's successes and the efforts of the musicians.

With each VYC residency, students create a portfolio of every sound, rhythm, melody and composition that they have created. On about the sixth lesson, after all the instrument demonstrators have visited, hold a short individual conference with each student to review all the creations, discoveries, and accomplishments in their portfolio. After admiring and honoring the work to date you should ask the composer to think about the upcoming performance and what kind of piece he wants to present. Which ideas would he like to explore further? Which ideas are best set aside for a different piece? What new inspirations does she have? What are some ways she might combine or experiment with different ideas? Each student will react to this conference differently. Some hold their every creation dear and find ways of incorporating all of them into the final project while others scrap everything and start over with a totally new concept. Many students will find themselves strongly attracted to one or two ideas and focus on developing them.

"I want to have a distant sound, a creaky door sound, and make the sound of someone jumping off a cliff."

"Interesting sounds: Birds, Cat, Helicopter!"

Sophea Clarke, PS 24, 4th grade

"Some advice I would give to kids who are learning melody, harmony and rhythm is a good way of composing is to start out with a simple melody, then make some variations, some extended variations, some sequences, some reversals, and flips then finally expand it all into one piece of music."

Ben Myers
PS 199, 5th Grade

The First Day: Getting to Know You

The purpose of the first class is for you and the students to become acquainted with each other. Everything you do should be linked this goal. If you have a sense of mutual respect and trust at the end of class then it's been a successful day. A few helpful tips for beginning activities and exercises are given below.

Movement: Composition takes concentration which is hard to muster at the end of a long day when your class is most likely to take place. Getting students to move and express their pent-up energy can be an effective way to shake the cobwebs out of your students' brains and help them focus; it also helps the students to start thinking rhythmically early in the residency and will encourage compositional creativity later on.

The Conga

The classic game of playing a conga or large drum with the students walking around in a circle is a great way to discuss the *effect* of tempo and dynamic fluctuations. The Teaching Artist should lead by playing the drum for the first few tries and then turn this leadership role over to the students as this increases the fun for everyone!

Vocal Imitation

Imitate everyday sounds with your voice and ask the the students to react to what they hear. Let them have turns at leading the exercise if they feel comfortable doing so. Everyone should attempt to write down some of the sounds they hear using graphic notation.

Improvise a melody either vocally or on the piano and ask the students to find a word to describe it. Now let the students try to improvise their own melodies and come up with a title. There are no wrong answers!

Call and Response

Employ an extended rhythmic call and response and improvisation. After you

invent several "calls" have students respond with their own rhythms. Ask for volunteers to invent their own calls!

"Getting to Know You" Physical warm-up:

Have students invent a rhythm song for the syllables in their name incorporating their hands, feet, and /or voice.

Sit in a circle and have each student introduce their name-rhythm while remembering and repeating whoever preceded them. Vocalizing and creating melodic intonations can help the students memorize their colleagues and their own name-rhythm song. The students can come up with memorable rhyming phrases like "Max give me your tax", "Sarah-sharer", etc.

Once each student has a rhyme for his name they should all create an energetic but related gesture that goes with it. Keep n going around the room until everyone remembers everyone else's name. As a concluding exercise you might have the students notate their name-rhythm graphically to get them used to the idea of translating concepts into concretes.

This takes a while and allows you to immediately identify the more outgoing students and those who look to others for help. It can also serve as a model for classmates helping each other. You might ask a student struggling with the game if they want a suggestion from another student and then see if they're amused by it.

The Nuts and Bolts

1. What is Music?

You may want to ask your students what music means to them on the first day of class. Express that music is subjective and means something different to every individual and assure them that your quest together will be to find the music within each of them and that your role as mentor and scribe is to help them notate what they want to say through sound. As homework for the first week have them write a letter to you that says 1) their musical experience so far in life and 2) a question they have about music. Their responses always give you fresh insight into the students that you're working with.

"Music is notes that are played by instruments. Music can be beautiful. All music is sound."

"When you compose, just hum the melody, harmony and rhythm over and over till you get it stuck in your head."

I had trouble starting my pieces. What I did to solve this was to take a long walk, and I would come up with melodies that had to do with things I heard or saw in my walk."

Ian Goldstein

James Blachly, Paola Prestini, Aedan Julian, Ingrid Camillo

Music in VYC by Richard Carrick

Music in our program is all about imagination, fantasy, personal experiences, and emotions which lay the groundwork for future technical study. Entry into the program does not require the student to know how to write music or play an instrument. In the course of VYC study the student will be exposed to the sounds of all the instruments, the orchestra, and the building blocks of musical theory.

We feel that each student has something special to share with others. We want to know what kids think about butterflies, rainbows, people in their lives, or their walk to school every day. Everyone in the room will have a different answer to these questions. There is no wrong answer because whatever is special to the child is the right answer. Each composer writes different variations for the same theme. REVISION is more important than a good idea.



Homework and Research

Working at Home by James Blachly

It is crucial to stress the importance of completing homework thoroughly. Here are two effective ideas for first assignments that are fun for the students and get them into a rhythm of working outside the classroom.

1. Bring in your favorite book, a picture of your favorite place, or something that represents the class' theme.
2. Come up with one or two cool rhythms and remember them so you can share them with the class. Write them down in any way you can. Inventing a 'class rhythm' will help the creative wheels to start turning in your students' minds. Try notating the rhythm either graphically with shapes or dashes or with rhythmic sounds like "boom cha cha-cha boom", "wait wait TAP", etc.



Graphic Notation: Katherine Hade

These methods they come up with to notate their first rhythm often reappear in later versions of their pieces.

An example of a homework assignment for week 2:

1. Write down what we learned about rhythm
2. Create a postcard or letter to your Teaching Artist about your experience with music, things you like to do, a question you have about music.
3. Write a melody for the rhythm you wrote last week.
4. Write one sound that is interesting.

Research by James Blachly

Instrument demonstrations are a regular fixture of VYC residencies and students who have ready access to the internet should be instructed to research instruments that will be demonstrated in the class online. Student preparation for an instrument demonstration can include:

1. Writing down five cool things about the instrument to share with the class.
2. Thinking of a question about the instrument.
3. Identifying four distinctive sounds of the instrument.

When a student or a musician makes an insightful point or plays an interesting sound, stop the class and have the students write five words describing what was just said or played.

"I learned a lot from the 3 years that you taught me how to compose. You taught me that music can be anything; it doesn't have to be something called minuet in C flat minor, or g major study. I liked writing for all the instruments because in my opinion they all sound great, except for the ones that don't. And another suggestion to make the sessions more fun is to encourage the students to **BRING IN THEIR INSTRUMENTS.**"

Nathan Mannes

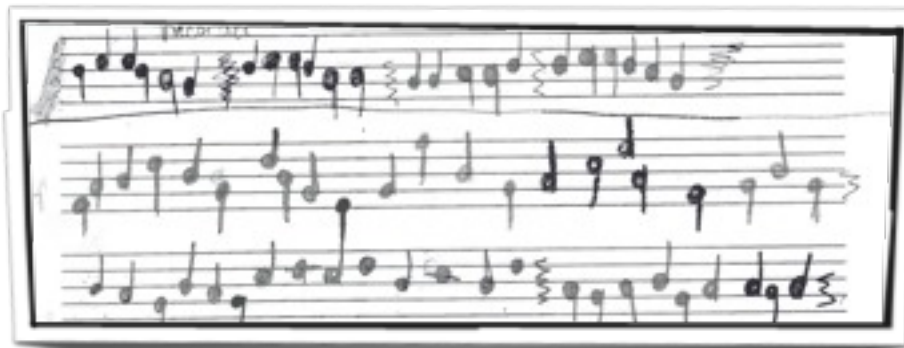
"I know that for me, learning takes time and often I am overwhelmed at the amount of material that is being presented to me. However, with different methods and activities to help reinforce concepts, I am able to grasp more information than previously imagined."

Grant Margolin

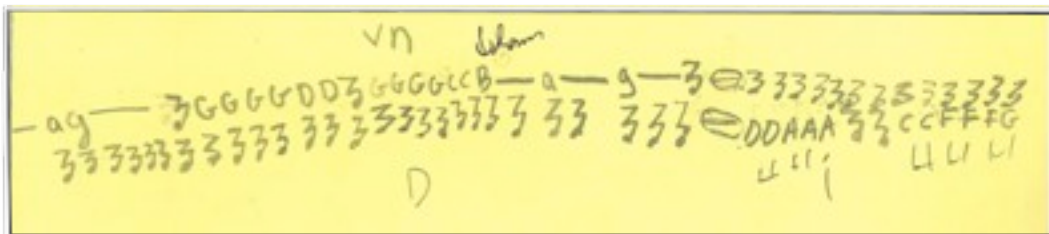
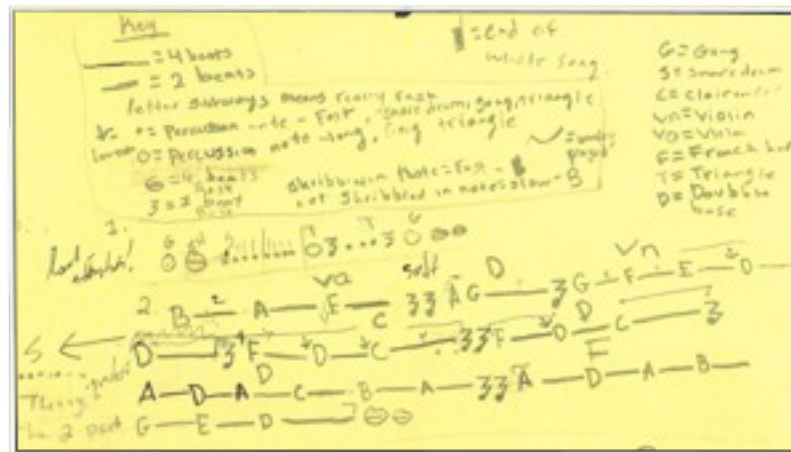
2. Notation

There are many ways for your students to write down what they hear. While we encourage traditional score notation ultimately we recognize the urgency for kids to notate and we do not want to limit kids capacity to hear things differently. One common trajectory involves starting the student on graphic notation and then getting them to write note names before they finally write on a staff.

Students should compose on the instrument in which they are most proficient. Most students will come up with their own way to describe what they hear. This creativity should be encouraged as long their systems can be explained.



above: notation by Nuha Dolby, PS 24; below: graphic notation by Madeline Schmidt, PS 24



3. Melody

Melody is a succession of notes that include steps and skips that form a distinctive sequence. We often call melody a “tune” and it is often the most memorable part of a piece of music.

Best and Worst Melody Activity by David Wallace	General Melody Workshop by Richard Carrick
<p>This workshop typically takes one class. It's a fun activity for the students and can be made into a competition.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have the students write a 10-12 note “bad” melody. 2. Have them rehearse this bad melody on their instrument and then share it with the class. 3. Share the melodies and talk about what makes them “bad”. 4. Listen to different styles of music and different melodies. Talk about what they like or dislike in the melodies. This will open their palate to new choices and sounds they may want to try out. 5. Now have the students write the “best” melody they can write! <p>By having the students compose a “bad” melody first you highlight what it lacks in terms of a logical shape, balance between steps and skips, memorability, etc. and frames the elements of an effective melody.</p> <div data-bbox="154 1549 727 1879" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>“Sometimes you can get a piece started by working with a friend and tapping rhythms to each other.</p> <p>Sometimes the simplest things can make a catchy melody.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">~~~~~</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Abraham Pagan</p> </div>	<p>This workshop can take from one to two classes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write one or more short melodies, combining any five notes 2. Demonstrate on the blackboard with note names 3. Let the students know their options for melodic contour. Spell out that notes of a Melody can <i>Repeat, Skip, Change Rhythms, Include Silence</i> 4. Review and play melodies at the piano as a class and then have them review their melodies. 5. The students should give their melodies names once their revisions are done. Tell them that the name can be a person, place, or thing, or it can be ‘melody 1’ or ‘Op.1’ 6. Compose in groups: Each student should take their melody and combine it with different melodies 7. Discuss Music Categories: High/Low (register) Fast/Slow (tempo) Loud/Soft (dynamics) Big Small (instrumentation, octaves, harmony, dynamics) 8. Review work so far (5 min) 9. Look at scores of others, and listen to a piece (10 min) 10. Discuss what needs to be done for the week (5 min) 11. Write a beginning, middle, and end 12. Write sounds, melodies, backgrounds, grooves, rhythms, etc, and put them together into a piece.

Writing Melody

Modeling and experiencing revision Class Activity by James Blachly	How to Revise a Melody Class Activity by David Wallace
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have each student sing or hum or play or name a note. Notate the melody with no stems. 2. Next, in a different order, each student names a rhythmic value-preferably orally but can also be by indicating each rhythm by name, such as “make the G a dotted sixteenth.” 3. During this process, every three or four notes, play and sing the melody as it appears so everyone has it in their head. 4. Review the melody several times and label it “Class Melody #1” 5. Either later that class, or in a subsequent class, take the same notes, and write a new rhythm; then take the same rhythm and write new notes. 6. Try changing only one thing at a time, and talk about what difference that makes. Examples: <i>What’s it like to add a rest?</i> <i>What would this melody be like if it were played on the tuba or on the piccolo?</i> <p>After each change, have the class sing the new melody to internalize it.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Ask: “What I can do to change/edit revise my piece.” In the sixth weeks or so, ask what else we could change. Write list as possible of possible edits (see page 8 for ideas on how to further edit melodies). Have the students copy the editing ideas into their notebooks and add two more techniques. 	<p>Generate a “Things You Can Do with a Musical Idea” list which you can expand and reference throughout the residency. Here is a sample list generated by the very young composers of PS 165 in Manhattan.</p> <p>Things you can do with a musical idea:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repeat it exactly 2. Change some of the notes 3. Transpose it (Make it higher or lower) 4. Throw it away! 5. Turn it into a background (accompaniment) 6. Create a background for it 7. Echo it 8. Play it backwards 9. Invert it (play it upside-down) 10. Add harmony to it 11. Turn it into a harmony 12. Add trills / ornament it 13. Add a drone 14. Change the dynamics 15. Change the timbre or instrumentation 16. Add a countermelody (a different melody happening at the same time). 17. Add percussion 18. Take something away from it 19. Speed it up or slow it down 20. Change the rhythm <div data-bbox="824 1591 1396 1885" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>“Sometimes, if you have a piano, you are just fooling around on it and discover some different sounds that you like. Then you might put that in your piece, or you might not. I discovered some of my composition sounds by accident.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">~~~~~ Claire Kurrnen</p> </div>

4. Instrument Demonstration

We believe strongly in the profound expressivity of all instruments and that students should develop a unique relationship with different instruments instead of simply being told how to write for them. To help the instruments come alive we provide interactive, professional demonstrations during which the student "interviews" the instrument, asking it questions, listening for the answer, and where possible, "conversing" with it. At all times in this process we celebrate and respect the Young Composer's voice. Three or four instrumentalists come in to play throughout the semester.



How to Conduct an Instrument Demonstration

Play your students salient excerpts of each instrument of each instrument in the class before the demonstrations. The examples should exhibit standard ranges, timbre, and the general character of the instrument.

To prepare for the instrumentalist's visit we usually ask the students to imagine four sounds that they would like to hear on the visiting instrument. They could also write a brief melody for the instrument. The four sounds may be inspired by their sound journals. The sounds may employ special effects in addition to standard sounds. A siren, for instance, can become a good model for glissando. These pieces will serve as a springboard and will naturally bring up notation questions. Encourage your students to be as playful and specific as they can be with notation.

During the demonstration, without talking
12

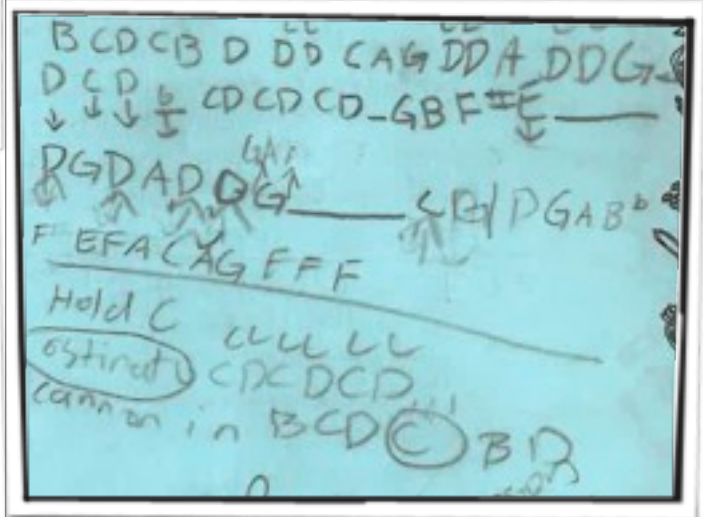
have the instrumentalist perform a passage of their choosing that illuminates range, timbre, extended effects and articulation.

When it's time for the students to interview the instrument, begin by having each student ask a question which the instrumentalist may only answer by playing. Have the students write what they learn in their journals. At this point you can cover history, range, and extended techniques. After the interviews the students should share their melodies and notated sounds for the instrument.

Re-notation the student's piece so as to clarify their original version and have the instrumentalist perform the edited version. Take this opportunity to discuss being supportive of colleagues with the whole class

Instrument Demo Duets

For subsequent instrument demonstrations have your students write a duet for the guest instrument and themselves on an instrument of choice. This opens up the student's mind to chamber music, counterpoint, polyphony, harmony, and helps them to understand the need for clarity in whatever notation system they come up with as well as the basics of score notation. It also encourages intense listening which can be very challenging without consistent stimulation and focus.



Example of duo by Kevin Nakagawa



New York Philharmonic Teaching Artists Richard Carrick (far left) and David Wallace (playing viola) work with Very Young Composers of Seoul, Korea.

5. Rhythm

"Sometimes the rhythms in my head are so hard to write down, I just want to write simple rhythms, but then they don't sound right. It helps to record them."
-Jade Aubertin, PS108, VYC Bridge

Rhythm is the backbone of music. It consists of patterns of sounds and silence and is the most fundamental, amorphous, and primal aspect of music. Even before we had notes, we had a beat!

Often one of the most difficult tasks for young composers is notating rhythms and applying a meter to a melody they compose. Rhythm can be a mysterious thing that's easy to feel but difficult to quantify.

While it might be hard to notate the rhythm a young composer wants when it exists only in her head she is usually able to identify the rhythm immediately if it is played for her once or twice. This is a good principle for teaching rhythm and for getting students more focused on what rhythms they are already using.

With this in mind you can start teaching the basic concepts of rhythm more explicitly. As a starting point you should divide the concept of rhythm into two different subjects: rhythm and tempo/meter/beat.

Rhythm	Beat/Meter/Tempo
<p>The rhythm of a melody, groove, or background is made up of quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes, etc, and comes in infinite combinations. It is applied to pitches to create melodies or motives and applied to percussion instruments to make a groovy beat.</p> <p>"When you compose, just hum the melody, harmony and rhythm over and over till you get it stuck in your head."</p> <p>I had trouble starting my pieces. What I did to solve this was to take a long walk, and I would come up with melodies that had to do with things I heard or saw in my walk."</p> <p>~~~~~ Ian Goldstein</p>	<p>Beat, in general, is the underlying pulse or "heartbeat" of music that isn't changed by the "surface level" content of note values. To put it another way, your melody might have rests but the beat never rests.</p> <p>Meter is how many beats there are in a given measure. This may be described as how that "heartbeat" of the music is grouped into twos, threes, fours, or more.</p> <p>And finally, tempo is the speed of the beats. We have slow tempos such as adagio or grave, medium tempos such as andante, and fast tempos like allegro or presto. These tempi can also be notated with metronome markings. Tempos can slow down (ritardando) or speed up (accelerando).</p>

Rick's Rhythm Technique Corner

Technique: the Three-Time Rule

When a student comes up with a melody or a background rhythm and want to play it for you, her Teaching Artist, it's a good idea to ask that she play the melody or rhythm the same way three times before showing it to you. This is very helpful for kids who are musical and make up melodies easily but have a tendency to improvise a slightly different melody every time. This technique can even be applied to jazz-oriented improv in that encourages conscious choices.

While you may encounter some resistance to this technique from the student at first, being forced to stick to one version of her idea will encourage her to decide exactly how she wants her melody to go for herself without the Teaching Artist intervening directly. This discipline lets the student develop a strong sense of detail for herself come up with her own questions of what is important in the process.

Rhythmic games and exercises are intended to elicit the rhythms that are already within the child. This works well in social settings. The TA builds up a feeling of teamwork, as well as an awareness of rhythmic layering as a prelude to melodic layering--instruments and voices working together, building, fighting--whatever images naturally arises from the children. Dance rhythms are encouraged as well as the student changing those rhythms where he or she chooses. Nothing is set in stone.

Technique: Tap the Rhythm *(notating the rhythm of a melody)*

Sometimes a student has a melody written out in notes but not in rhythms. In such a situation it is often the case that while it is beyond the student's ability to play the notes and rhythms together perfectly he still knows exactly what he wants.

The student might have a slew of note names and rhythms on paper without having yet decided on exactly how these two elements interact. To help combat this roadblock the TA might ask the student to tap out the notes, stopping every now and then to make sure the TA understands which notes go with which rhythms. When they tap out the rhythm more than once in the same way you should play it back for them. If what you play is what they want, then we write it down.

Technique: Show the Downbeat *(figuring out the meter)*

Once a student's melody is written out with notes and he can sing or play the melody the young composer should, if possible, perform the melody and put a big slash under any note or space that feels like a downbeat. This should be demonstrated in the first measure or two to make sure they understand what a downbeat is.

Each composer will be comfortable with rhythms and beats differently. It's your job, as a Teaching Artist, to decide on the spot whether it is beneficial for the young composer to do this exercise on his own, with you, or with another student in the class.

6. Harmony

Harmony is multiple musical sounds occurring simultaneously.

"When the french horn and strings play together the sound is heavenly harmony."

Katherine Hade, PS 199

"I liked the conversations, and hearing the notes overlap."

Madeline Schmidt PS 24

RICK'S TECHNIQUE: COMPOSING SECOND LAYER - *Teaching Artist and student play together*

When a student has written a melody and can play it the TA might encourage them to write a secondary melody or background to go along with it. If the student is comfortable playing or improvising on an instrument, it is a great technique for the TA to play the melody they already wrote and have the student improvise the secondary melody or background at the same time. The student will compose and write things down as improv session goes along and they will build ownership and command of their music from having written everything on their instrument.

Harmony Games

Before this session have each student compose a melody for homework.

Divide the students into groups of two or three and have them work for 20 minutes on harmonizing the homework melody of each student in the group.

After the 20 minutes are up, each group should share their work and the class should have a dialogue about the different approaches to harmony that they hear. Discuss counterpoint, harmony, minimalism, serialism, and any other techniques to orchestration they may have discovered.

After you have your harmony discussion have one student their perform melody while another plays the harmony and a *third* student plays a percussion instrument. This helps them discover how to add beat and rhythm to their pieces. It is also a great exercise in collaboration and listening.



Rajon Herbert of PS 39 hard at work with Jon Deak

7. Ear Fantasy/Chords

The Ear Fantasy exercise has the students apply imaginative words to specific chords. Begin by playing major, minor, diminished and augmented triads as well as dominant seventh chords and ask them to write down and then share their word associations. You can eventually play extended tertian chords and clusters to provide students with a wide variety of aural possibilities for when they begin to write multiple lines. All names that the students apply to the chords are valid. Some of them might even know the technical terms. Common student reactions to some basic chords are:

Major: Happy, Shocked, Loud, Fading

Dominant seventh: High, Confusing

Minor: Soft but booming

Diminished: Booming, scary in beginning

You don't have to be musically trained to hear some difference in feeling between G major and G minor. The students may not be able to exactly say what the difference is now, but the purpose of the class is to acquaint the students with the sonorities. Make sure to encourage the students to make their reactions to the chords personal. Try playing the chords on a keyboard in different keys and ranges. Try building a series of them and see what happens. Remember, there is no wrong answer at this point.

The "Ear Fantasy," or the Sentiments of the Chords and Intervals

In most societies, we grow up listening to harmonic, even contrapuntal music. It is true, that in some societies, most notably China and India, children hear monophonically, and we respect that. Otherwise, we need to give children access to the harmonies that their ears are already hearing quite well and in deep detail. In that regard, I've taken an idea from Leonard Bernstein that it is important for the child to feel the sentiment of a chord or an interval more than its technical name and rigid rules of use. We give the children basic chords which they identify according to their individual feeling (which is almost always a bit different!). A major triad may sound: happy, clear, sunny, or even glaring and sickening. A diminished triad: spooky, scary, sad, or even scratchy, furry or purple. And so on. A melodic minor 7th: yearning. A series of minor 2nds: like a beehive, or an argument. Then, we ask the children to invent or discover their own chords. The class is repeatedly asked to remember which chord is which as a kind of game/test. Kids catch on at very different rates which matters little, and all are encouraged. It is so important that they "own" the chords they use, from the very start.

Jon Deak

"Before this class began, I knew major and minor chords. During the class I learned what diminished chords, augmented chords, and clustered chords are. During the program when kids compose pieces, they should try and compose them a little more independently with not as much help because they will have to compose independently when they compose by themselves."

Adam Bernstein

Major triad: "Big, proud, loud"
Minor triad: "Sad, crying, disappointed"
Diminished triad: "Eerie, confused, scary unexpected"
Minor 7th: "Big, jazz, powerful"
Dominant 7th: "Happy surprised, shriek"

Sophea Clarke, PS 24, 4th grade

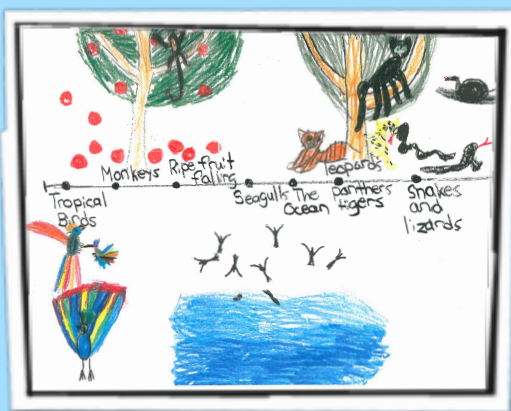
8. Form

In keeping with the desire to not tamper with our students' ideas, TA's typically do not introduce Rondo, Sonata, Fugue, or even *A-B-A* form at the beginning of a residency. We do encourage development on the models of ordinary conversations, development of feelings, growth, decay, and sometimes we introduce images or encourage stories. In general, we have discovered that about half of our students write music based on narrative, and half write absolute, non-programmatic music. It is crucial to respect an individual student's approach to structure but that is not always easy to initially discern.

Having said all this, it has been noted that encouraging a use of "theme and variations" is consistently effective for students who can't get past an initial case of writer's block. Children have a tendency to understand this particular form intuitively and consistently relate to it in profound ways. They are able to take a melody or rhythm and just "go to town" on it. We seldom encounter a kid who just plays the theme in eighth-notes or merely changes articulation. They far more frequently are able to change the actual *sentiment* of the theme. A very rich, artistic gift indeed!

Form Lesson by Danny Felsenfeld

This lesson is meant to be explored near the beginning of the VYC journey. It focuses on large-scale compositional skills like thinking of a piece as a strong and beautiful shape they are creating rather than just putting one note after another and thinking of events as music and music as events. These highly rigorous modes of thought are approached in an unassuming manner in that it requires no use of standard notation. Divide the class into groups of four and designate one person in each group the "composer".



The composer is completely in charge of the group but must complete the following assignments:

- 1) use everyone else in the group in some way. They can't participate themselves but they may "conduct" the piece.
- 2) they must assign at least 4 different "sounds". These sounds tend to work better if they have no understandable words in them
- 3) put the "orchestra" to work executing these given sounds in a particular order. It MUST be rehearsed, even polished, and it MUST have a title.

Stress that, while they may have input from their "orchestra", the authority of the composer must be respected by each group. Perform the pieces twice and talk about what was positive and what could be improved upon. Did they follow the rules of the assignment? Did everyone participate? Could there have been something better?

This whole process takes around 10-15 minutes. Switch the groups around a few times to let as many students have the chance be the "composer" as possible.

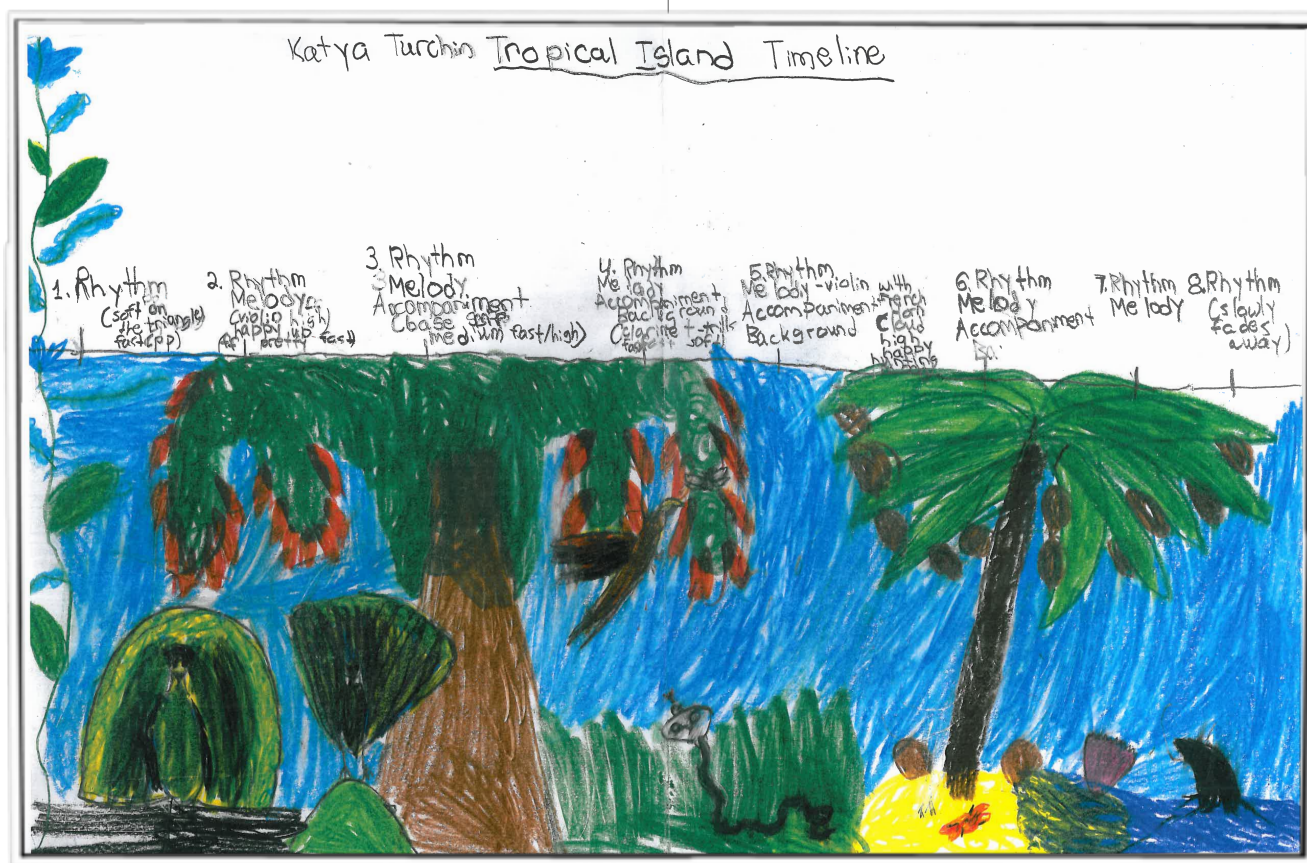
Timeline as a way of visualizing and understanding form

Creating a visual timeline for what a student's piece for the final activity will look like is a great way to get young composers to start thinking on a larger scale. Make a timeline in class as a model, placing the words beginning, middle, and end on the timeline.

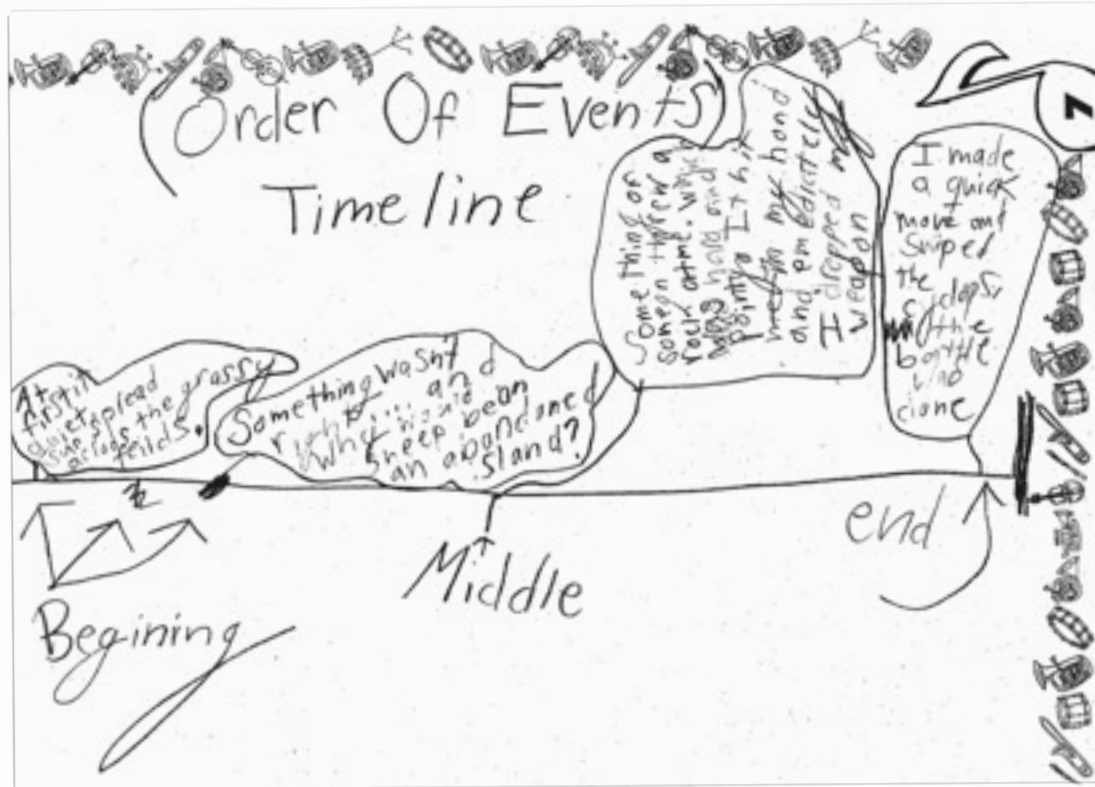
Use the timeline as a basis for talking about form and the function of each part of a piece, including development. The timeline can end up being your score, or it can be just a descriptive departure point.

Length on the timeline should be pegged to the duration of the events in a given piece. Make sure that each student incorporates narrative structure, melodies, rhythm, and pacing in at least roughly accurate proportions.

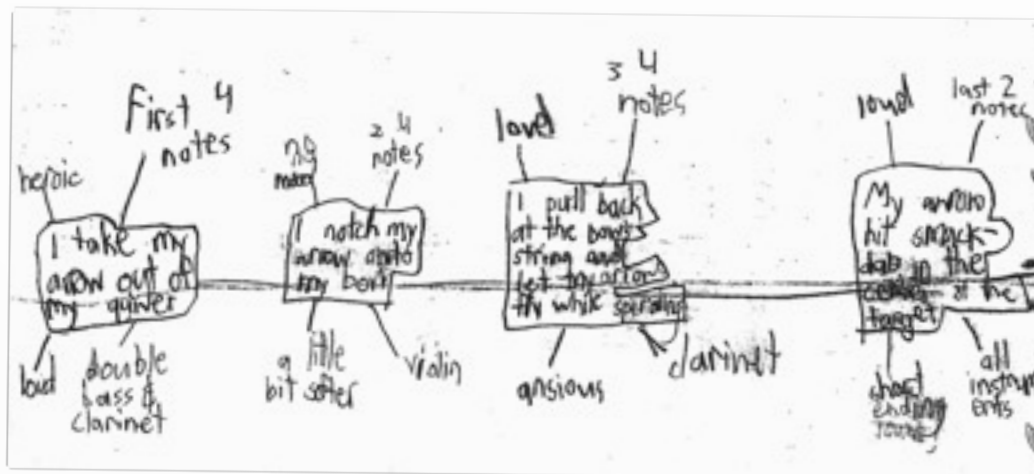
Once a student has completed her timeline, have her include dynamics, instrumentation, extended techniques and so forth. The timeline can now be "played" as a sort of graphic score for the whole class. This can be a catalyst for some wonderful class discussions.



Example of a formal timeline by Katya Turchin, PS 199



above: timeline by Katherine Hade
below: timeline by John Mattson



9. Dynamics, Articulation, Extended Techniques

Dynamics

Dynamic markings indicate how loud or soft music is at any given point and VYC students are consistently fascinated by them. The earlier in the process you bring dynamics to their attention the more quickly students feel comfortable using them since they most likely will have an intuitive sense of their dramatic effects.

Go through each student's piece phrase by phrase, instrument by instrument, and ask, "how loud is it here?" They often just say "medium" but even here ask them "medium *loud* or medium *soft*?"

A kid is never finished with his composition until he has completed his dynamics for every instrument and for every section. Students are usually fairly decisive about dynamics. If, however, dynamics are assigned haphazardly, have the student(s) refocus on them.

Articulation:

One way to determine articulation is by going through each phrase of the piece and asking, "do you want it smooth or choppy here?" If they want it smooth, try to get them to sing it that way, then phrase by phrase, or however the music flows.

Kids almost always have a strong opinion and they will usually know which one they want after some trial and error. Try to get as much detail as possible; if they want a note short, ask "how short"? Do they want it to have an accent or not? Have them sing it back both ways. If it seems they have several different ideas about slurs or articulation, print the piece and have them put in all their own articulations. After doing this a few times they tend to get the idea. Afterwards, check their work, making sure all their decisions are intentional.

Extended techniques

To prepare for instrument demos we have the students write four sounds that they will want to hear on the instrument. These can be notes, the beginning of a melody, or abstract concepts. One of the thrills of working with live musicians is the experience of them trying to imitate sounds from the student's sound journal: a creaky door on the bass, a helicopter on the flute, or whispering on the French horn.

For each sound, the player is most likely using an extended technique, such as *sul ponticello*, flutter-tongue, left handed pizz., etc. For each technique, have the students write down what it is called, and how they can ask for it in their piece.

Even if extended techniques don't make it into the final version of the piece, the process of imagining sounds on an instrument and experiencing players push themselves to achieve a sound from the child's imagination is empowering and exciting. It encourages the students to have no limits to their writing.

The students can conceive of anything they want, so long as the Teaching Artist can write it down. Being challenged to find an appropriate notational system for a boundless imagination is part of the fun of a TA's job!



drawing by Lauren Kennedy, PS 199

10. Orchestration

Orchestration

Orchestration is a beautiful and integral part of the art of composition. The defining by the student of exactly which instrument plays and when, should be a central part of the process.

After the instrument demonstrations the students generally have an idea of which instruments they want to use. At this point it is important to discuss, if you haven't already, range and timbre.

Timbre is the special sound that each instrument makes. This should be a large part of each instrument demonstration.

Range

Range is how high and low each instrument can play and can be illustrated on the piano for both visual and aural simplicity. For their purposes, "high B," or "very low C" are good indicators of range, but the color changes of each instrument across its range are still important. Since most instruments have three or four octaves in which we can choose to write, encourage students to write 'high' 'medium' or 'low.'

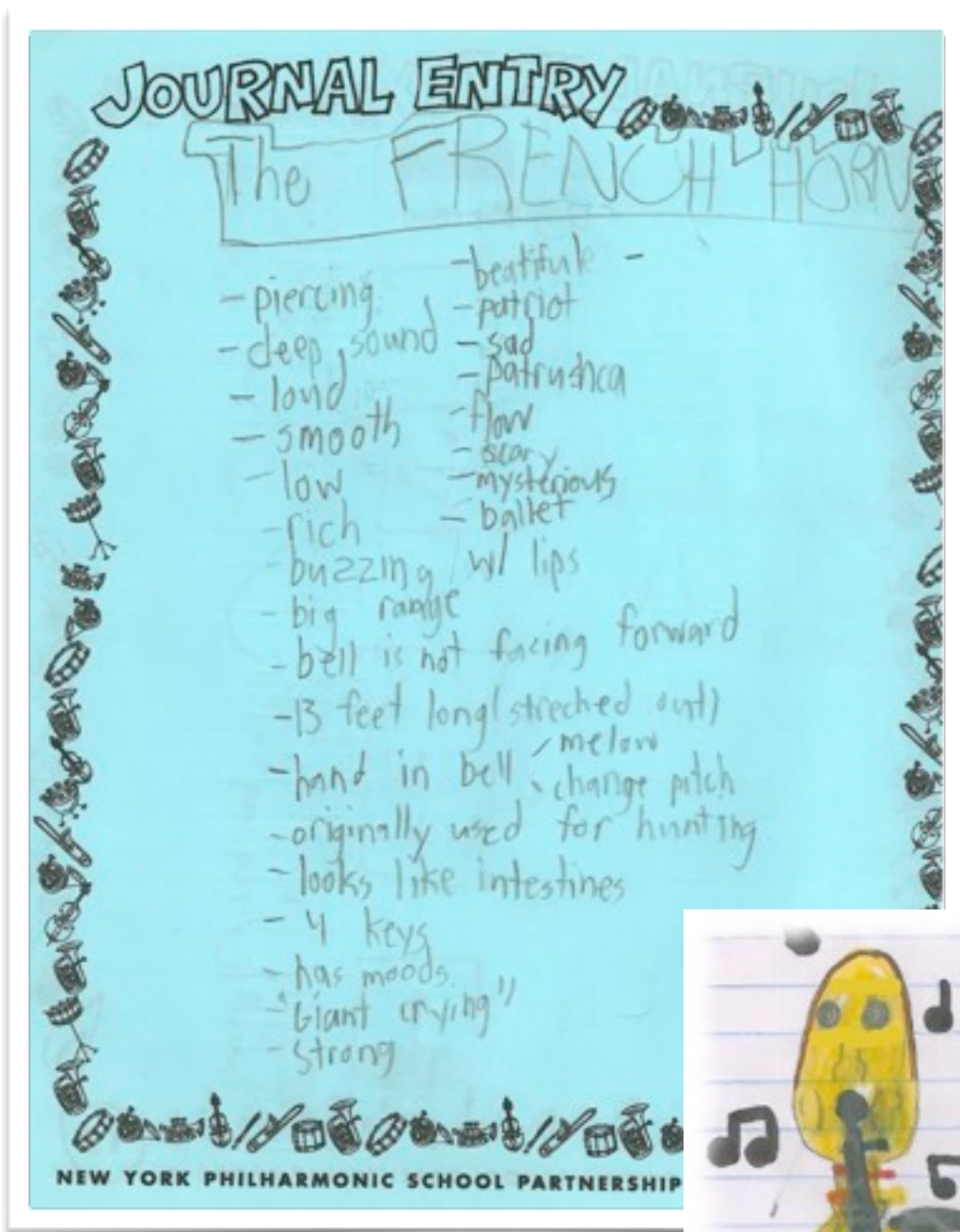
Later, when working on the computer together, or when you print out the music, they can visualize where these notes lie.

*"When I stuck my hands in the french horn while he was playing and it vibrated a lot (felt wet ewwww. Probably spit."
The french horn is bold, vibrating/reverberating loud, broad pitch level and range, moody and happy. Katherine Luong PS24*

"When I went to see the NY Philharmonic musicians play at their concerts, I observed that all the musicians I was going to be working with were so focused. They cared about every little detail in the piece, and always concentrated and were interested in what they were playing! When I met the musicians and gave them my piece, they shared the same interest and focus as they did when they played Beethoven's 9th Symphony. What I took away from that experience was that no matter what the musicians played, they had the same great care for whatever piece they have in front of them—even if it is written by kids. I loved all the instruments. I used clarinet, violin, trumpet, bass, banjo, and percussion. They made unique sounds. Let me share some that I liked. Clarinet can screech and make very sudden noises. Violin is amazing; it can go higher than the human voice and pretty low, too! Speaking of low, the bass can go extremely low and I like how you can knock on it. The banjo has pretty chords and has a funny string starting halfway down the neck. I like the trumpet's mutes and flutter-tongues. Last but not least, percussion. I like the twangy sound of the flexatone and the tin tone of the cowbell."

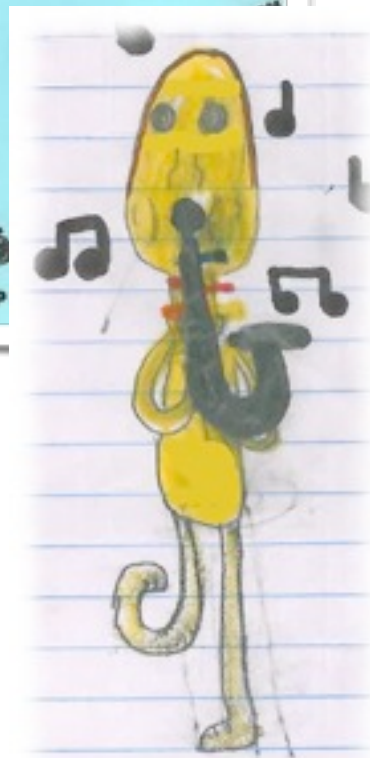
-Ben West, Colorado VYC, age 10





"To get the right sound for my story, I had the Guitar and the Bass playing, and I made the Trumpet play the lowest note he's EVER played before!! It was very cool."

-Allyson Ludewig, Bravo! Colorado VYC



11. In Class Scribing and Revision

When you are scribing, there are a few ways to ensure that you are writing what your student *really* wants: have them sing or play it the same way two or three times; write down what they do, making sure it's the same each time. But what if they don't sing it the same way twice in a row? What if there are issues still to be worked out? Sometimes their performances vary. We expect that they will have better conceptions of the music than what they can perform. Sometimes an improvisation, if recorded and transcribed, can lead to a very rich revision process.

Ground Rules of Scribing by James Blachly

Students should be encouraged to present their compositions on whatever instrument they are most imaginative. This may be the instrument in which they are most proficient but may not be. For example, many students are more creative on the piano than on the recorder, even though they have more skills on the recorder. Some students have difficulty expressing melody at all, but have a concrete idea of what they want. With these students, it is essential that they tap or clap the rhythm.

I have found that many of the initial ideas of children are quite complex rhythmically. Rather than try to notate on the fly and risking a 'simplification' of their ideas as interpreted by myself, I record their performances and transcribe them at home.

When recording, have them play it once to 'practice,' and then play it again. If they aren't performing it consistently, have them practice it and come back to record when they are ready.

Record them as often as possible while encouraging them to continue to use their own instinctual notation. The more complex pieces will require multiple listenings and are well worth multiple listenings and attention.

If their ideas appear unclear, still make a notated version of them, and present them with your questions and possible interpretations. Write out several options, and have them choose. It is very important not to present this writing as authoritative; they should always be able to make changes to what they have written. Jon speaks about the patience it requires, at this stage, to not insert one's own compositional propensities into the process.

It is helpful to use a notation software (such as Sibelius or Finale) throughout the process. By inputting their lines and playing back what they have created, they have a sense of achievement throughout the process, and it facilitates a concrete knowledge of how and what they are revising.

**The Teaching Artist Thinks he Knows
What the Student Wants
by Richard Carrick**

Teaching Artist: "How does the melody go?"

Student plays melody, with very 'flexible' beat and not keeping precise time. The Teaching Artist tries to iron out their rhythms by playing it back to them with some sort of beat, but cannot figure out what the student wanted for 2 measures.

The Teaching Artist plays those two measures one way.

Student: "Yeah, that is it!"

Teaching Artist: "Great, now these two measures they could also go like this..."

Teaching Artist plays a different version of those two measures.

Student: "Yeah, that's it!"

Teaching Artist: "Wait, so it is the second way? Not the first way?"

Student: "Sure, that's good."

"I recommend to all newcomers to have time to make changes in what they write, and not rush! This time I started a week early so I could take the time to write the story part. Sure enough, the next week I changed my story quite a bit. Finally, I came up with a repeating theme and rests for breaks in the in the instruments' journey. It was a long process but if you take time and follow through and hum a lot as you go, it works out very well."

-Ben West

Teaching Artist plays the first version again, and student gets confused. This type of filling in of the student's material, which occurs frequently, can lead to an impasse. The Teaching Artist might think it is saving time if the student is going slowly or having difficulty with details. This reasoning is weak compared to the greater problems it will cause: it diminishes the importance of the student's own abilities for themselves (they rely more on the Teaching Artist than themselves) and it most likely produces a different result than if the student performed the melody themselves. How can we know that we are interfering with their instincts? Because when I do NOT interfere with their music creation, they will often come up with something I hadn't thought of in advance!



Richard Carrick and TA Julie Ahn with student Jin-Young in Seoul, Korea

12. Culminating Project Ideas

Musical Adventures: Jon Deak/Bill Gordh

We have found that young composers are often inspired by a narrative circumstance That lends inspiration and/or structures to their musical creations. The idea of Instrument Village™, a village in the Land of Sound where all the instruments of the orchestra live and work and play has been the basis for many wonderful compositions. The first, The Roaring Mountain, was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic for its Young Peoples Concerts and premiered in 2005. Composer Jon Deak and librettist Bill Gordh then created eight more Instrument Village ensemble pieces. Jon recognized the value of using the Instrument Village idea within VYC since he already likes to think of instruments as living personalities.

The aim of these narrative scenarios is to liberate expressivity, not confine it. Following are some of the Instrument Village Adventures that have been explored. These scenarios can be used many times in many ways all according to the imaginations of the specific young composers and instruments available for them to write for. As stated earlier, about half of our young composers employ a story as a starting point and the the other half write non programmatically. The Instrument Village storylines have been constructed so that a composer can work in a way that is best for him/her.

The following set up of "The Journey to Symphony Sea" was used by Bravo! VYC

kids during NY Philharmonic's residency in Eagle County, Colorado with whom we get to work for about a week every summer. The set up is in "Storytelling" form to encourage an adventurous feeling so that the young composers will fun with the idea and allow their imaginations to roam.

Instrument Village: The Journey to Symphony Sea by Bill Gordh

Tales have been told for years about Symphony Sea which lies far to the East of Instrument Village. Well, one band of Instruments have decided to venture out across the Land of Sound in search of the Sea. It's an amazing journey across the musical landscape and there are times the Instruments feel it's impossible. But still, they travel on.

In 2010 we used Big Bass, Viola/violin, Trumpet, Clarinet, Percussion and Banjo/ guitar to take us on this trip.

There are many ways of working with this scenario. Here are a few:

- It might be a descriptive piece using music to describe the terrain (or one particular area - a field, a mountain, a cave) as the Instruments cross the Land of Sound. No one knows what this land is like so . . .
- The piece might describe an incidental adventure the Instruments have along the way - some trouble they run into or fun they have. Something that happens to one or more of the instruments.

- The piece might tell of other creatures that live in the Land of Sound.
- The student might capture the musical exchanges the Instruments have as they travel, sit around in the evening or go to sleep.

Once we have all of these ideas the students can create a simple narrative that moves from one composition to the next and we will have quite an exciting musical event!

Here are some additional Instrument Village Adventure composition launchers that young composers have created remarkable pieces for. We originally sent out similar letters (as above) to the composers, but for this book felt brief descriptions would suffice.

- Instrument Village: The Camping Trip-a band of instruments pack up their gear, hike up a mountain and spend the night. There's even a campfire to tell stories around. Some of the "Stories" are pure music.
- Instrument Village: The New York Adventure-a small ensemble of instruments explore New York City.

- Instrument Village in Mozart's Vienna-an Adventure in Sonata-Allegro Form. This piece featured new compositions by young composers (ages 10 – 13) from the newly created Bridge program. As the sonata allegro form is considered essential to the understanding of music from Vienna in Mozart's time, the narrative set the circumstance for the sequential playing of individual compositions which were in sonata form. The young composers wrote music describing the carriage ride of 4 instruments into Vienna.

"Composing music helped me play the Cello better."

-Taz Kim, Songcatchers, age 10



Bill Gordh (l) with New York Philharmonic musicians and NYC/Bridge composers Sophie Millar, Isabelle Hasslund, Ian Goldstein, and Bo Henry
Photo: Michael Di Vito

End of the Year Activities by Paola Prestini

Musical Pictures:

Theme: Create Music to memories based on pictures

The students should take a photograph that inspires them and think about how they might translate the content of the picture into sound. They should share their pictures and their thoughts in class and then begin writing music based on the picture that evokes personal memories. Construct discreet sections for the piece and attach words to each section.

SoundScapes (electronic):

Theme: Create a soundtrack to a beloved place

The goal of this assignment is to create a musical background or story for a place to which the student already has a strong emotional attachment or simply wants to explore/discover. They should begin by creating a timeline that is both descriptive of their chosen location and involves a narrative structure. Part of this process should involve collecting sounds from the internet or recording sounds that remind the student of their special place and incorporating these sounds into the timeline.

The piece that results from the timeline should be a sort of experiment in electroacoustic music. The students should be instructed to write for a live ensemble just as they would for any other piece. The TA should also, however, help the students create tracks of their “found sounds” which will be the featured “effects” of the overall piece. Programs like Garage Band are great for this sort of activity.

Carnival of the Animals:

Theme: Choose a real or imaginary animal and write a piece that describes how that animal moves, communicates, and lives

The students should begin by creating a visual map of characteristics, colors, and events that they feel describe their animals. They should then write a brief motif, melodic or rhythmic, based on their visual map. After all this has been accomplished they should craft their piece. If a student is stuck for ideas listening to *Carnival of Animals* by Camille Saint-Saens might spark his or her imagination.

When a guest performer visits the class one may turn this basic concept into a group activity. Divide the class into two groups; each will write a piece that describes an animal chosen by the class as a whole. Create a visual map from which the students will write a brief motif. The instrumentalist can perform both pieces once they're finished.

Sound Journal

Theme: Create a piece based on the sounds collected in student sound journals

The students should choose one of the sounds that they've collected in their sound journals and explore the natural sonic world which emerges from it. They should diagram the foreground and background of this soundscape and then morph these structural layers into a melody and accompaniment. Ask the students what instruments and techniques they might use to achieve specific sounds like milk steaming or coffee grinding.

Homework Assignments & Class Activities by David Wallace

- Write the world's most beautiful slow melody
- Write the world's most exciting fast melody
- Write something funny
- Write something lonely
- Make a duet where one of you holds long notes while the other plays moving notes; make a percussion ostinato and compose a melody to go with it
- Write a great melody using skips
- Write a great melody using leaps
- Teach your partner one of your melodies and learn one of your partners melodies
- Add a percussion part to your melody; orchestrate this melody, who is playing what? Is the melody doubled, shared, or passed around? decide what "flavor" of harmonies you want with this melody.



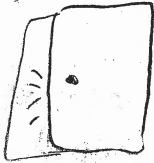
David Wallace works with Sae-Young Kim in Seoul, Korea

JOURNAL ENTRY

H W:

- Research Double Bass
- Write more melodys
- 2 more sounds

My parents whispering to each other when I'm in bed.



"pssswsswss...yay.... OK, pssswss.."

14

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

"All my life people have told me exactly what to do. Now here come these Americans who let me be creative and free. Now I really want to become a musician."
 -Yi-Jun Zhang, on National Television, Shanghai VYC, 2008

Final Thoughts

Lessons

Sight Reading

Choose a score from one of your students (or request a kids orchestra score from the VYC archives). VYC students wrote their own recorder parts and the notation is inventive and very kid-friendly. Have the students follow one line first with their fingers while listening; then have them sing the line, and eventually, play the line on recorder.

Listening Committee

Create a “committee” of composers who help expand on each other’s compositions. Listening to new music every session that is new to the students: try world, classical, contemporary, etc.

Titles

Sometimes titles are the seed for an entire composition. Sometimes, they are the last thing that comes out of the composing process. A title might be about a thing (Gold and Dirty - about a hair color!), or a place (Diner Dash). They might be abstract (The Unfinished Beginning) or provocative (The Assassination of Barney). Titles always help everyone understand the music in some way, including the audience, the Teaching Artist, the students themselves, and the musicians who get the scores before meeting the students (which affects how they feel the music and what technical questions they might have before the first rehearsal).

Encourage your students to come up with a working title early on in the process. Each student must come up with a title,

even though they are allowed to change the title as they continue to work on the piece. This provides a focus for their work, a focus that they can place as much or as little importance on during the composing process as they like. It can focus the student on what they think is important, a title about a musical technique, or a non-musical reference, and since they can change the title from week to week they keep a log of the different titles and can look over all of their titles to come up with a final title.

Everyone develops their title at a different point in the VYC classes, but most people do find their title before the end of the classes. The working title usually becomes the final title at a natural point in the process.

Dress Rehearsal

The dress rehearsal is one of the most critical parts of the process of premiering a new musical work. One of the critical roles of the mentor is to prepare and focus very young composers for it. Here are some suggestions to help very young composers get the most out of the experience:

- Become acquainted with the printed score: practice identifying page numbers, measure numbers, and distinct parts. Practice following the score while listening to a live performance or a MIDI realization of it.
- Shut your eyes and imagine the sounds of your score played by real instruments.
- Practice singing, playing, drumming, counting, dancing, or vocalizing the different parts of your score. Be ready to

demonstrate or describe the music you have created. Are there any helpful descriptive words or phrases we can add to help the musicians know how you want them to play their parts?

- Review the dynamics. Who has the melody and when? What details do you want the audience and musicians to be sure to notice?
- Remind yourself of any special requests you have for the musicians.
- Discuss rehearsal protocol: Where and how do we sit? When do we talk? How should we address the conductor and musicians? What are some things we can notice or listen for when other composers' pieces are being rehearsed?
- Create an introductory speech for your piece: write a short paragraph introducing your composition. Be sure to include your name, your title, and any details you want your listeners to know (why you gave your piece its title, any story behind the piece, any musical moments you want them to know about in advance, any questions or challenges that will keep them on the edges of their seats).

Often, very young composers need help finding the right voice in rehearsal. Most young composers find themselves overwhelmed or shy, and the mentor needs to draw them out with focused questions like, "How was the tempo at rehearsal letter C?" or "How was the dynamic of the piccolo melody?" More confident and exuberant students may need a reminder that the conductor and orchestra must be treated with the utmost gratitude and respect, even if things don't sound exactly right yet.

Occasionally, students find their voices shortly after the dress rehearsal and will privately articulate specific requests to the mentor before the performance. Usually, the requests can be passed along directly to the conductor and/or musicians involved. Ideally, the composer should communicate requests directly to the musicians. In the rare event that requests cannot reasonably be honored (due to re-scoring, lack of rehearsal or practice time, etc.), the mentor should help the composers find the next best solution or encourage them to make a mental note for future revisions and scores.

**"I had my 15 minutes of fame in the VYC. I'm fine with that. Now I really enjoy working with younger kids, and it helps my composing."
-Farah Taslima, VYC Bridge Graduate, on her North Korean premiere**

A note to teachers

We always partner with public school music teachers whenever possible. Schoolteachers everywhere are a vast treasure of knowledge, care and dedication. We feel that they are among the unsung heroes of our culture.

A note to parents

VYC has worked in many underprivileged schools and in situations where parental or guardian support is lacking, or even abusive. While it is true that these children have risen to write amazing music, there is no question of the value of parental support. In fact, the entire VYC program would not be what it is today without the support of many of our students' parents.

We have often been asked about the role of parents, specifically when the child is composing music at home. We suggest that the parents encourage, generally approve and facilitate, and yet remain neutral in regards to the specific judging or editing of a child's creation. Children are so sensitive to our approval and disapproval that, in many cases, their own inner voices are quickly lost.

Glossary

accent the stressing of particular notes or sounds

arco use of the bow in playing a stringed instrument

cadenza a virtuosic passage for the soloist in a concerto

chord a combination of two or more notes or more that blend together to form one sound

concerto a piece for one or more soloists accompanied by orchestra

conductor leader of the orchestra

crescendo increasing in volume

diminuendo decreasing in volume

dissonance a clashing or discordant musical interval

dynamics the loudness and softness of musical sounds

glissando a rapid sliding up or down on the musical scale

harmony multiple musical sounds occurring simultaneously

imitation the repetition of a theme or phrase

jazz American music developed from ragtime and blues, generally with syncopated rhythms and improvisation

legato smooth and connected playing of notes

melody the tune of a piece of music

meter predictable pattern of strong and weak beats

motive a recurrent phrase that is developed throughout a piece of music

orchestra a group of musicians playing a variety of instruments

orchestration the choices that a composer makes in the use of musical instruments in a piece

philharmonic literally, "loving harmony" or "loving sound"

pizzicato the plucking of strings rather than bowing

pulse steady beats that appear in a very regular, predictable way

rhapsody a piece with an irregular form and a highly charged emotional character

rhythm patterns of sounds and silence in a piece of music

staccato short, disconnected, or choppy manner of playing notes

symphonic in this context, the same as “orchestral,” usually a large scale piece of orchestral music

syncopation displacement of the regular metrical accent in music

tango a ballroom dance of Latin American origin

tempo the fastness or slowness of a piece of music

texture the feeling or character of a passage of music determined by the combination of its sounds

theme the main idea in a piece of music

timbre the distinctive quality of a sound

trill rapid alternation of two adjacent musical notes

virtuoso a musician of exceptional skill

variation an alteration or new version of a theme



Briana Serrano, PS 199

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Lily Goldberg, PS 199

