

Jamming With Your Ensemble!

Leading Students To Create Original Music in Real-Time, Virtually or In-Person

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Creativity and collaboration in the classroom is **easier** and **more fun** than you might think. This session will give you games and activities that you can use **immediately** to take the scariness out of live composing and improvisation. Whether your classroom is virtual or in-person, these exercises can be successfully used with student groups of **all sizes and experience levels**.

Session Goals

1. Learn **how to give students a creative voice** in their music making, primarily creating music by ear, similar to what a rock band does, rather than reproducing notation.
2. Try out **games and music making activities** that you can easily do with your own ensemble.
3. See how this can work **in a rehearsal setting**.

Games/Active Demonstration

Overall Instructions

- Less a matter of conducting and more a matter of facilitation —
 - Ensure students understand rules
 - Helping students listen to what's going on and respond musically.
- A safe place, without judgment
 - "There are no mistakes, only surprises that hold new possibilities."
 - **Focus:** experimentation, collaboration, creativity, and having fun!
- All of these games are pitch-based, so percussionists may participate using any pitched instrument or their voice.

Pacific Ocean

Play long, pulseless drones in a predetermined key/scale. All start on the same pitch. After sustaining that pitch, decide whether to move up, move down, or stay on the same pitch (no leaps). Don't play constantly. Occasionally, rest between long notes, listen and enjoy the chords created.

Copycat

Within a predetermined key/scale (e.g., C minor pentatonic), one player improvises a short me-

lododic line. Everyone repeats it back to the first player as best they can. Give all players a turn to be the leader.

Call and Response

The basic idea of call and response is simple: One student plays a short music phrase, and then another student plays a response.

Explain antecedent consequent phrases. The first phrase (the "call") may end higher allowing the second phrase (the "response") the chance to resolve the melodic line lower and thus create an overall arched shape melody. Try doing some simple pairs of call and response over a drone or texture.

Growing Melody

Choose a key or scale. Ensure all participants know it and can play it. One student decides the first note. The next person plays that note and adds a note of their choosing. (For first timers, a good limitation is to say, "you must move *only* by step.") The next student plays those two pitches and adds another. This process repeats with each subsequent player adding a note. The game is played *entirely by ear*, without notation.

Creating “Instant Compositions”

Having played these different musical games, your students can now combine games to create “instant compositions.”

- Choose which games they enjoyed
- Create an ordering to play them in (games can be repeated)
- Identify the parameters for those games, including
 - Key/Scale
 - Instrumentation
 - Dynamics
 - Expressive intent

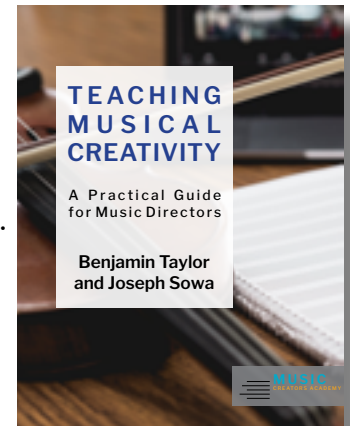
Making this work in virtual classrooms

- Basics
 - Any platform can be successful: Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, etc.
 - Everyone should be encouraged to have video on and be unmuted.
 - Explain to your students what latency is and how the music they create will have to embrace that limitation.
 - In general, this means having no more than 3 layers: (1) a bass line or drone, (2) a static texture or repeated ostinato, and (3) a free floating melodic line.
- In large groups (20+ students), games with very limited decisions work best (e.g., “Pacific Ocean” or “Copycat”)
- Facilitate small group jams (5–8 students) using breakout rooms.
 - Everyone can hear everyone else (up to ca. 7–8 people playing simultaneously).
 - Great games for small groups include “Call and Response” and “Instant Composition.”
- Incorporating other media can super-charge students’ creativity! Invite them to consider choreography, lighting, costumes, props, acting, spoken text, etc.

We applaud you for seeking tools to help your students engage in creative music making!

About the Music Creators Academy

- Founded in 2020 by Benjamin Taylor, with Joseph Sowa on the executive board, to enable students to continue to make music during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- A virtual summer experience in which students from across North America came together to create new works for virtual ensembles
- Residencies and workshops with more than half a dozen ensembles across the United States and Canada.
- **E-book:** *Teaching Musical Creativity: A Practical Guide for Music Directors* (F-Flat Books, 2020)



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