

# Course sample

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# **Moving On with Composition**

## **Music 2**

**Written by**  
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**Level HE5 - 60 CATS**



This course has been written and illustrated by Patric Standford.

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## About the author



**Patric Stanford** is an award-winning composer, a teacher and lecturer of repute, a writer and music journalist, occasional broadcaster and a musician who has played a major role with many British musical organisations – he was the chairman of the Composers' Guild and British Music Information Centre from 1977 to 1993. He is perhaps best known as a composer. His 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony gained the *Premio Città di Trieste* in 1972, and a large scale oratorio *Christus Requiem* earned him the Yugoslav Government's Arts Award after performances in Skopje in 1976; his 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony has the *Ernest Ansermet Prize* from Geneva, and he received the *First International Composers' Award* in Budapest in 1997 for a choral masque *The Prayer of St Francis*. He has awards from Spain, Finland and Belgium. The BBC commissioned his 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony in 1986. He worked as an arranger for West End shows in London, composing and directing light music recordings and an album for the jazz group Continuum, and ghost writing for Rod McKuen's classical American recordings. A regular visitor to Hungary and France as a jury member for choral competitions, he taught composition and orchestration at the Guildhall School of Music in London for 15 years, moving to Yorkshire in 1980 to become Head of Music at the Leeds University college at Bretton Hall.



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# Introduction

## Course overview

Level 1 of the OCA's Composing Music course sought to provide a foundation for acquiring a knowledge and awareness of the *craft* of musical composition. Level 2 continues the quest with a series of projects designed to focus on specific challenges in composition. It first seeks to put some harmonic processes to the test, and requires imaginative re-working of harmonic outlines derived from the work of significant composers of the past. These harmonic explorations are put to use in the support of vocal lines, both of folk style origins and your own original word setting. Voices performing together in small groups or as a choir might provide an opportunity for students to find performers for the pieces they write within the local community, and even a choir or vocal ensemble with which they themselves perform.

The study of string instruments and later brass instruments then becomes an adjunct to the wind instruments that were a significant feature of the Level 1 projects, and over the following series of projects these instrument are put together in various smaller groupings and eventually the conventional small orchestra, all hopefully becoming a provocation to imagination and ingenuity – both essentials in the development of the composer's craftsmanship.

It is, of course, well known that distinguished composers of the past have confined themselves to only a few, or even just one, particular medium. Symphonies by Chopin, operas by Brahms or string quartets by Wagner are unlikely to be discovered because those composers devoted themselves only to what they felt they might do best. They were all highly prolific, but did not do everything. This course may seem to be attempting everything, and in the interests of breadth and completeness no apology need be made for it. But it is recognised that students will develop – or may already have – their own special

interest. For this reason, the OCA has developed a Level 3 Composing Music course during which individual special interests are given the opportunity to take off. Composing for choirs, folk groups, guitar, jazz orchestras or community opera groups are just a few of the areas to which a composer may wish to devote time exclusively, and this will be possible. But to get there, it is necessary for any composer to have had the opportunity to explore techniques, idioms and styles over the broadest field, so that their eventual choices are made from experience (however brief) rather than from the disadvantageous position of being unaware of how processes work or what performers can do. This is what makes the Level 2 course a vital precursor to any further more ambitious and perhaps professional work, providing a beneficial foundation from which confidence can flourish.

## **Course outcomes**

Upon completion of Composing Music 2 you will be able to:

- Manipulate harmonic progressions to suite your own taste;
- compose accompaniments for songs and appreciate the requirements of word-setting;
- write more confidently for string and brass instruments;
- experience working within some 20<sup>th</sup> century styles, and composing for specific commercial and media needs.

# Project and Assignment Plan

## 1: Harmony with words

Project 1: Colouring harmony	10
Project 2: Reviving skeletons	10
Project 3: Accompaniments	10
Project 4: Word setting	10
<b>Assignment 1: A solo song with piano accompaniment</b>	<b>25</b>

## 2: Voices together

Project 5: Amen	10
Project 6: A vocal jingle	10
Project 7: Percussive voices	10
<b>Assignment 2: A madrigal for mixed unaccompanied voices</b>	<b>30</b>

## 3: Adding strings

Project 8: A string duet	10
Project 9: A guitar prelude	10
Project 10: The string quartet	10
<b>Assignment 3: A little serenade for strings</b>	<b>30</b>

## 4: Expanding the band

Project 11: A wind quintet	10
Project 12: Brass fanfares	10
<b>Assignment 4: A radio or TV 'signature' tune</b>	<b>35</b>

## 5: An exploratory finale

Project 13: Arranging a dance band	15
Project 14: Expanding harmony	15
Project 15: A serial piece	15
Project 16: A little minimalism	15
<b>Assignment 5: An adventurous pastiche</b>	<b>35</b>

Listening and Reading 65

**TOTAL TIME 400**

# 1: Harmony with words

## Introductory note

As with the Level 1 course, it is necessary to make sure you are familiar with all the music theory which underpins each section.

References in Level 2 are to **The AB Guide to Music Theory – Part 2** by Eric Taylor. Part 2 is a continuation from Part 1, beginning with Chapter 14.

It is assumed that you became quite familiar with Part 1 of this AB Guide – or an equivalent theoretical guide of your own choice - as you progressed through Level 1 of the Composing Music course.

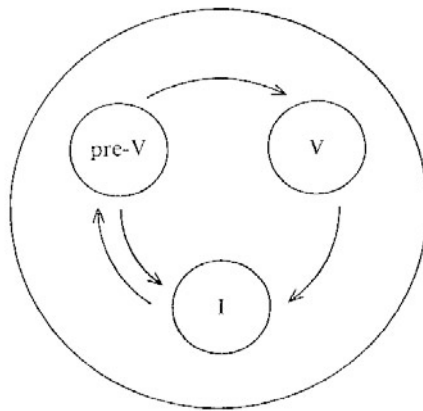
It should be noted that the AB Guide is designed to provide all the theoretical information needed for instrumental and vocal examinations. Part 1 covers grades 1 to 5 of those examinations; Part 2 takes the student from Grades 6 to the final 8, and prepares for the instrumental Diploma examination that follows. It is an essential and invaluable guide for *performers*. Its information is also very important as a support to this Composing Music course. Without a familiarity with the practical issues discussed by Eric Taylor in Part 2, it may be difficult for you to follow the progress of this course with the full degree of understanding to provide the greatest benefit to you. Because this OCA course is about *Composing*, you should read a guide to the theory of music to keep you as well informed as are the musicians who have been well trained to *play* your music!

If you are using Eric Taylor's excellent Guide, check your familiarity with the content of Chapters **15: Non-harmony notes**; **16: More about tonal harmony** and **17: Chromatic chords** before embarking upon the first group of projects. Do not however neglect using Part 1 of the AB Guide to refresh your memory on earlier practicalities.

## More about harmony in circles

Level 1 ended with the observation that the fundamental progress of more traditional harmonic events tended to move in circles. Although the composer, being a free spirit, may not wish to be so tied to the well travelled paths, it is a distinct advantage to be aware of them.

Most listeners will be familiar with the expected course of harmonic progressions, even if they are not technically equipped to explain their recognition of it. They may not even be interested in the explanation. That is their privilege. It is the composer who should know how to plot the route. The listener should be able to follow with delight, feeling confident that the composer's invention sounds right – even if it takes a little time to warm to a fresh musical personality.



Here is a brief recap of the explanation accompanying the above chord progression circle which was given in Level 1:

The **pre-V** chords are most frequently **IV** (the triad built on the 4<sup>th</sup> scale degree) or **II** (that on the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree), less often **III** – though effective used sparingly.

These chords lead to **V** which is frequently fortified with a 7<sup>th</sup> (**V<sup>7</sup>**), 9<sup>th</sup> (**V<sup>9</sup>**),

11<sup>th</sup> (**V**<sup>11</sup>) or 13<sup>th</sup> (**V**<sup>13</sup>), all of which serve the dominant function. A triad built on the 7<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale (**VII**) is, in fact the upper three notes of the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> – so it too might just qualify for membership of the **V** group.

Chord **V** then wants to move to **I** - although **VI** can easily substitute for **I**. This is a useful substitution as it serves to 'interrupt' or delay the cyclic movement of the chords which is then obliged to continue around the circle, entering again the **pre-V** group to join again the harmonic roundabout.

**VI**<sup>7</sup> is occasionally used to replace (or embellish) **I** at the end of a piece – in 1<sup>st</sup> inversion it is the jazzy 'added 6<sup>th</sup>' chord.

The circular diagram shows a 'backward' flow from one of the **pre-V** group; when it is felt appropriate, chord **IV** can move directly back to **I**, forming a Plagal cadence - often understandably called the *Amen* cadence – a more sedate but just as final a resting place at the end of a piece.

This was the basis of the final Assignment of Level 1.

We may now subject this resource of chords to some colourful experiments.

If we build triads on each degree of the diatonic major scale using only the notes of that scale, there will be three major triads, three minor, and one diminished. The minor triads can all be changed to major by raising their 3<sup>rds</sup> a semitone. This note might then take on the role of a 'leading note' and want to rise a further semitone to become the root of the next chord. If a 7<sup>th</sup> has been added to the triad, then the function is like that of a 'dominant' 7<sup>th</sup>, but as it is not in the home key it would be called a 'secondary' 7<sup>th</sup>. The home key's dominant 7<sup>th</sup> does not have to have its authority undermined – unless the composer intends to use the secondary 7<sup>th</sup> as a means of subverting that authority! These alterations can be very colourful.

### Ex. 1

basic outline I IV II V VI II V I III IV II V I

The major triads I, IV and V can all be given minor 3<sup>rds</sup>. Perhaps IV is the most successfully adaptable to minor (in major keys) and major (in minor keys).

Altering I is a challenge to the home key itself, and the flattened 3<sup>rd</sup> of V takes away its dominance and might be used to move the key, maybe to IV as a new home key – stronger if adding the new dominant below the triad.

And remember the usefulness of first inversions of the chords to provide a wider choice of bass notes.

### Ex. 2

Allegretto

A 7<sup>th</sup> placed above any of the triads can be either *minor* (the combination of major triad and minor 7<sup>th</sup> is the 'dominant' formula), or *major* which is an attractive jazzy colour. Using successions of 7<sup>ths</sup> is attractive, but the challenge is to make them sound fresh. This device (as in Ex. 3) can be overused!

### Ex. 3

Moderato con moto

## Project 1: Colouring harmony

Compose a group of four contrasting short episodes that explore colourful ways of moving around the circle of **pre-V, V** and **I** chords. Note that many of the chromatically altered notes move only a short distance to their next resting place.

'Conjunct motion' of the lines is preferable when richer chromatic movement is employed.

The movement of melodic lines, whether prominently above the texture or discreetly hidden within it, is described as being either in *similar* or *contrary motion*. It is often very effective to create a contrary motion, especially between a bass line and the rest of the voices. The movement of notes step by step in a melody is *conjunct motion*; leaping around between notes is *disjunct motion*. *Parallel motion* is when two or more parts keep the same intervals between them and move together.

Another way of exploring harmony is to borrow the 'skeleton' of another composer's work. Reducing a short piece you know well (or one you would like to know better) to its basic harmonic framework is in itself a discovery that should prove a useful demonstration of how harmony has been used in the hands of an imaginative composer. It may be that the harmony is quite ingenious; it may also be that the underlying framework is surprisingly simple, but has been used to underpin a series of very inventive and appealing melodic or contrapuntal ideas.

For instance, this simple little minuet from Bach's *Anna Magdalena Notebook*:

### Ex. 4

Moderato



can be reduced to this harmonic 'skeleton':

Ex. 5



With a change of costume and hair-style (tempo, key and time-signature) and some gentle cosmetic uplift to update its personality, a quite different little piano piece could emerge:

Ex. 6



The inspired extemporizations on Bach by Jacques Loussier and more recently the clever elaborations of music by Purcell, Grieg, Fauré and Ravel by the David Rees-Williams Trio are well worth hearing in this context.

As a musical youth unable to afford lessons, Elgar taught himself most from the books in his father's music shop. In order to learn about classical symphonic form, he reduced the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No 40 in G minor to a harmonic outline and built from it his own his own symphonic movement. Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* deliberately follows the classical format quite strictly, although he is being more adventurous harmonically than any of his models.