

Creative Warm Ups

for Instrumental Ensembles

Get your students improvising & composing!

Alexander Koops, Azusa Pacific University
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CASMEC, Fresno, CA

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1c9EW2DZNR3GS0vcq2Tk9hlzhVwdC6H314prBAczuL_4/edit?usp=sharing

Overview

- short warm-up exercises for instrumental ensembles that get students improvising and composing without taking up excessive rehearsal time.
- conducted improvisations that will be interactive and participatory,
- improvised meditation exercise
- composing using animal charades
- rhythm composing games for beginners through advanced students.
- Resources

Improvised conducted warm up

Conductor visual shows:

- hands up high, students play “high” pitches, hands low = low pitches
- point at individuals or groups -- that means, those people should play
- Give solos, duets, trios, etc
- Give visual cut offs and entrances
- Gestures for pulsating notes, ostinatos, jabs, swells, decrescendos, etc.

- Use left arm/hand for the left side of the ensemble and right arm/hand for the right side to provide exciting mixes, blends and dialogues.
- Alternate free time with steady rhythm
- Do the wave, where you point to one side and then swing your arm around to cover the whole band
- Get student conductors! They love it!



Tuning Meditation

Four Meditations for Orchestra by Pauline Oliveros, Mvt. II.

Instructions:

Begin by playing a pitch that you hear in your imagination. After contributing your pitch, listen for another player's pitch and tune in unison to the pitch as exactly as possible. Listen again and play a pitch that no one else is playing. The duration of pitches is determined by the duration of a comfortable breath or bow. The dynamic level is soft throughout the piece. Brass players use mutes.

Continue by alternating between the three options described above.

Tuning Meditation continued

Instructions:

- playing a new pitch of your own that no one else is playing
- just listening
- tuning in unison to the pitch of another player.
- Introduce new pitches at will and tune to as many different players as are present. Although the dynamic level is soft make your tones available to others.
- Play warmly with variations in tone quality.

Four Meditations for Orchestra by Pauline Oliveros, Mvt. II.

Basic Call and Response; One bar improv

Sound to Sight teaching

Think of building “words” or patterns by ear. Then vary the words/patterns

DMSMD--DMLMD

SMSLS -- S L S M S

DL,DMD etc.

Schleuter Sound Teaching; Feldman Instrumental Methods -great chapters on this

Tips (from Do It! P. 29, 38)

A: Keep it simple

B: Keep everyone involved

C. Allow for self-selection of tasks

D. Avoid common creativity killers (expressions of approval or disapproval, surveillance, evaluation, reward systems, and competition)

Urban Groove-John McAllister

- “*Urban Groove* is a fantastic way to get young (or even mature) musicians to get to be creative within a full band setting. I made this tune up on the fly with a group of students specifically to have "looped" music that we could play at a pep rally. I'm a firm believer of the band playing tunes and NOT just having music played on the loudspeaker. Live music is so much better and I'm completely biased”
- “If you have fun with this, kids will absolutely love it. I've never had a group that didn't go crazy the first few times we did this!”

[Download File](#)

[Note: this totally works with marching band too. You can use it as a "time filler" that can be played on a loop and end right before the snap!](#)

Urban_groove.pdf <https://www.johnmcallistermusic.com/band-games.html>

Flute

Urban Groove

John McAllister

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

1

2

3

4

5

<https://www.johnmcallistermusic.com/band-games.html>

- 1) The first two measures are the d minor scale that kids can improv on
- 2) Teach the rhythm for Rehearsal Mark 1, as this should be the backbone rhythm
- 3) Rehearsal Mark 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 all fit all the time
- 4) The percussionists can play the rhythms printed, but this is a chance to improv
- 5) Double side the copies with blank staff paper on the back to write down melodies!

Animal Charades part I

As students walk in the room, have them count off by 5's (or another number, depending on how big your ensemble is and how large you want each group to be).

The 5 random groups that have just been created have to use their instruments and create an animal music composition in 5 minutes to perform for the rest of the class.

Improvisation is encouraged! The rest of the class will guess what the animal is after each performance.

Animal Charades part II

How to introduce this warm-up game: There are so many animal pieces out there by professional composers, and students and teacher alike enjoy creating animal compositions! This lesson owes credit to Michael Daugherty and “Alligator Alley” (Bandquest). You can download the free curriculum from Bandquest and it includes the animal composition lesson plans!

Think about how you’d like to help the listener imagine your animal. Sometimes the musical sounds used by composers try to copy the actual sound the animal makes, like a whip mimicking the sound of the alligator jaws snapping together. Other times, musical sounds are less literal, and they are meant to refer to a characteristic of the animal, but not necessarily try to copy an actual sound the animal makes.

Animal Charades part III

For instance, the tempo of the music may refer to the speed that the animal moves. The tonality of the music may sound dark and sinister to represent a predatory animal stalking its prey. The instrumentation may refer to an event in the animal's life, such as a battery of percussion violently depicting animals fighting with one another.

Animal Charades part IV

You will need to decide whether you want to literally recreate the animal's sounds using instruments, refer to the animal's characteristic in more abstract ways, or both. Questions you should consider include:

- How fast or slow does the animal move?
- Does it run, crawl, hop, slither, fly, etc.?
- What are its physical characteristics? How does it look?
- Is it aggressive, passive, friendly, or dangerous?
- Does it make any distinctive noises?
- Does it tend to make high pitched or low pitched noises?
- Does it travel in groups or by itself?
- How might any of these things or other things you discover about your chosen animal translate to musical sounds?

Bill Cahn Creative Music Making

p. 3: “”over time it became apparent to us that the state of mind that existed in our improvisations could be beneficially transferred to making music in other contexts, notably in symphonic music and composed chamber music. Such a state of mind has the following characteristics:

- A deeper knowledge of the instruments and their sound-making possibilities
- A deeper level of listening—to one’s self and to other ensemble members—focusing on an acute awareness of the sounds being made
- A more developed intuitive sense in making appropriate musical responses
- An increased ability to embrace the sounds produced by others
- An increased confidence in musical expression and risk taking

Bill Cahn Nexus Percussion-free improv

p. 5; p. 7... Creative music making

the response to listening to the recorded improvisation was “gratifying in the extreme”.

Discuss: What did you think as you were listening to the playback?

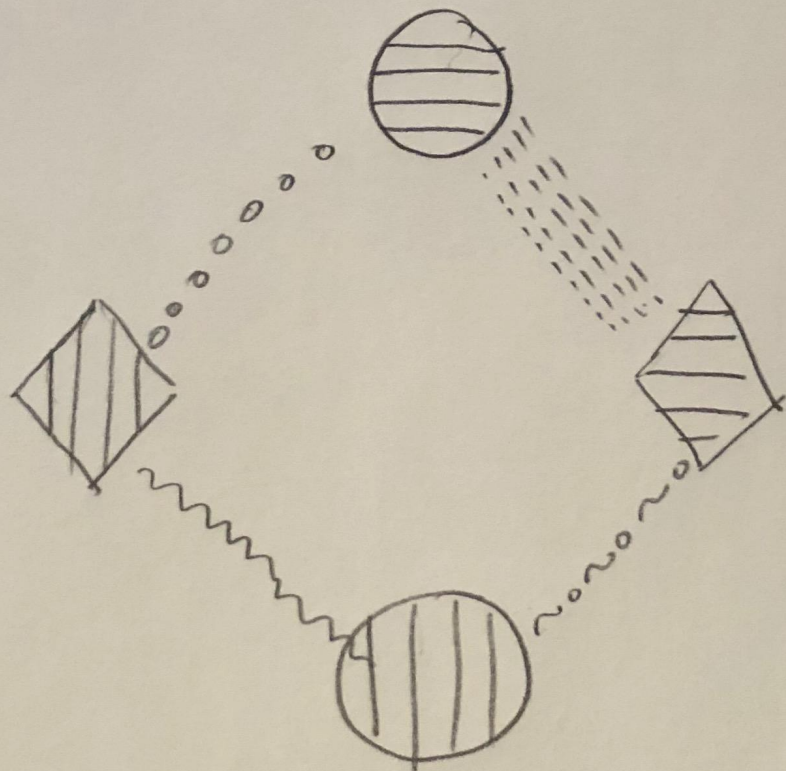
- What did you think about when you were improvising?

- Did you notice anything in the playback that you didn't hear while you were playing? Who was leading in the first part of the piece?
- “Why do I want to make music?”
- What is it about making music that I really like?
- What can I do to further develop the things I really like??

Dan Deutch

Perform the following piece

(from



Bill Connor

The responsibility to enthuse, invigorate, coerce, encourage, lead, inspire, coach, fire up, guide, journey with, teach, etc etc etc lies with the Musical Director, leader, conductor, teacher, student, dinner lady, sir, miss, how so ever you are defined standing at the head pulling focus on those before you on the floor.

So get the vibe right, you, the chap or chapess in front is the catalyst, motivator, the mover shaker and stirrer to all in front of you so make it count and regardless of what the words say make sure the body says the same thing.

Bill Connor

If kids have fun they will remember the outcome of that activity...if they have fun with something they have devised or contributed themselves they will remember the outcome of that activity AND the sense of pride and achievement that will boost their self-esteem, focus and creativity....(remember the first time YOU managed to hold a note....get a rhythm right...have someone say to you "that was great!")...think in the kids zone....don't drag them into the adult domain before they're ready...**YOU get back into the kid's domain and devise/communicate from there.** Please get rid of the word "mistake", no-one sets out to make a mistake but accidents happen so call it what it is, an accident but let them happen and don't stop because of accidents along the way.

Bill Connor

Try a different layout/placement/seating arrangement for the warm up/creative time

...If there's room in the rehearsal room to leave the stands and seats in their usual place and get everyone in a large circle facing each other that is best.

Even if there isn't room for that get the players used to being responsible for their own stand and chair so the change from ensemble position to warm up/creative position becomes the thing that is "normal", expected, usual.

Bill Connor

Avoid the tendency to concentrate on pieces at the expense of:

the exploration of sound, instrumental technique, tuning, breathing,

holistic awareness and the fundamental for any wind instrument ...all of which are applied in playing pieces.....

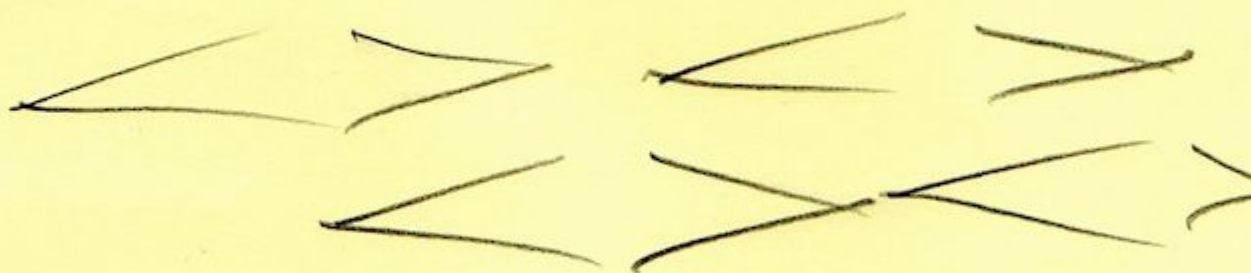
Bill Connor - Warmups/departure points

A Soft wind blows (or "Hot Air n Scuttlebugs")

Wind for breathing - devise something comical for the kids.....with breath sounds first then add ooo's then aaaaaah's then dooo's.....etc.....make sure they count as they go along....or maybe to a metronome at crotchet 60....

Bill Connor "Windy Bag"

(Breath of fresh Air)



add pitches after breathing

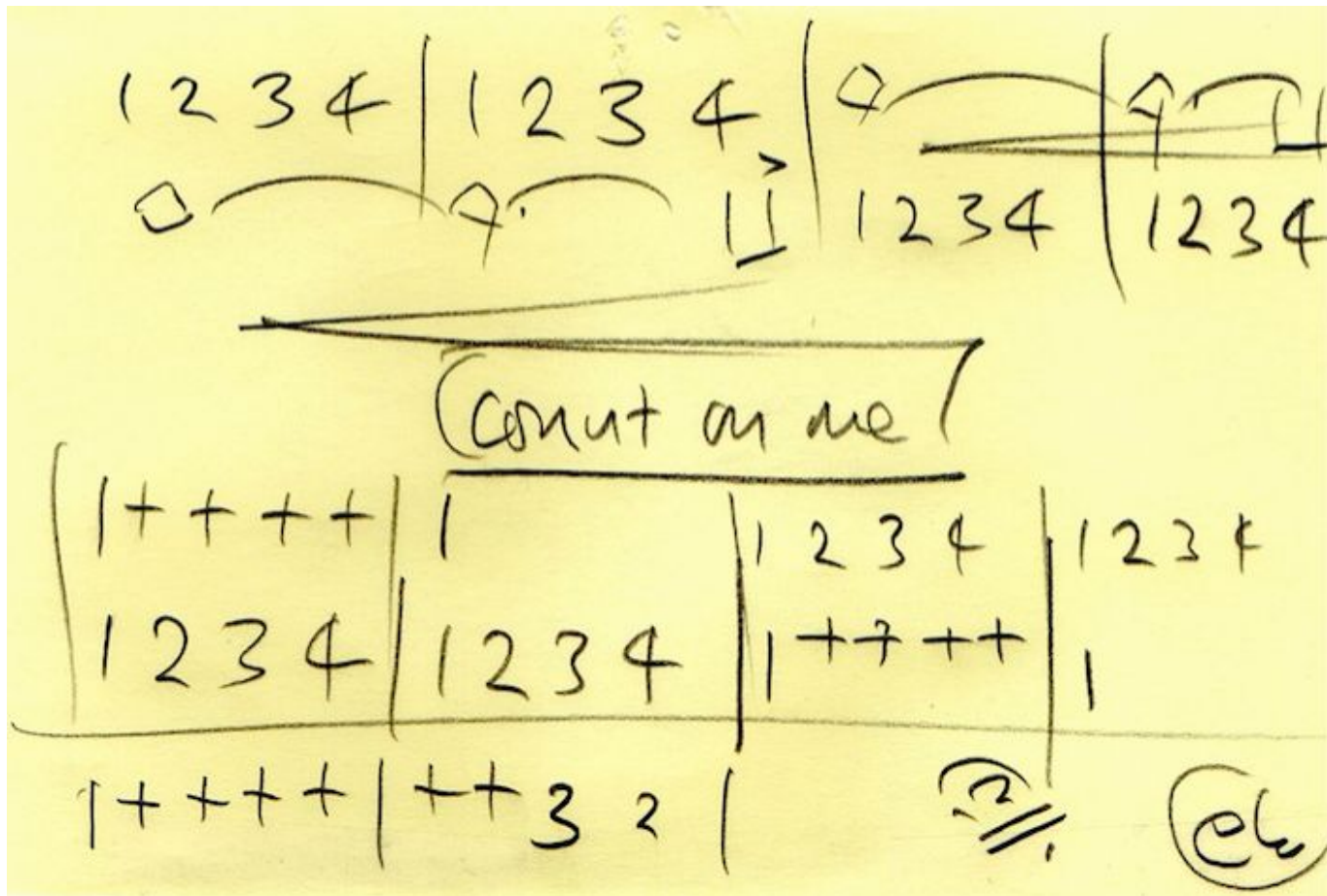
Bill Connor “Count on Me”

Counting out loud to include off-beat “and and and and” cross lining counts with held cresc chords so kids learn to count and play sustains against the counting.....

1 2 3 4, 1+ + + +, 1 2 3 4 etc....also 1 2 3, 1+ + +, 1 etc....adapt to include 1+ + + +, + 2 - - -,
and 1 + + + +, + + 3 - , and 1+ + + +, + + +4, etc etc.....

important there’s time to realign where the bar line is through call and answer of the two bar phrases always having a groups counting 1 2 3 4 or whatever the chosen meter...

Bill Connor "Windy Bag"



Bill Connor “Abandon Ship!”

.....all choose a very quiet note set it going....add waves with notes above and below the first note legato/one breath don't tongue the different notes.....keep veeeeery ppp.....perc enters when they wish....wash the sounds away rise with the cresc mind the rocks!!..add tam-tam/cymbals smash with the rocks you all go under....glugglugglugglug...bubbles of air rising everything drifting away to suspended silence.....OR.....you grab on the rocks (original notes in ostinato and get saved!....tarantaraaaaaaaaaa....major triad!!

Bill Connor Ship Wreck (or build off Abandon Ship?!)

Someone plays a pitch....everyone else finds and holds that pitch...a thump on a drum....everyone suddenly pianissimo in anticipation....percussion build a wave of sound...all slow cresc....vocalise while playing....when perc hit the loudest point with a sfz cut off (you lead)...Tutti tumbles into the sound wave!....this can be extended with: what's it like under the water?....or you're on the rocks with the waves battering from all sides.....eventually you get to the warm sandy beach.....exhausted...but safe...and warm....nice soft and warm sounds.?.....other stories?...outcomes?....get the kids to devise.

Bill Connor

“build em up...” “Chase ‘em Down”

“build ‘em up...”....choose a key....discuss what the bass note is...then the 8ve...then the 5th...then the 4th...then the 3rd, minor 3rd, 2nd, minor 2nd conductor indicates from lowest pitched instrument to highest...

“Chase ‘em Down”....choose a scale...someone sets a pulse going...the snare drummer waits a while then when he/she’s ready wham!....you all speed up on the same pitch faster and faster then with cymbals and other perc joining in wham blam ssssss the chase is on who tongues the fastest and highest up the scale and down again!.....

Bill Connor Scale The Cliff

“We’re going to scale the CLIFF....can’t see the top....maybe the mist hangs over the lip up there....let’s take a look...see how high we can climb...when you reach as far as you can stay there as long as you can you might be rescued before letting go into free-fall...so who’s brave enough to go first?....ok great...everyone else, grab the rope (the start note played by the first climb hero) you’re gonna hold that rope in case he/she lets go....you can choose a known route up...or...find your own”

Bill Connor Scale The Cliff

....get the person who's volunteered to go first to set the start note with everyone else holds the start note (the rope) but not to hold it too hard or the first climber will be lost (drowned out...)....as the climb starts....indicate next climber....then the next...then another....keep adding more and more faster and faster....the "known route" can be any scale....the "find your own" can be any sequence of pitches....the rope can be added to or changed or it might break but there will come a point when no-one is left to hold it...so everyone might fall!...add another scale...maybe two ropes one thicker (8ve lower) or thinner (8ve higher) than the main one.....how many routes (scales) can you find....is it an easy route or a difficult one?

Bill Connor Scale The Cliff

once one climb has ended with all having descended try some partnered routes..(section leaders leading their group for pitch and tempo)...there are many variants that can be tried....get the kids to work out their own climb teams and routes but every now and then they have to come back down to hold the rope for the next climb....

Perc can be the weather centre....sunny
climb...blizzard....storm....rain....lightening...high winds etc

Bill Connor Snakes, Ladders Hippos and Posers

- 1) Choose a scale....scale up....slither and gliss down... gliss up....scale down..
- 2) ..brass choose a start pitch....gliss up the natural harmonics hold highest attainable pitch.....theeeeen.....all keyed instruments scale down from the high note all soli fast as they can!...
- 3) ...brass mutes on....hold muted start note....keyed instruments tip toe up two 8vs ppp...hold the top note (maybe on a trill in anticipation?)...brass gliss up with cresc as high and as loud as they can as they can....knock the others down...all slither, gliss, fall down.....

Bill Connor Snakes, Ladders Hippos and Posers

- 4) Variations on the above.... break the ladder heavy steps, quick light steps, bouncy ladder steps with brass holding each of the steps f – p.....
- 5) Winds tip toe up....hold the top note....Here come the HIPPOS!....tmbs/tubas/bass instruments as heavy and as vast as poss bustle up the heavy duty iron ladder....everyone else scatters out of the way in any way they can!
- 6) “we’re better than you” team scalers....get into several teams (maybe by instrument family?)... each choose a scale....then in turns see how many ways you can get up and down again...fast, slow, bouncy, hustle, posh, street wise, ruffians, royalty, snobs, intellectuals etc etc etc

Bill Connor Aliens

Any note...sharp and crisp....silence in between....you lead they watch....eachtime they play they have to choose another note....tutti at first.....ppp to fff in sustained chords (Aliens are coming)

Start long cresc and dim...then accel over a few minutes leading into: the highest squeakiest nasty noises they can make (the Aliens have arrived).....maybe the Aliens go away again...get the kids to decide...what happens when the Aliens arrive?...gte them to tell their fellow band members what to do....each person that comes up with idea has to lead that idea.

Bill Connor Missing Person

Get an ostinato going; any pitches but crisp precise pulse and rhythm....now divide a silence but the pulse keeps going internally....at first get them to count out loud....hold up fingers for how long the silence lasts....interrupt the silence with a downbeat...only one...then change your fingers held..????

Bill Connor Snaps in the Dark!

Tutti eyes closed...name a person...finger snap: that person plays a pitch...finger snap: everyone else hums that pitch...finger snap: then find that pitch on their instrument...cresc til breath runs out then audible breathing-in dimin.....finger snap....all stop.....choose someone else to stand and lead.....

Tutti eyes closed...name a person...that person plays a pitch...everyone else hums that pitch...then find that pitch on their instrument...

Bill Connor-Strings

Face Off: Face each other try to out bow....choose the leader everyone has to follow the bow movements whatever they are....smooth, fast, irregular, heavy, soft, tip of the bow, heel, sul pont, sul tasto, behind the bridge!....erratic ready or not

Take Off!....continual gliss up the G string to D then D string to A then A string to E then E string toooooo...keep going as high as you can into the stratosphere...once in the stratosphere add trem....

Bill Connor-Strings “Creepy!”

....tip toe pizz’s....all soli....like a crowd rushing across the floor trying to be QUIET....end on an upward pizz gliss...got to open the HUGE heavy door....lots of weight heel of bow bow drag...the door opens...(silence!)...half the group = open E string trem sul pont...other half = Spiders scutter across the floor (light touches on the strings – very light fast bows...lots of glissandi....soft as possible on the string...bow with barely any weight.....sul pont trem to join the open E trem... (silence!)...then sudden fff attack low on the G string any notes but NOT the open string...dimin with everyone glissing down to the open G string ppp...

then short stabs on the G string...(how many?) get the kids to plot where they go from there...yoho.....

Bill Connor-Strings “Bubble Bee”

Hum a note....try to find it....move the played note but keep the hummed note.....change the hum to the new note.....always glide between notes....(this is for bow control....early tremelo effects.....)

with the tip of the bow on the string and your arm at it's fullest extension, wobble your wrist to get a trem...always very light sounds (bow weight) then start again humming another note, try to find it etc....changing all the time.....

Resources for following up . . . improvisation & composition

[Cahn, William. \(2005\) Creative Music Making. Routeledge](#)

Hicky, M. (2012) *Music Outside the Lines: Ideas for Composing in K-12 Music Classrooms*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hickey, M. (. (1997). *Teaching ensembles to compose and improvise*. Music Educators Journal, 83(6), 17-21.

Hickey, M., Koops, A., Randles, C., Stringham, D. A., Thornton, L., Webster, P. R., (2013). *Musicianship: Composing in band and orchestra*. Chicago, IL: GIA.

Kaschub, M., & Smith, J. (2009). *Minds on Music: Composition for Creative and Critical Thinking*. Co-published by MENC and Roman & Littlefield

Rhythm Improv & Composing Games

Rhythm Challenge: Take a piece you are performing in 4/4 time. Improvise the rhythm or rhythm and melody to fit into $\frac{3}{4}$ or vice a versa.

“Telephone” for smaller groups: 1 student solo improvises a 2 or 3 bar rhythm and passes it... Then next person tries to copy it, but either purposefully or by mistake changes it. Go round the circle and see how the rhythm adapts.

Additive: start with a 2 or 3 note rhythm. Each person repeats the previous rhythm plus adds a tiny bit

Drum circle: start a groovy rhythm ostinato, students take turns to stand up and solo improvise

Rhythm Improv & Composing Games

Bonus outside of class:

Rhythm Challenge:

Improvise a short challenging one to two measure rhythm and record it, clapping or playing.

Swap with a classmate and attempt to write down your classmates rhythm.

