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London

RCM Sparks Composition Course: Guide to Writing a Duo Piece

RCM Sparks is the Royal College of Music's learning and participation programme.
To find out more and get involved visit www.rcm.ac.uk/sparks

This pack is a guide to writing a duo piece.

The basics

Think carefully about instrumentation before you begin. How do the chosen instruments work together?

Also think carefully about your planned duration before you begin.

Inspiration

What is your piece about?

You need ONE strong idea: a story, a picture, a place, a colour, a feeling, a temperature, a poem, an event, or something personal....

Think about the sound of the instruments. Are there particular qualities you want to explore?

Basic raw materials

Notes and rhythm are your basic raw materials.

Choose a few notes (a mode) or a scale to start with. Play with these notes until you find a combination and order you are happy with. See what this sounds like with the instruments in unison. And then apart by beginning the second instrument one or two beats later.

Independently of your notes, create a short rhythm. (This doesn't need to have a pitch or can be on one note).

Now you have notes and a rhythm you can try to put them together. How do your notes sound with rhythm? Try lots of versions, writing the best ones down. Perhaps each instrument has a different rhythm, or they each play one followed by another.

You can try turning the notes and rhythm(s) upside down and back to front, or doubling or halving the note lengths of the rhythm. Since you are writing for two instruments, you can try two of these things mixed together.

Structure

Once you've got your idea, your notes and rhythm(s) to use for your piece you should think about the bigger picture. How do they fit together to form a piece?

Grab a piece of paper and some colours and draw your piece like a graphic score. This can help to clarify things. Drawing a time-line can also help structure your piece... .

Polish

Add the finishing touches.

Mood

Tempo

Articulation

Dynamics

Phrasing

(Reference the Building Blocks resource pack)