



Lesson: Odysseus Composition Project 2

OVERVIEW

Students use characters or events from a story to compose an original musical composition using traditional and aleatoric techniques.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will:

1. Consider how musical sounds may embody the characteristics of events or characters.
2. Identify and apply aleatoric techniques.
3. Use characters and/or events of a story to inspire an original composition.
4. Create a musical score that includes all the traditional conventions (time signature, expression markings, etc.) and aleatoric techniques.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

1. Assignment Handout and worksheet.
2. A familiar or original story.
3. Manuscript paper or access to a computer notation program.
4. Aleatoric Handout (optional).

PROCESS

Students will:

1. Read the program notes provided by composer Dana Wilson, then listen to a recording of the piece and compare the information in the program notes with the musical references he cites.
2. Complete Odysseus Composition Project 1 as a prerequisite.
3. Using the story, characters or events, and melodies created in Odysseus Composition Project 1 as the basis for the piece, map out an original composition for at least four instruments that musically represents a portion of the selected story.
4. Combine traditional musical notation with aleatoric techniques to create the original composition.

5. Optional: To provide more background on aleatoric music, read a handout that is provided with more in-depth information.
6. Create a score and parts for the composition using staff paper or computer music notation software.
7. Rehearse and perform or record the piece.

Odysseus Composition Project 2 Rubric

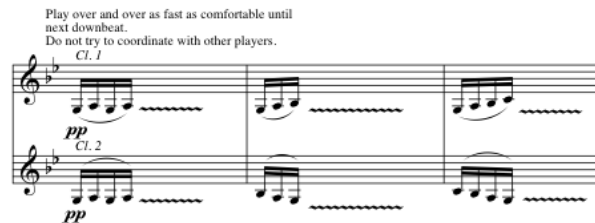
CATEGORY	3	2	1	R - Redo
Project Preparation & Organization	Story and characters or events are clearly mapped out. There is a logical relationship between the characters or events, descriptions of the sections of the piece, and summaries of musical interpretation.	Story and characters or events are mapped out, but some details are not clear. There is a logical relationship between some of the characters or events, descriptions of the sections of the piece, and summaries of musical interpretation.	The planning for the creation of the composition is unclear, and it is difficult to determine the composer's intentions.	No evidence of understanding of the purpose or criteria for this project.
Aleatoric Techniques	The composer effectively included aleatoric techniques that provided a key or clear directions to the performers. The composition was very effective in realizing the intentions that were mapped out on the planning sheet.	The composer included aleatoric techniques that mostly provided a key or clear directions to the performers, although some needed further explanation. The composition was mostly effective in realizing the intentions that were mapped out on the planning sheet.	Although a sincere attempt was made, the key or directions from the composer about the aleatoric techniques included in the piece were too vague to be helpful.	No aleatoric techniques were included in the piece.
Music Notation	The score and parts include key signature, time signature, appropriate clefs, correct number of beats, expressive markings, and all critical musical information.	The score and parts mostly include key signature, time signature, appropriate clefs, correct number of beats, expressive markings, and all critical musical information, but with three or less errors.	The score and parts mostly include key signature, time signature, appropriate clefs, correct number of beats, expressive markings, and all critical musical information, but with four or more errors.	There are numerous notation errors.
Musical Effect	The piece was balanced, cohesive, and unified. Musical ideas were fully developed. Instrumentation was thoughtful and instrumental parts were idiomatically appropriate. The story was musically well represented.	The piece was mostly balanced, cohesive, and unified, but with some issues. Musical ideas were not always fully developed or Instrumentation had some problems. The story was musically represented, but sometimes the relationship between story and music wasn't apparent.	The piece seem incomplete or more concerned with the mechanics of musical notation than musically reflecting the characters or events of the story.	No evidence of understanding of the purpose or criteria for this project.
Assignment Criteria	All components of the assignment - mapped out plan, use of at least 4 instruments, full score and parts, and recording or live performance - are completed.	All but one component of the assignment completed.	Two components of the assignment not completed.	Assignment not completed.

ASSIGNMENT

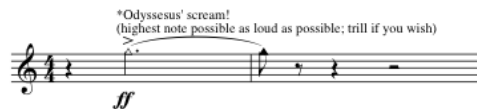
ODYSSEUS COMPOSITION PROJECT 2

Composer Dana Wilson used some non-traditional techniques to create some unusual musical effects in *Odysseus and the Sirens*. These non-traditional techniques are called **aleatoric** music. In aleatoric music, some element of what is performed is left to chance and/or the decision of what sounds to play are determined by the performer. Often some sort of directions or original type of notation that doesn't always necessarily indicate specific pitches or rhythms replace traditional musical notation. Sometimes geometric shapes, alternative noteheads, or text providing directions to the performers are used.

Wilson uses two different aleatoric techniques. First, he specifies some pitches followed by a wavy line and directs the performers to play those pitches at random speeds to create a murmuring effect that represents the wind-song of the Sirens.



He later uses a geometric notehead and instructs the performers to play a random high note (possibly trilling it in the upper woodwinds) as loud as possible to represent Odysseus' scream.



For this project, you will use the story and melodies from *Odysseus Composition Project I* as the inspiration for original a complete original piece. You will map out how the story and music will progress, and then you will use both traditional notation and aleatoric music to create your original composition. To make the project manageable, you don't have to use an entire story. Dana Wilson only used one portion from *The Odyssey* – the part where Odysseus encounters the sirens. Here are the steps:

1. Read the program notes provided by composer Dana Wilson, then listen to a recording of the piece and compare the information in the program notes with the musical references he cites.
2. Complete *Odysseus Composition Project 1* as a prerequisite.
3. Using the story, characters or events, and melodies created in *Odysseus Composition Project 1* as the basis for the piece, map out an original composition **for at least four instruments** that musically represents

a portion of the selected story. There is no specific length required for the piece, but it has to be long enough to sufficiently tell the portion of the story you have chosen.

Here is an example of how you may map out the story, choice of instruments, and composition:

Title: Jack and the Beanstalk: Jack in the Giant's Home			
Instruments: flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, French horn, various percussion instruments			
Story: Jack opens the door and tiptoes into the giant's home.	He sees the goose that lays the golden eggs and sneaks up on it.	He grabs the goose, but it panics and starts making loud squawking sounds. Goose thrashes around tipping over things while Jack hangs on.	Jack hears the stomping of the giant coming from the other room to see why the goose is squawking, so runs out the door with the goose with the giant in pursuit.
Description of scene: Squeak of door. Tiptoe, pause, tiptoe, pause, etc. – Sinister, on edge, quiet	Pace of tiptoeing gets quicker and louder and no more pauses and turns into running. Increased tension, adrenaline, accelerated pace.	Explosive sound as Jack grabs the goose and loud panicked squawking begins. Startled, panic, struggle, fear, determination.	Sound of huge feet of giant, gradually getting faster. Heavy, loud, menacing, danger. Jack running. Agitated, scrambling. Goose still squawking.
Description of music: Jack theme from Project I in solo flute. Then ratchet – medium speed, then eventually slower – door opening. Staccato eighth notes in bass. cl., then pause with fermata, repeat a few times – tiptoeing and looking around	Accelerando and cl. added in a tense harmony with bs. cl.	Explosion of percussion sounds – cym. crash, random drum and accessory percussion sounds of things tipping over represented with geometric shapes (aleatoric music). French horn makes random horn rips (goose squawking) represented with alternative noteheads.	Jack running – eighth notes to 16 th notes to running scales in fl. & cl. Bs. cl. repeats staccato eighth notes on same pitch (ostinato) like an engine running. Bass drum with medium hard mallets starts slow repeated notes that gradually get faster, but out of sync with tempo of other instruments – represented with squiggly line.

4. Once your plan has been mapped out, combine traditional musical notation with aleatoric techniques to create the original composition.
5. Create a score and parts for the composition using staff paper or computer music notation software.
6. Rehearse and perform or record the piece.



ALEATORIC MUSIC AND NONTRADITIONAL MUSICAL NOTATION

Composers of the 20th and 21st centuries have dramatically stretched notions of what can be considered to be musical sounds. They add sounds from unusual sources to their pieces or use traditional instruments in unusual ways. They also do not feel bound to use the 12 semitones traditionally contained within an octave. With the addition of new approaches to creating music comes the need to notate the desired musical effects.

We often think of a composer as being the sole creator of a musical composition. In the 20th century, some composers moved in the direction from musicians being the performers of the pieces that the composer created to the musicians, and even the environment where the performance takes place, to be the co-creator of the piece. The performers have an influence in what sounds ultimately become a part of the piece and every performance is different. **Aleatoric music** is music where some element of what is performed is left to chance and/or the decision of what sounds to play are determined by the performer, often with some sort of directions or original type of notation that doesn't necessarily specify specific pitches or rhythms.

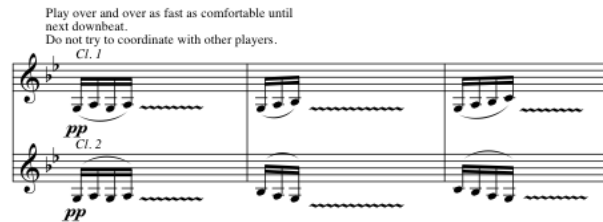
The types of aleatoric musical techniques used generally fall into three categories:

1. The composer uses some sort of random procedure to select specific pitches and rhythms that make up the piece. This is sometimes referred to as **"chance music."**
2. The composer creates specific "events" or groupings of notes, but the performer decides how to organize them or what order to play them in. This technique is sometimes referred to as **"open form."**
3. The composer uses **indeterminacy** through **graphic notation**.

In first type of aleatoric music, a composer may roll some dice, use a randomizing computer program, or use other methods to allow chance to determine the selection and order of pitches and rhythms. In this case, the performer still performs specific pitches and/or rhythms. It is the creation of the piece that is determined by chance – not the performance. John Cage composed a piece titled *Music of Changes* (1951) where he chose pitches by using an ancient Chinese book called *I Ching*, which described a method to determine random numbers. Around 1947-1948, John Cage created the ultimate in chance music. His 3-movement work, *4'33"*, was performed by a single player or group of players sitting in complete silence. The music was the sounds that occurred in the surrounding environment.

Open form music utilizes traditional notation to indicate the specific pitches that the performers are to play, but the speed, order, number of pitches, or number of repetitions the pitches are performed are determined by the performers. In 1964, Terry Riley composed a piece titled *In C*. Although it wasn't written for a specific number of performers, the score suggested that 35 players would be desirable. The piece consisted of 53 short phrases of music that were numbered. Each phrase was from one and a half to 32 beats long and had contained specific pitches and rhythms that were to be played in numerical order (although the players could choose to skip some), but the performers chose when to enter and how many times to repeat each phrase. The piece began with one performer playing the note C at a steady pulse to establish the tempo.

Dana Wilson uses open form techniques and graphic notation in *Odysseus and the Sirens*. In several places throughout the piece, he provides some groupings of specific pitches, but then directs the performers to “Play over and over as fast as comfortable until next downbeat. Do not try to coordinate with other players.”



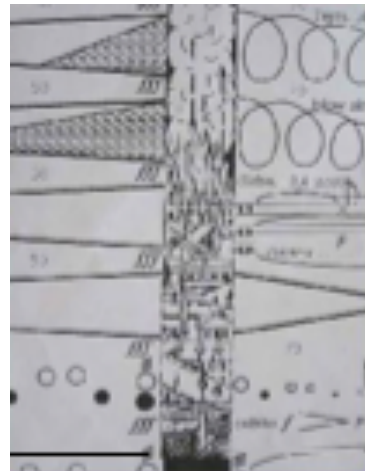
The earliest musical notation that we have record of began with squiggles, lines, and dashes that eventually developed into shapes. Shapes evolved into specific notes. With the addition of new sounds to musical compositions, some 20th-century composers have returned to the use of shapes to symbolize the sounds they want to be performed in their pieces. Indeterminacy is a technique that a composer uses where there is no specific pitches or rhythms provided for the performers. Composers have to create their own original symbols and instructions to guide the performers in creating musical sounds. Graphic scores abandon standard musical notation for geometric shapes or designs that suggest how sounds are to be performed.

In his orchestral piece about the WWII bombing victims in Hiroshima, *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, composer Krystof Penderecki used triangles and straight and wavy lines in the string parts to notate the sounds he intended. Other composers of orchestral pieces that have used graphic notation include György Ligeti and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Dana Wilson is not the only composer to create a work for band that includes graphic notation. Michael Colgrass used graphic notation in *Old Churches*, in this case a squiggly line to indicate a “murmuring” sound. Other band composers have also used graphic notation to have performers create sounds that cannot be symbolized with more traditional notation.



In his work for concert band, *Symphony #1: In Memoriam Dresden – 1945*, Daniel Bukvitch portrays the bombing of Dresden on the night of February 13, 1945 and the resulting “Fire Storm” that killed 150,000 men, women, and children. *Symphony #1* is composed in four movements. The piece builds to the fourth movement where the sounds of a “Fire Storm” are recreated. A variety of graphic symbols are used to indicated whistling, blowing air through instruments without mouthpieces,



lightly tapping the lips of performers mouths while making a “shh” sound, and whispering, mumbling, speaking, shouting, and then screaming the German words, “hilfe, feuer, raunch, faeuertafe, and feuer sturm.” To emphasize the emotional climax of the “Fire Storm,” Bukvitch uses a drawing of Dresden burning.

As composers continue to include sounds never used before in musical pieces, they will continue to create new ways to represent those sounds. In some cases, the notation may “jump off the page” and symbols may not be confined to being printed on paper. Creativity and innovation will be required for composers to realize the sounds they imagine as music - and musical notation will continue to evolve accordingly.

References:

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