



Lesson: Creating an Irregular Groove

OVERVIEW

A rhythmic ostinato in each percussion part is combined to create a “groove” in an irregular meter in *Charm*. Students will use this piece as an example and inspiration to create and combine rhythmic ostinati to create a “groove” for non-pitched percussion instruments. Students should first complete the *Irregular Meter: Exploring, Analyzing & Creating Rhythmic Patterns* lesson plan to first practice analyzing and creating rhythms in irregular meters prepare for this project.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- demonstrate the ability to organize an irregular meter into groupings of 2 or 3 subdivisions of beat.
- compose an original composition for non-pitched percussion instruments.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Student copies of “[Composing an Irregular Groove](#)”
- Music staff paper or music notation software
- Percussion instruments for performance of the compositions

PROCESS

1. Hand out the assignment sheet and read it together with the students.
2. An excerpt of the percussion parts from one section of *Charm* is included on the handout. During rehearsal, have the percussionists play that section, both individually and together, so that all the students in the band can hear how each individual part is constructed the musical effect of all the parts being combined.

3. As a large group, discuss the questions that are included for the students to consider in preparation for creating their own original composition.
4. Students independently compose their pieces based on the criteria provided on the handout.
5. The compositions are performed for the class.
6. The student audience can comment on the things they liked about the piece and also offer suggestions.

ASSESSMENT

There are numerous examples of rubrics designed to measure the quality of student compositions available on the web and in print materials. Various rubrics focus on technical components of the piece, craftsmanship and musical affect, application of processes, and personal reflection of the student composer.

It is important that the teacher determine which considerations to include in the evaluation of student work. The choice of assessment criteria should take into account the composing experience of the students. If the students do not have a lot of formative experience in musical composition, the teacher's critique of their first efforts should focus on considerations that will ultimately encourage them to continue to create more musical work in the future by sharing critical feedback in ways that serve to move the students forward in self-confidence, motivation, and an enhanced knowledge base. The level of rigor in evaluating the technical and aesthetic components of the students' compositions should increase proportionately to the amount of the students' experience. It is best practice to provide the grading criteria or a rubric in advance.

For additional guidance in evaluating student creative work, the following resources are recommended:

Hickey, M. (1999). Assessment rubrics for music composition. *Music Educators Journal*, 84 (4), 26 -33.

Rinehart, Carroll A., Ed. (2002, Composing and Arranging: Standard 4 Benchmarks. MENC, the National Association for Music Education (U.S.), MENC Committee on Performance Standards.

Composing an Irregular Groove

In *Charm*, composer Kevin Puts combines rhythmic **ostinati** for several non-pitched percussion instruments and hand clapping in an **irregular meter** to create an exotic and slightly “off-beat” groove. The rhythms are organized in a pattern of 2+2+3 eighth note groups. Here is an excerpt from *Charm*:



As a class, analyze the example above and consider the following questions to prepare to write your own rhythm groove in an irregular meter for percussion instruments:

1. Which part(s) seems to be establishing the overall pulse of the piece? Which part(s) seems to be more active (contain the fastest moving notes)?
2. What is the overall rhythm being performed if you were to combine the rhythms of all the individual parts?
3. How would you describe the kinds of sounds that are combined (high vs. low; metal vs. wood; body sounds vs. instrument sounds; etc.)?
4. What sounds occur simultaneously? What sounds occur in between each other?
5. Does the 2+2+3 eighth note groupings stay the same throughout the two measures or do they change position?
6. How did the composer use both sound and silence to make the parts work well together?
7. What are any other interesting or helpful things you notice about this excerpt from *Charm* that may help you to create your own rhythmic groove?

Now it's time to get started writing a rhythm groove in an irregular meter (e.g. $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{7}{8}$, etc.) for non-pitched percussion instruments.

Your piece should be at least 4 measures long and include at least 4 instruments. Create a score and individual parts. You can either write out the score and parts by hand, or use computer music notation software.

Share either a live or a computer created performance with the class. Other members of the class can provide reactions and suggestions for your rhythmic groove.

If this is the first time you have written original music, some of the following suggestions may help you:

- Pick the irregular meter you want to use ($\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{7}{8}$, etc.), determine how you want the eighth notes to be grouped, and start by writing a part that establishes the pulse. Do you want the pulse and the groupings to stay the same throughout the piece (Example 1) or do you want them to change to make the piece more complex (Example 2)? You may even want to change meters throughout the piece (Example 3.)

Example 1

2+2+3 throughout

Establish the pulse

Example 2

2+2+3

2+3+2

Establish the pulse



Example 3

2+2+3

2+3

Establish the pulse

- Familiarize yourself with sounds that the instruments make that you are considering using in your piece. You don't have to limit yourself to using actual instruments — remember the handclapping?
- Balance parts that establish the pulse with parts that are more active. Too much activity in too many parts at the same time can sound “cluttered.”
- The rhythmic groove should have some repetition.

