



Rock School: Methods and Materials for Classroom Composition
NMEA Conference-Clinic
November 16, 2007
Jeffrey Kitson, presenter

About this session:

Use American popular styles to teach compositional techniques such as: form, melody, harmony and chord structures, and rhythm. In addition, utilize simple analysis techniques to show the similarities of today's radio music to our standard classroom repertoire. Also, materials in songwriting will be showcased for short-term assignments or more long-term projects.

Part I: Methods

- **Form**
 - *The structure of music. The how, why, and where things repeat.*
 - Directed Listening
 - Listen to a song, then create a musical timeline of what you heard
 - Include the basic outline, but also interesting features of each of the sections
 - Composition
 - Create a five-part rondo (ABACA)
 - Experiment with a non-rondo rondo (BAACA)
- **Melody**
 - *A musical gesture that at first seems false, but becomes true due to context.*
 - Directed Listening
 - Listen to “I Just Called to Say I Love You” by Stevie Wonder. How does he use motive and then expand it over time?
 - Composition
 - Free write a melody of about eight bars. Don't worry about musical grammar. Write what comes to mind...good or bad.
 - Write a short to medium length sentence of about five to ten words. Consider the ways the arrangement of letters could give rise to pitch classes, rhythm, etc. Write a melody. Below it describe your system of construction/assignment.
- **Harmony**
 - *The aggregate effect of vertical sonority.*
 - Directed Listening
 - Listen to something for something
 - Composition
 - Beginner/Intermediate
 - Look online for the chords to a song you like. Does the harmony “work” according to the theory you learned?
 - Write a chord four chord progression. Write a six chord progression. Write a two chord progression without using V.
 - Advanced:
 - Inverted Portrait
 - Write a six bar chord progression using chords of not less than five notes (9th, 11th, 13th chords are a start). Write a melody for your progression.

- **Rhythm**
 - *The timetable in music. The how and why of how music relates to time.*
 - Directed Listening
 - Pink Floyd’s “Money”
 - Brubeck’s “Take Five” and “Blue Rondo A La Turk”
 - Bernstein: “America” from *West Side Story*
 - Composition
 - Write a 16 bar melody that changes time signature every one or two measures. Keep the eighth note constant. Try to keep as much flow as possible without letting it become too jagged.
 - Write a clap canon. The leading voice (dux) should become more challenging as time goes on. Use non-retrogradeable rhythms, triplets, and strategic rests to give the impression that the leading voice (dux) is challenging the follower (comes).
- **Lyrics**
 - Directed Listening
 - Listen to “Wordplay” by Jason Mraz. Try to find all his lyrical puzzles.
 - Listen to “Always True To You In My Fashion” by Cole Porter. Enjoy the rhyme scheme.
 - Composition
 - Write some lyrics. Try to include some poetic devices. Revise, revise, revise.

Part II: Materials

- **Music Technology**
 - Garage Band
 - Sequencer and Loop Program
 - Mac Platform Only (comes with iLife)
 - EXCELLENT for Beginners
 - Fruity Loops (FL Studio)
 - Sequencer and Loop Program
 - Available for PC
 - Can be intimidating for beginners
- **Books in Print**
 - Braheny, John. *The Craft and Business of Songwriting*. Cincinnati: Writers Digest Books, 2006.
 - Anderson, Michael. *Michael Anderson’s Little Black Book of Songwriting*. Los Angeles: Cadillac Pink Music, 2006.
 - Perricone, Jack. *Melody in Songwriting*. Boston: Berklee Press, 2000.
- **Online Books**
 - Belkin, Alan. *A Practical Guide to Musical Composition*. Available at: <http://www.musique.umontreal.ca/personnel/Belkin/bk/>
 - Brahms, Johannes. *Rules for Composition*. Available at: http://members.aol.com/dmarko1/brahms/index_n.htm
- **Other Selected Online Resources**
 - Chords and Lyrics Online (Legal issues / Don’t trust everything you read)
 - azlyrics.com
 - sing365.com
 - ultimateguitar.com
 - rhymezone.com
 - The Taxi Songwriting FAQ
<http://www.taxi.com/faq/songwriting/index.html>
 - Berklee Online Courses in Songwriting
<http://www.berkleemusic.com/school/courses/songwriting>

Lyrics Toolkit:

- Watch your pronouns! (he, she, it)
- Key lines: First Line, Hook Line, Bridge Surprise
- Assonance: same vowel sound in a row:
 - *You say no way*
 - *Hold on or I'm gone*
 - *This time you'll find you're mine*
- Alliteration - same consonant sound in a row:
 - *I'm falling forever*
 - *Now I'll never know*
 - *The way we were*
- Metaphor/Similie - Symbolism. Similie is LIKE something or AS something. Metaphor IS something
 - *Similie: Love is like a flower.*
 - *Metaphor: Love is a flower.*
- Text Painting - the music does what the words say
 - *"pull out the stops" - Jason Mraz: Wordplay*
 - *"Movin' on up" - Theme song to The Jeffersons.*
- Rhyme

Possible Rhyme Schemes

- Rhyming all four lines (don't do it)
- Second and fourth lines
 - trust
 - guess
 - hurt
 - mess
- First and Second lines + Third and Fourth lines
 - luck
 - stuck
 - brave
 - save
- First, Third and Fourth lines
 - able
 - still
 - cable
 - stable
- First and Third lines + Second and Fourth lines
 - making
 - good
 - taking
 - could

Poetic Feet for Syllabic Stress

Poetic "Foot"	Accent	Example
iamb	ta TUM	insane, goodbye, tonight, for good
trochee	TUM ta	healthy, lover, money
anapest	ta ta TUM	going out, making sense, understand
dactyl	TUM ta ta	poetry, ultimate, I'm okay, you're okay
spondee	TUM TUM	downtown, starship, headlong
amphibrach	ta TUM ta	believing, concerning, I love it

Suggested Listening:

- **Form**
 - Davinci’s Notebook: “Title of the Song”
 - Avril Lavigne: “Sk8er Boi”
 - David Bowie: “Under Pressure”
- **Melody/Hook**
 - Stevie Wonder: “Superstition”
 - David Bowie/Vanilla Ice: “Under Pressure” vs. “Ice Ice Baby”
- **Harmony**
 - The Beatles: “Hey Jude,” “Hard Day’s Night” and “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da”
 - Stevie Wonder: “Sir Duke”
- **Rhythm**
 - Pink Floyd: “Money”
 - Brubeck: “Take Five” and “Blue Rondo A La Turk”
 - Bernstein: “America”
- **Lyrics**
 - Jason Mraz: “Wordplay”
 - Cole Porter: “Always True To You In My Fashion” and “De-Lovely”
 - Davinci’s Notebook: “Title of the Song”

About the presenter:

Jeffrey Kitson hold the position of Vocal Music Instructor at Central Community College in Columbus, NE. He directs the College Chorus and Spectrum, and teaches courses in music theory, voice, piano, songwriting, and musical theatre. Previously he held the position of Instructor of Music Technology at the Flint Institute of Music in Flint, Michigan where he taught classes in music fundamentals, songwriting, and advanced studies in American popular music. He has several published compositions and is seeking to premiere his one-act opera. He holds Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from Michigan State University.

This handout, along with the accompanying PowerPoint and live links, will be available at www.jeffkitson.com/nmea for a few weeks following this presentation.