

**NYJO**

***Working with  
Beginner Musicians***



**CREATED IN COLLABORATION  
WITH VIJ PRAKASH**

# ***Things to Think About...***



## **Ensemble Layout**

Think about room setup. Use little moving games to switch people around. Changing the layout can change the feeling of an ensemble and help freshen things up.

## **Planning a Piece**

Identify the key elements of the piece and simplify where necessary: bass line, groove, riffs, backings, melody (in some cases elements may need some form of notation/resource if long or complex). How many elements can be taught through hand-signal leading?

## **Resourcing**

Can you create a clear 'cheat-sheet' or 'memory aid' for the piece? Colours / Shapes / Numbers all avoid the issue of transposing instruments.





# ***Session Leading***

Make large gestures! These make your instructions easy to follow, especially when there is loud playing and your voice can't be heard.

Take your time. Give yourself time to think, give clear signals, give students processing time, then count in a cue.

## **When singing:**

Use 'my turn – your turn' signals when using call and response.

Always demonstrate direction of pitch with 1 hand.

Try getting students to lip sync along with you before singing.

## **Think about engagement of the group:**

Can you create a task to encourage active listening. Eg. "after this task I'm going to ask you who's version you liked best and why".

If there is a task which involves playing one at a time can the others be playing backings/bassline or body percussion to be part of a collective groove.

Are the activities interesting for the rhythm section? (sometimes just celebrating/highlighting the fact that it's a really hard job just to hold down a groove can be enough to encourage them to focus when the task isn't applicable).



# ***Starter Activities & Improvising***

## **Starter Activities:**

Focused clap: everybody follows one leader to clap at the same time.

'Give me 1': "Give me 1/2/3/break it down". This can be easily developed into a piece of music with the addition of instruments.

Birds Eye View: In silence rearrange yourselves so that you spell out different letters - (standing in a circle would be 'O').

## **Improvising:**

Think backwards: What is it you are hoping to achieve and what skills are required in order for the student to execute this?

Plan an activity/game which can develop these elements in isolation and then begin to combine.

Sometimes a 'mistake' in the room can open up a conversation which leads to the next part of the process. Eg. "Timmy just played a triplet rather than sticking to minims, that sounded great. Why don't we all try adding a different rhythm..."

Give thinking time in your tasks. "Play" – "Think" – "Play"...



# ***Improvisation Tasks***

## **Rhythmic improvising:**

1 pitch and Call and Response rhythms.

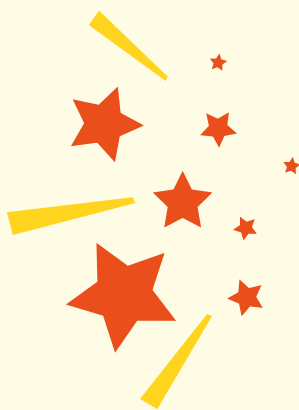
Student led Call and Response rhythms.

Extend exercise to 2 bars perhaps using different pitches for each bar.

Focus exercise by constricting this to 4 notes in each bar.

## **Structural improvising:**

Do A A improvising so students have to repeat an idea exactly in the second bar.



A B where B is related to A (Q+A)

A A B A

A B A C



## **Pitch-based improvising:**

Choose pitches only playing semibreves (this may be nice as a group improvising task as it will create some interesting chords). Move to shorter note lengths.

Reduce thinking time so that it becomes more like leaving space - eg. play 6 minims and rest for 4 beats.

Change where the thinking space is so that the phrases change lengths - (initially led by tutor then decided by student).

In this task a drummer could try and find 8 different pitches on the kit and participate with the ensemble filling in the groove.



If you have any questions about the content within this pack, please contact us on [projects@nyjo.org.uk](mailto:projects@nyjo.org.uk).

This resource pack was created with:

**Vij Prakash:** NYJO Resident MD

**NYJO**

***National Youth Jazz Orchestra***

Woolwich Works, The Fireworks Factory, 11 No. 1 Street, London SE18 6HD  
[www.nyjo.org.uk](http://www.nyjo.org.uk) | +44 (0) 330 500 2000 | [info@nyjo.org.uk](mailto:info@nyjo.org.uk)

Company registration number: 01334250  
Charity registration number: 274578



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

