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# **Introduction**

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This book, together with its Project Book companions, is intended to provide everything the music teacher requires to manage a successful GCSE composition programme. It recognizes the very wide range of skills and experiences GCSE music students can arrive with – and also the relatively high levels of uncertainty among teachers, regarding one of the most mysterious of creative activities. And while ever-mindful of the examination board requirements for GCSE music composition, it strives always to respect the musical and practical realities of working with sound. Every one of the exercises and projects leads to (or prepares for) the creation of legitimate pieces of music intended to bear scrutiny in the context of public performance. The GCSE Composition Course is not about an inferior musical genre known as ‘classroom music’ or ‘school music’.

It is important, therefore, that teachers themselves approach the task in a frame of mind which legitimizes students’ work, where students are considered to be creating for realistic musical contexts (some products of which will just happen to be assessed for examination purposes). In this frame of mind, professionalism and honesty go hand in hand with encouragement and inspiration. Perhaps the most important quality of any composition, no matter how elementary, is its sense of sincerity – its honesty of intention.

The GCSE Composition Course recognizes the disjunction between creative music activities up to key stage 3, which are almost always based on group work, and the GCSE focus on individual work. There is no magical moment when an individual will suddenly be able to sustain his or her own composing, and in any case, the notion of an isolated figure producing reams of manuscript from a garret is a relatively recent nineteenth-century image. In most parts of the world, and in most periods of history (including today), the composition and production of music continues to be a collaborative effort. So, in encouraging individuals to develop and realize their own musical ideas, the book does not ignore the wider process of making music happen. In many cases, projects and exercises can be tackled either by individuals or by groups, but in the realization of the musical results, other people inevitably become involved.

The GCSE Composition Course, consequently, links improvising, composing, performing and listening. Teachers, perhaps anxious about teaching composition, should find the pathways provided clearly delineated, allowing for a journey of joint exploration with their students. We hope that the material will also enable teachers to develop their own creative confidence and that the work will be approached in a spirit of collaboration and a sense of adventure.

The basic approach of the book can be summarized as:

- making and collecting sounds
- shaping sounds
- grouping, layering and connecting sounds
- sharing and testing
- discussing the musical material created
- revising and reworking
- notating and performing