

Young Voices Zine

Celebrating the Creativity of Young Composers

2024 Cohort

Sound and Music



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Introduction

Welcome to the Young Voices Zine.

A collective effort from young composers dedicated to empowering the next generation of composers in the UK.

This publication addresses the unique challenges that young composers face today, from the lack of access to musical instruments and software to the financial barriers that often prevent them from pursuing their passion. By shedding light on these issues, we aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all young talents can reach their full potential.

Inside, you'll find a mix of resources, insights, quotes and creative prompts designed to inspire and guide you on your musical journey. From our 'Young Voices Manifesto', which outlines the critical areas where young composers need support, to the imaginative 'Composition Briefs' that spark creativity, this Zine is a toolkit for navigating the music industry.

Our mission is to ensure that every young composer, regardless of background or financial means, has the opportunity to thrive and be heard.





About Sound and Music

Sound and Music is the UK's charity for new music and sound.

Our vision is a future where the frontiers of new music and sound are closer to every person.

Our mission is to be the base camp for anyone in the UK who wants to make, experience or support new music and sound to shape the modern world. We deliver artist-centred development programmes and essential funding to young, emerging and established artists breaking new ground across music-making in the UK. We lead research, campaigns, networks, archives and collections to further originality, discovery and equity within music. For over 15 years, we have worked with thousands of music creators and hundreds of organisations to boost musical creativity, careers, cultures and communities; progressing inclusion and representation within new music in the UK.

We are guided by our Fair Access Principles, a code of best practice which ensures our work is open and inclusive for all.

Sound and Music is supported by Arts Council England and proud to be a National Youth Music Organisation.

Our values

- **Artist-centred:** We place the strengths, needs and voices of artists at the heart of all we do
- **Curious:** We actively explore, listen, learn and collaborate – always open-minded
- **Agile:** We innovate, respond creatively to ever-changing contexts and prioritise momentum over perfection
- **Ambitious:** We foster originality, lead on equity and inclusion and drive progressive change across the industry

Sound and Music



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Young Voices Manifesto

In an ever-evolving music industry, young composers face unique challenges that often go unaddressed. Young Voices is dedicated to amplifying the needs and aspirations of emerging artists, ensuring they have the support necessary to thrive.

This manifesto outlines the key areas where young composers require assistance, reflecting their collective voice and the importance of these issues in shaping the future of music.

- **More opportunities to have work performed**
(no connection with live music, I feel like I'm writing for imaginary players and whatever I finish gets left to gather dust)
- **Support in sharing and uploading work**
(I'd like to put my work online and promote myself but don't know how)
- **A higher education alternative to conservatoires**
(applying to conservatoires was like knowing they wanted something specific but not what exactly, and hoping I had it, like some twisted riddle)
- **Places to make relaxed live music as a group**
(the equivalent of jazz jams and folk sessions, more community and improvisation without a set genre)
- **Competitions for genres other than classical composition**
(despite safely writing classically, I wonder if I'd be more creative if there was a place for it to go)

“Remember, you don't have to do anything to 'become' a composer - you already are! The music is already in you!”

— Mia

Young Voices Statement

One of the most pressing issues for young composers in the UK is the disparity in access to musical instruments, electronic music gear and software. Many musical talents are not reaching their full potential because their access to musical equipment is restricted.

Another issue for young composers is the financial insecurity associated with composing. With it being highly difficult to make money composing, many people are turned off seriously considering becoming a composer because the money is not as abundant for many people as a composer as other professions.

Outreach to many young composers is strained in the UK. Many people do not know about different composition activities happening around the country, as it means that we miss out on lots of talent flourishing to their full capabilities. I think there needs to be a focus on reaching out as much as possible to young composers, in person and on social media, so that they can understand the opportunities out there and not be overlooked for their potential.

I also think the financial barrier to many of the composition opportunities in the UK is too high for many young people to meet, and is often the deciding factor for many people as to whether they ever go. Whilst it is understandable that many composition activities require a large amount of money to happen, cheaper alternatives for people who may not be able to afford to go would allow a wide variety of people to have their interests flourish.

“The two main things a young composer needs in my opinion is a motivation/vision for the piece they are going to compose and the opportunity to hear their works played in real life. There is something about hearing your music in real life that is really special, giving an almost lifelike quality to your musical creation.”

— Atharv



Reflections on a year of composing

By Atharv

The one thing that really interested me in the Summer School (now In the Making) was its both intense and educational nature; within 7 days you would be composing an entirely new composition and an experience that was simultaneously shaped by live expertise and performance of the progress you made. As I went in to the composition summer school, I expected to come out being able to compose in different voices and styles to what I normally used and expected to generally have a better grasp of composition and versatility in composition after the summer school.

During the composition summer school, I feel like I really thrived in the academic and experimental nature of the group I was in, the classical group, and I vividly remember feeling completely enlightened about music history and theory after the first lesson which was a lecture on music.

Throughout the rest of the week, the ability to have my music played by a professional ensemble as I worked on it was very unique and really helped my craft my ideas in the most musically effective way possible. The most challenging part of the course was learning to compose under time pressure but I feel that having this experience really helped me learn to efficiently compose, come up with ideas and orchestrate.

During the summer school year, I developed a stronger grounding in my own unique compositional voice which I discovered in the piece I wrote just before (called Demain, Des L'Aube based on the French poem of the same name by Victor Hugo) coming to the summer school. During the summer school, I really felt like I had the opportunity to expand this voice and enhance it. After the summer school, Demain, Des L'Aube has both won the BBC Young Composer Award and has gotten me selected as one of the ORA Singers Young Composers 2024. For my prize commission for the BBC Concert Orchestra for the 2024 BBC Proms, I am currently composing a full orchestral score using the style that the summer school helped me hone. Along with this, I have received a choral commission from the ORA Singers to be performed by them in the Three Choirs Festival at Worcester Cathedral this year so I am excited to work on that as it will be my first experience composing a vocal piece of music and I hope to continue learning a lot from the mentorship programs that winning both competitions have offered me.

A Sampler

By Diego

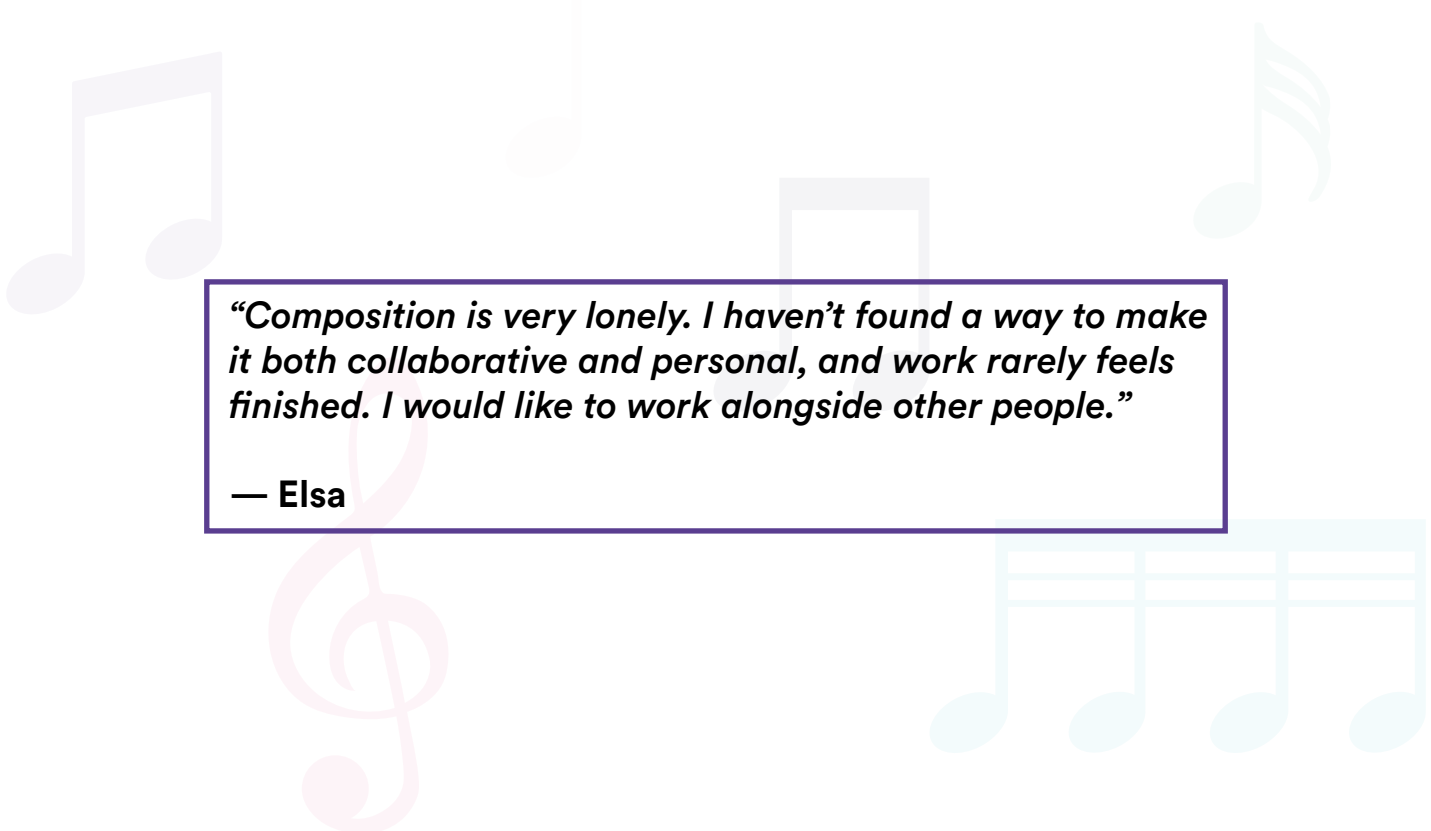
This doesn't have to be an electronic digital sampler in a traditional sense. When I say sampling I mean sampling anything, any idea and recycling it.

It could be a simple melody, or a sound you find, or a sample of music.

Sampling is a great way of taking something and turning it into something else. It could even be used to turn something less interesting into something great, or to turn something abstract and non-musical into something that works into your composition.

You could use part of a melody, or recycle a part of audio or music and transform it until it's something that works for your creation.

The technique of sampling has been around for a long time and music today would not be the same without it.

A collection of faint, stylized musical notes and a treble clef are scattered across the page. Some are light purple, some are light blue, and one is light pink. They are positioned behind the text and a quote box.

“Composition is very lonely. I haven’t found a way to make it both collaborative and personal, and work rarely feels finished. I would like to work alongside other people.”

— Elsa



Composer Toolkits

Composer Toolkit

by Sam GL

Notes

A portable way to take down musical ideas is important for a young composer. This can be a notepad, manuscript paper, an app on your phone or any method which allows you to take notes when inspiration strikes.

Backups

Backups are very important to preserve your composition digitally. If the original file is lost, a backup can be the deciding factor as to whether your composition is saved or not. Additionally, seeing the progression of your composition may be beneficial to your creative process, and you may want to take your composition in a new direction from a certain point in the past.

Breaks

Whilst it may be tempting to work for hours on end when composing, this can quickly lead to burnout. Taking period breaks whilst composing can allow you to compose more consistently over a longer period of time.

Feedback

Having an outlet for feedback is important when composing. Oftentimes an external opinion can give a new sense of perspective to your creative process, and may be able to spawn new ideas and improve your composition.

Inspiration

Knowing what will cause your compositional ideas to flow more easily allows you to compose more frequently and more confidently. This could be another piece of music, a piece of visual art or a place which inspires you artistically.

Toolkit for a composer 'n' such

by Sam W

A decent DAW

This is something which has helped me a great deal in the past with the music I'm writing, it enables me to jot down my ideas and motifs in a quick and organized way so my scatterbrain doesn't forget about them. While some of them sit behind a pretty chunky paywall, there are plenty of others that are free or cheap, which are equally good if not better than the one I use.

A quiet space

I dunno about others, but for me, it's completely impossible to formulate musical ideas in my head, and hum them through in my brain to see if they sound any good, if there is a load of sound going on around me, i find that it can be rather distracting, while sometimes I am able to completely zone out, i know that is something that other people struggle to do, thus this makes it onto my list.

A mentor of some kind

While it is possible to lead yourself and teach yourself an instrument, it is so beneficial to have someone steering you and guiding you on what to practice or what to focus on in your musical upbringing, this always helps me find new things that i need to improve on, and gives me proper direction of the things that have to change in order for me to become a better musician.

A big fat break

It is incredibly important to realise when you are running low on ideas, and need some time to step back to take a good hard long look at what you've created before jumping back into it. It's easy to forget about the big picture when you're deep into something and it can feel overwhelming without context, this is why a break to give yourself time to wind down and think about something other than music is very significant in the composing process.

Inspirational content

This is what I believe to be the single most important tool when composing. When you go to create anything, you need to have inspiration, or your mind will have nothing to draw from besides its own ideas, which will eventually run dry. Sitting down and listening to something you love with a creative ear, focussing on things that you could make use of or blatantly steal is an incredibly productive thing to do, and also a good excuse to stop composing and go listen to something more interesting than the same five second looping section of a track that you're trying to get sounding right.

A Composer Toolkit

by Catriona

Something to record ideas

Before writing a piece, I like to gather some ideas over time as to what I think will eventually go in it, but seeing as I don't have superhuman memory I like to carry a couple items on me that will help me to do this. For me these items include:

- Some manuscript/lined paper and a pencil
- A phone/voice recorder to record anything I play.

Notation software/manuscript paper

As the time comes to write/work on the full thing, it's important to keep a note of the piece! Great ways to do this include modern notation software which can often be found on laptops/devices etc for free. Some people may want to use production software and/or instead which is also a great alternative dependant on the music. However, many people may prefer to go old school with some manuscript and a pencil which is also an effective way of presenting work – this kind of physical notation is also a very good skill to have

A Metronome

Many composers are very good at maths and can do big calculations very quickly in their head! Unfortunately, some of us aren't so mathematically gifted, but when it comes to deciding the right tempo and time signature for your music these calculations can be necessary. This is why I use a Metronome. A metronome can tell you the exact tempo a piece is with the click of a button (when downloaded onto a device). It is a great tool for a performer, but an even better tool when you're a composer.

A Listener

One of the best ways to improve as a composer is with feedback, and the best way (the only way) to receive this is by allowing other people to listen to your work. An amateur, a professional/a teacher, a parent, a friend or any peer are all people you can show your music to – although note that sometimes having people who don't know you personally can be even better! Whether they hear your work in person, or if you're bold and online doesn't matter as long as you put it out there. Music/Art is subjective so 50% people may love something that another 50% really don't, but there's only one way to find out.

Self-encouragement/belief

If you have no faith in yourself or your art, getting others to have some faith in it will be a bit of a challenge! In the creative world, being your own cheerleader is something to hang on to and be proud of. Believing in yourself is the first step towards anything you want to try or achieve. The same goes for your music – if you have worked very hard on a particular piece and you believe it has promise then often it probably does! So, while taking on feedback is good, stand up for your own ideas as well.



How to write music when you aren't given an objective

By Elsa

How do you feel about not having a brief?
Does the lack of direction stop you from writing?
Do you like the freedom? Do you need specification?

If you like the freedom, try improvising on an instrument, or creating random sounds.
Shape the ones you like.

Listen to something else and come back to your work with fresh ears.
Think critically about what it conveys and if it aligns with your idea of what it is.

Take any opportunity to listen to other composers' work.
What do you like about what they make?

If you hit a wall, ask for support. People need to know if you're struggling.
Remember to enjoy the process of creating imperfect work.

If you need a goal, set yourself one so you're not writing without purpose.
This could be a duration of time, a specific mood you want to invoke,
a plot taken from a film and converted to music, a new and specific set of instruments.

Set smaller goals to meet on the way. Breaking down a big project into manageable
chunks can make it feel doable.

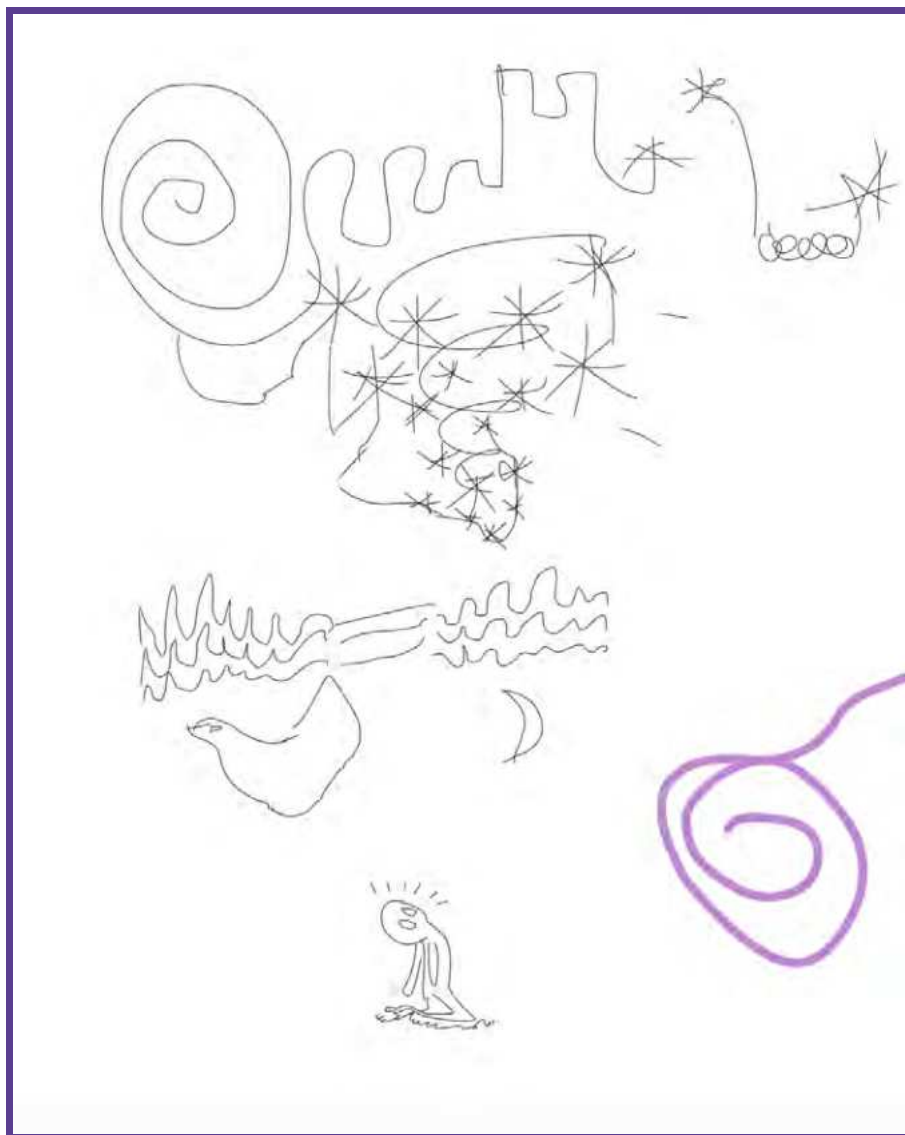
Hold yourself accountable for your progress.
If you struggle with this, ask someone you respect to keep you on task.

Take any opportunity to listen to other composers' work.
What do you like about what they make?

If you hit a wall, ask for support.
People need to know if you're struggling.

Remember to enjoy the process of creating imperfect work.

Graphic Score



“Better communication between organisations, music hubs and schools to help establish high quality resources and additional training for teachers who are less confident in teaching composition in the classroom, so that more of an emphasis can be placed on composition in the curriculum.”

— Catriona

When you don't feel like a Composer

By Mia

When you want to write music, but you don't feel like a composer, here are a few things that you could try,:

1. Find music (a song, piece or beat) that you really love, play around and create something that makes you feel the same way as that song does. If you're stuck, try and find out what makes you love it so much.
2. Write for someone. Have the goal in mind that you'll play it for them when you're done!
3. Find the first (or earliest you can find) piece of music you wrote. See how far you've come!
4. Allow yourself to be unproductive. Loosen off the pressure to create a finished masterpiece. It's okay to just play and improvise. Let your creativity take command. It doesn't need to have a great meaning, you can just enjoy it.
5. Find other musicians! writing in a band setting can be really liberating. You don't have to do all the heavy lifting yourself - you can just bounce off each other.

Remember, you don't have to do anything to 'become' a composer - you already are! The music is already in you!

“It would be useful if industry professionals could help young composers by mentoring them or offering entry level opportunities in commissions or open calls.”

— **Catriona**



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