

Rhythms of the world

Beyond the Western musical tradition

Around the globe, music is often at the heart of cultural life.

During your GCSE Music you will study and develop an understanding of the characteristic rhythmic features of:

- Indian classical music and Punjabi bhangra.
- Traditional Eastern Mediterranean and Arabic folk rhythms, with particular focus on traditional Greek, Palestinian and Israeli music.
- Traditional African drumming.
- Traditional calypso and samba.



Sample brief

Create a composition (melodic and/or rhythmic) that suggests a world music style that you have studied. Your composition should be suitable for playback on a student-run radio station.

Your composition, if you choose this brief, should reflect the characteristics of the styles of music listed on the previous page.

Important considerations

You can decide whether your composition is predominantly melodic and/or rhythmic, but most importantly you should decide the world music style that will influence your composition.

This dictates the features you will need to employ.

Once you have chosen a style you should consider:

- Are there typical instruments for this style?
- Is the music organised in a particular way in terms of texture? Do certain instruments play the melody? Do others form the accompaniment?
- What musical characteristics, in terms of melody and/or rhythm, are important for your chosen world style? For example, is syncopation typical? Does it make use of ostinato patterns, or particular types of scales (such as **pentatonic**)?
- Any other features typical of the style.

Be clear in your mind that you know exactly what the musical characteristics are for your chosen area. Be precise with:

- Characteristic rhythms and metres.
- Ways in which performers work together.

Notice, too, the other musical elements that you should consider to ensure you demonstrate effective understanding of your chosen area:

- How is tempo chosen and manipulated? Does it change during a typical piece from your chosen style?
- How are dynamics, expression and articulation used?
- How is harmony and tonality exploited? Is a **drone** often used?
- Is there repetition? Do you find any use of ostinato?
- How are melodies ornamented in your chosen area, if at all?

TIP

Before you choose a style for your composition, it's a good idea to listen to the pieces on the 'suggested listening' list provided by the exam board (in their specification document). There are also 'further listening' lists for each Area of Study provided in this book. Which of these pieces or styles appeals to you?

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It is important to study the suggested listening pieces. Notice any traditional rhythm patterns (including regular and irregular time signatures) that might be useful for you to use in your composition. These will show your understanding of your chosen area.

Typically, music from some parts of the world has layers that build up gradually. Is this the case in your chosen area? Some musical traditions have particular instruments to signal changes in the music (such as a master drummer in African drumming). There may be tempo changes to show the progression through the structure (such as in Indian classical music, where the tempo may get progressively faster as you go from one section to the next). This level of detail will help make your composition exciting and demonstrate your understanding of your chosen style.

Which stimulus will work best for this brief?

You might find the suggested note patterns or rhythmic phrases most useful for this brief.

Many of the world music styles you will encounter are rhythmically repetitive and the melodic material may be restricted to certain combinations of notes (such as a **raga** or a pentatonic scale).

For this reason, your composition may mix together world music with more mainstream music styles, creating a **fusion** of sounds and styles.

Where do you start?

Many world music styles have particular rhythms that run through them (e.g. the chaal in bhangra music or the son clave in Cuban music).

Try taking one of these rhythms and experimenting with it – turn it into an ostinato, perhaps, and consider layering up different patterns derived from it. You might also want to apply this rhythm to the note pattern, if you've chosen this stimulus.

Most importantly, consider the structure. Think about how your composition will be organised and how the sections will relate to each other. Decide what instruments are necessary to convey your chosen style. Be brave to be imaginative: use instruments that you may be less familiar with.

Texture and colour

If you decide to work primarily with rhythm you still need to think about texture and colour. For example, some sections may have fewer instruments playing than others. Important structural moments, such as climaxes of the composition, are conveyed most effectively with everyone playing.

Percussion instruments are often capable of a range of different **timbres** – be familiar with the possibilities and use these in your composition to show a variety of colours. Keep in mind the playing techniques that are possible and use a range of dynamics to keep the composition interesting throughout.

When writing a melody, don't forget to vary the texture. The melody might pass to a different instrument and you could structure your composition by which instrument is playing this melody.

Get to know which intervals and scales seem to be most common in your chosen world music style and make use of them in your own melodies. Check, too, if devices such as drones are used. It is remarkable how Indian classical music, though underpinned by a drone, always sounds interesting due to the regular and carefully controlled changes in the music. Consider how your composition will change and consider the pace of these changes carefully.

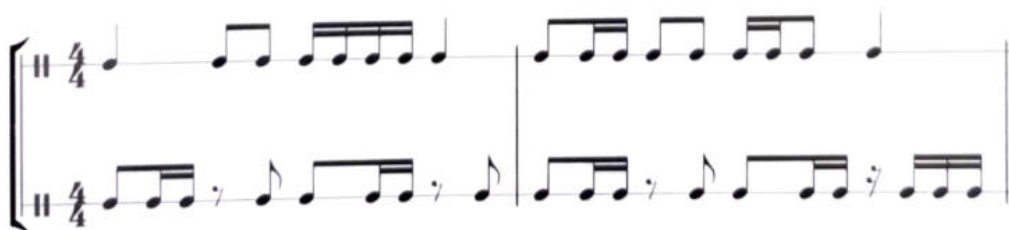
POLYRHYTHMS TASK

Using the rhythmic pattern below create 30 seconds of music that sounds similar in style to African drumming.

Consider which musical devices might be necessary to achieve a polyrhythmic texture typical of African drumming.



If you add further layers of rhythm to this, you will create a polyrhythmic texture, similar to what you hear in African drumming. In the example below, a second, **syncopated** rhythm has been added. Can you turn this into a 30-second composition? You may need to add a third or a fourth rhythm. You could introduce each rhythm, one at a time.



Question and answer phrases

Now that you've created a polyrhythmic texture, you should develop the original rhythm.

In the example below, a short section of the original rhythm has been turned into a 'question' phrase, while a variation on it has been turned into an 'answer' phrase. Can you develop this into an 8-bar section?

This may involve adapting the question phrase, or the answer phrase, or both!

The musical notation is for three instruments: Djembe 1, Djembe 2, and Shaker, in 4/4 time. The notation is divided into two measures by a vertical line. In the first measure, Djembe 1 plays a 'question' phrase: a half note, followed by two eighth notes, and a quarter note. Djembe 2 and the Shaker play a 'rest' (indicated by a horizontal line). In the second measure, Djembe 1 plays a 'rest'. Djembe 2 and the Shaker play an 'answer' phrase: a half note, followed by two eighth notes, and a quarter note. The notation is written on three staves, with the first staff for Djembe 1, the second for Djembe 2, and the third for the Shaker.

Structuring your ideas

Now you have two sections for your piece. Arrange your musical ideas so that you create a short composition, lasting around 60 seconds (remember that your combined composition coursework needs to be a minimum of 3 minutes).

Ask a friend to listen to your finished composition. Give them a checklist of what you aimed to capture in your chosen style. If they cannot detect all of the features, consider how you might make them even more obvious to the listener.

EXTENSION: Once you are happy with your question and answer rhythms, try transferring these rhythms to pitched instruments to create short melodies and riffs.

SECTION BY SECTION

Think about how you will create each section:

- Will the transition between each section be gradual or sudden?
- Will a particular instrument signal the new section?
- When a section returns, how will it be different? Faster? Quieter?

Film music

Programmatic composition

We could all probably sing a theme from a well-known show, film or television programme. We can probably also recall specific musical ideas from films such as *Jaws* (the distinctive semitone!) or the low-pitched ostinato that forms the basis of the 'Imperial March' from the *Star Wars* films.

Sample brief

Create a descriptive composition suggested by the theme of a storyline or image that would be suitable for accompanying a short film to be shown at a film festival.

As a composer, writing for an image or storyline means we are accompanying a pre-existing idea with music. For us to do that effectively we need to consider what we are trying to enhance or create.

- Does the image or story suggest something sinister, or something optimistic or exciting?
- Does the image or story indicate a particular time or place?
- Does the image or story describe a specific character?
- How might the story or scene develop?

We have to consider these factors carefully to ensure our choice of musical elements and timbres is appropriate.

Your composition should aim to complement or support:

- A mood or emotion being conveyed on the screen.
- A significant character(s) or place.
- Specific actions or dramatic effects.

For you to be able to communicate the story/image effectively, you should study the suggested listening and notice how composers use music dramatically and expressively:

- What instruments and timbres are they using?
- How are rhythm and metre used to create a specific mood?
- Is the tempo well-chosen and how does it change?
- How do dynamics, expression and articulation contribute?
- Is the texture varied as the music progresses to show the action?
- How does the structure match the structure of the story?
- How is harmony (and tonality) chosen to reflect the nature of the story?
- Are repetition, ostinato, **sequence** and imitation used?
- Does a recurring motif or leitmotif appear (such as in *Jaws*)?

Important considerations

Your choice of stimulus will be important for this Area of Study. You may want to use an image or a short story.

Understanding the features of the stimulus will be essential and you should consider:

- If you are using the image, decide what is going on. Does it imply a narrative? Does it imply a particular mood or atmosphere?
- If you are using the short story, consider how you could break this story into different sections. How does it start and what is the atmosphere? When and how does it change?
- Are there elements (such as people or objects) in the story or image that will need particular musical ideas?

Where do you start?

If you choose the image as your stimulus you should spend some time thinking about what is going on and what narrative might be extracted from the image.

Describing an image

Look at the image on the next page. What atmosphere/mood is depicted?

There is plenty going on in the picture. The clouds suggest that unfavourable weather is on the way, yet we have some sun implied in the middle. In the distance we can see some ruins of an old



building. We have the impression we are in the middle of the countryside because of the field. The track ahead suggests we are perhaps journeying towards the ruin.

We could consider how to organise this scenario into different sections.

- The beginning is calm and not too busy – implied by the countryside and the cloudy sky.
- The music may suggest some movement, as it appears we are walking towards the ruins.
- Rain may be on the way, so the next significant section might be the rain.
- We eventually arrive at the ruins – how will the music reflect the old buildings?
- Maybe the sky gets even darker at the ruins and we are left with a sense of foreboding?

You should then consider the musical ideas you need to create:

- The weather and the eventual rain.
- The movement towards the ruins.
- The ruins themselves.
- The darkness that the darker clouds suggest is on the way.

Related pieces of music

It would be useful to look at any pieces of music that capture the same atmosphere as what we see in the image.

If we want to focus on the sunlight and movement in our image, the opening scene to the 2005 film *Pride and Prejudice* has a similar mood. The accompanying music (titled 'Dawn') creates a gentle and bright atmosphere, and is performed on the piano. The texture is melody and accompaniment, the tonality is major, and the piano makes use of broken chords. You can find the opening scene on YouTube, if you search for 'Pride And Prejudice Opening Scene'.

On the other hand, 'Nuages gris' by Franz Liszt (1881) for solo piano shows an example of how the piano is used to capture the grey clouds. Notice how he uses a particular part of the piano's range and distinctive intervals to capture the ambiguity of the clouds:



DARK CLOUDS TASK

Using the chords below, write for three instruments of your choice. Give one note to each instrument.

Consider which octave to put the note in to help create the right atmosphere for a mini composition called 'Dark Clouds'. Consider the right dynamics and tempo marking. Could you use any instrumental effects for colour (such as **tremolo**)?



Once you have arranged the chords, add a rhythm to them to create tension and excitement. For example, the chords could play on every crotchet beat, with an accent on the first beat of each bar (see below). Choose your own rhythm and apply it to the four chords.



Planning a composition based on a story

A short story

The thief breaks into the mansion in the middle of the cold, dark night. Unfortunately for him, he is noticed...

This brief also implies some movement (a thief breaking into a building) as well as an atmosphere at the start (a cold, dark night), a location (the mansion) and something to happen (he is noticed).

You might want to create a plan of how you will structure your composition, then consider what musical ideas would be necessary to convey the different sections. Our story stops on a 'cliffhanger', so it's up to you to decide how it ends!

Story	Musical representation	Duration
It is a cold, dark night and we see the mansion in the distance.	<i>Use perfect bare 5ths to show the cold night?</i> <i>Create a long melody to reflect the grandeur of the mansion?</i>	20 seconds?
We are outside the mansion and we can see the thief looking for a window to gain entry to the building.	<i>The 'mansion' theme is heard again by another instrument?</i> <i>A quiet dissonant chord reflects the appearance of the thief?</i>	15 seconds?
The thief breaks in. He pauses as he waits for any sound. He notices nothing and enters the building.	<i>Another dissonant chord reflects the moment a window is broken?</i> <i>The music pauses on a bare 5th to reflect the thief listening?</i>	10 seconds?
The thief is in the mansion's library and is exploring items. Suddenly a light comes on in an adjacent room. The light is seen under the door in the library. The thief pauses...	<i>The music changes key to show the thief is now inside?</i> <i>More chromatic notes?</i> <i>A higher-pitched bare 5th chord signals a light is turned on?</i>	20 seconds?

Footsteps might use small musical steps but a bigger movement, such as a ship, an airplane, or flowing water (for example) might involve bigger movements. Also, think about the pitch range of these 'movements'; the bigger the pitch range used, the bigger the movements will feel to the listener.

[illegible]

More excited, energetic atmospheres may require faster harmonic rhythms – for example, chords changing more than once per bar. To create some relaxation, you can slow this rhythm – to perhaps one chord every two bars. Listen to 'The Ecstasy Of Gold' from the film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* for an example of this. The chords change quite slowly at first, but change more quickly as the music progresses (up until about 1:30). The tempo also increases, and the texture gets thicker, building up the excitement.

Pacing it right

It is important to think carefully about how long your musical ideas last when working with an image or a story.

If you want to establish an atmosphere it can take some time for the listener to 'feel' it. You may need to keep an idea going for longer than you think to ensure all listeners appreciate the atmosphere or character you are trying to portray.

Using music technology (and instrumental techniques)

The story will never be very detailed but as a composer you need to fill in the detail. The more detailed the plan, the more exciting and interesting your composition can be.

Using a **sequencer** would be ideal for working on a film brief. You could then experiment with some unusual timbres, particularly as our short story brief is rather sinister. You might consider using sounds that employ particular instrumental effects (such as **pizzicato** or **tremolo** on strings). The famous 'shower scene' music from *Psycho* (actually titled 'The Murder') uses a mixture of string effects, including **glissando** and pizzicato.



Conventions of pop

How to write a smash hit

Rock 'n' roll, rock anthems, pop ballads and music by present-day solo artists – each genre has a distinctive sound world for us to explore.

You will have studied music that covers a wide range of pop and rock history:

- Rock 'n' roll of the 1950s and 1960s.
- Rock anthems of the 1970s and 1980s.
- Pop ballads from the 1970s to the 1990s.
- Solo artists from 1990 to the present day.

Sample brief

Create a rock- or pop-style song, or piece, suitable for performance at an informal gig or concert.

An important part of this example brief is the audience/occasion: an 'informal gig'. This would suggest something such as a voice and guitar, or voice and piano. It could include other instruments of course. You are free to choose but consider carefully how your song would satisfy the audience and intended occasion.

Your song should demonstrate your understanding of:

- Vocal and instrumental techniques within popular music.
- How voices and instruments interact within popular music.
- The typical musical characteristics, conventions and features of the specified genres.

Spend time on the suggested listening examples. Consider how composers of popular music (e.g. Queen, Bob Dylan, Adele) use musical elements, including:

- Instruments and timbre (acoustic and electric).
- Pitch and melody (including bass lines and riffs).
- Rhythm and metre – particularly making the rhythm of the words 'flow', if you are writing a song.



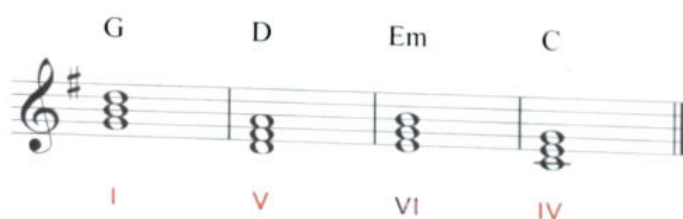
- Tempo.
- Dynamics, expression and articulation.
- Texture – creating the right texture to support a vocal or instrumental line, if appropriate.
- Structure and phrasing – attempting to create something catchy if you are writing a song, but also not being too repetitive by ensuring some change when sections such as the chorus return.
- Harmony and tonality – for example, what are the best chords and keys to go with the words (if you are writing a song), and the best chords and keys to help capture the right atmosphere in an instrumental piece?
- Dynamics, expression and articulation.
- Ornamentation – particularly in any vocal part or guitar part.
- Repetition, ostinato and sequence – for example, in the form of a riff.
- Technology, including amplification and recording/mixing techniques.

Important considerations

You will notice from listening to songs in the suggested listening, as well as from your own experience, that the lyrics in pop and rock songs are very important.

In addition these songs have a strong **hook**, often in the form of a short vocal or instrumental melody. Many hit songs use appealing **chord progressions**, which may even be familiar to us, as many songs use similar progressions. For example, you could listen to the 'Four Chord Song' (Clean Version) by Axis of Awesome. They sing many examples of songs that use the same chords, as exemplified by the distinctive accompaniment to 'Don't Stop Believing' by Journey. Although the original song is in E major, we're looking at the same chord progression in G major.

Chord progression



You could write your own words or find a poem. Once you have decided on your text it is important to consider the character of the song as a whole. This will help to set the right atmosphere in the music. It can dictate the tempo, the instruments used and perhaps even other decisions such as key.

The brief does say 'song' OR 'piece', so you may decide to write an instrumental piece that has no words. It would be advisable to consider the atmosphere and character even without words. Words may help you to do this and you could abandon the words in the final composition.

Where do you start?

You should listen to a whole range of pop and rock songs in order to find out which style (and instrumentation) appeals to you the most, and which style you would be most comfortable writing in.

When listening to a song, consider the following points:

- Notice if there is an introduction and how this contributes to the character of the song. Notice what type of voice is singing the song.
- Notice how the words have been set – are they mostly **syllabic** or are there **melismas**?

MELISMA

A **melisma** is when two or more notes are sung to one syllable. In pop music, melismas often happen at the beginning or end of a phrase, although there are no rules as to when to use a melisma. When just one note is used per syllable, we describe the phrase as **syllabic**.

- How are the accompanying instruments used? Do they just play chords to accompany or do they interact in different ways?
- Do any other instruments join in? What effect do they have on the atmosphere/character of the song?

Which stimulus works best for this brief?

If you have the option of choosing, one of the best stimuli for this brief might be the note patterns. These might become a riff played by your accompaniment instrument or a melody for the vocalist.

Here is an example of the stimulus for a note pattern:



Next is an example of how the note pattern could become the beginning of a melody, with accompanying chords.

Em⁷ C G D

mp

Voice

I want to fly a - way from here.

Piano

p

Alternatively, you could use a **rhythmic stimulus** to form the rhythm of a vocal line or melodic line. It could also be the basis for a riff, a percussion part or another accompaniment element. Consider carefully how this stimulus would change as the song or piece progresses so it is not identical throughout.

There is also a **chord sequence stimulus**. You will need to experiment with how to develop this further to ensure it is not too repetitive in your song. There will also be a **words stimulus**. It will be short and you will need to add more words to ensure the song has sufficient interest.

Assignment

Word painting task

Using the words below mark the ones you feel deserve to be:

- A long note for emphasis.
- Set with a melisma to create some emphasis and interest.
- Placed on a strong beat for emphasis.
- Represented in the music in an interesting way.

Do not let time cheat us then,
Kiss me often and again.
Every time a moment slips,
Let us count it on our lips.

(Adapted from 'Cheating Time', a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox)

Think carefully about your harmony - the chords that you use, and how they fit with the melody. Consider ways of making the chords you choose more expressive to show that you are paying full attention to the words. Consider harmonic rhythm (how quickly the chords change) to ensure that the chords you choose last long enough to support the atmosphere/character of the song or piece.

EXPRESSIVE CHORDS

You can extend triads by adding the 7th or 9th note of the chord. This is a typical way of making chords even more expressive.



WORD PAINTING TASK: EXAMPLE

Play through the following example (or ask a friend or teacher to help). Do you notice any words that have been emphasised, or any melismas that have been included?

Can you continue this song, writing a melody and accompaniment for the remaining words?

Chord diagrams: F, C, G

Voice: Do not let time cheat us then,

Piano: Accompaniment for the voice part.

PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT PATTERNS

If you choose to use a piano for this brief, get to know typical piano patterns by looking at a variety of songs. Slow expressive songs often use repeated chords or broken chords. Upbeat songs may make use of complex, syncopated patterns. Ask a friend who plays the piano or your teacher to demonstrate some of the typical patterns in songs you know.

Using the chord progression above, continue the three different accompaniment patterns below for piano. Each pattern shows the first bar of the progression (on the chord F). Can you add the three remaining bars to each pattern (using chords F, C and G)?

Chord diagram: F

Piano: *mp*

Pattern 1

Pattern 2

Pattern 3

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Developing material

Pop and rock songs can be repetitive in nature but in most cases, elements of the song will change as it progresses:

- More instruments may be added.
- The key may change.
- There may be an additional section between repetitions of the chorus near the end of the song.
- Ornamentation may embellish the final chorus or subsequent verses after the chorus.
- Consider if the introduction will come back at the end in a different way, perhaps as a middle eight (see page 159).

You do not have to use acoustic instruments alone, and you might consider other options for instrumental timbres. Always consider the nature of the event (in this brief an 'informal gig').

How is the composition marked?

Your teacher will assess your composition based on a recording of it (which may be computer generated) and a score or commentary.

When submitting your score do think carefully about the presentation:

- Make sure that what you submit is legible, and that your intentions are clear.
- Make sure your score has a title and tempo marking.
- If submitting a standard notated score, check your notation carefully, especially if you have inputted the notes using a keyboard. Software such as Sibelius can notate exactly what you play but this might not always be the correct notation.

Composition marking criteria

Each composition is awarded a mark out of 24 using the core criteria and a mark out of 6 using the Area of Study criteria.

The core criteria takes into account the quality of ideas, the way they are manipulated, and the structure.

FIND AN AUDIENCE

Share your composition with friends and ask them to listen and reflect on your chosen brief. Let them tell you what they hear. See if what you hoped would be heard by the listener is picked up.

Core criteria

21-24 marks	<p>There is imaginative development of musical ideas that show a strong sense of style and musicality. There is a wide variety and/or advanced use of musical elements which demonstrate a high level of musical understanding.</p> <p>A highly musical, stylish and effective piece that demonstrates excellence.</p> <p><i>These marks go to compositions that show a good manipulation of ideas in unexpected ways rather than simply repeating the stimulus. Many musical elements will be exploited (harmony, melody, rhythm, texture) in interesting ways to achieve marks in this category.</i></p>
17-20 marks	<p>There is stylish development of musical ideas that combine compositional devices effectively. There are a variety of musical elements that show a good level of musical understanding. A musically successful piece that demonstrates a good understanding of stylistic and structural features.</p>
13-16 marks	<p>There is development of musical ideas using a range of compositional devices. There is a range of musical elements that show musical understanding. A musically coherent piece with a well-organised structural framework.</p>
9-12 marks	<p>There is some development of musical ideas using a small range of simple compositional devices. There is some success in the use and combination of a range of musical elements. There is an appropriate sense of structure, showing some coherence and consistency in the use of musical elements.</p> <p><i>This is the first category that recognises compositions that have been structured with some coherence - i.e. an idea is repeated.</i></p>
5-8 marks	<p>The piece has some extension of simple musical ideas, often based around repetition. There is a small range of musical elements and/or devices and these have limited musical impact. There are occasional coherent passages and a limited sense of structure.</p>
1-4 marks	<p>There is no or very limited development of musical ideas. The use of musical elements is very basic. There is little or no sense of coherence or musical structure.</p>

Imaginative use of the set brief

The other six marks come from how imaginatively your composition relates to your chosen brief.

'Imaginatively' is a difficult word to define but think of it being something that surprises your teacher and ultimately the examiner; push yourself to consider the brief deeply and in detail.