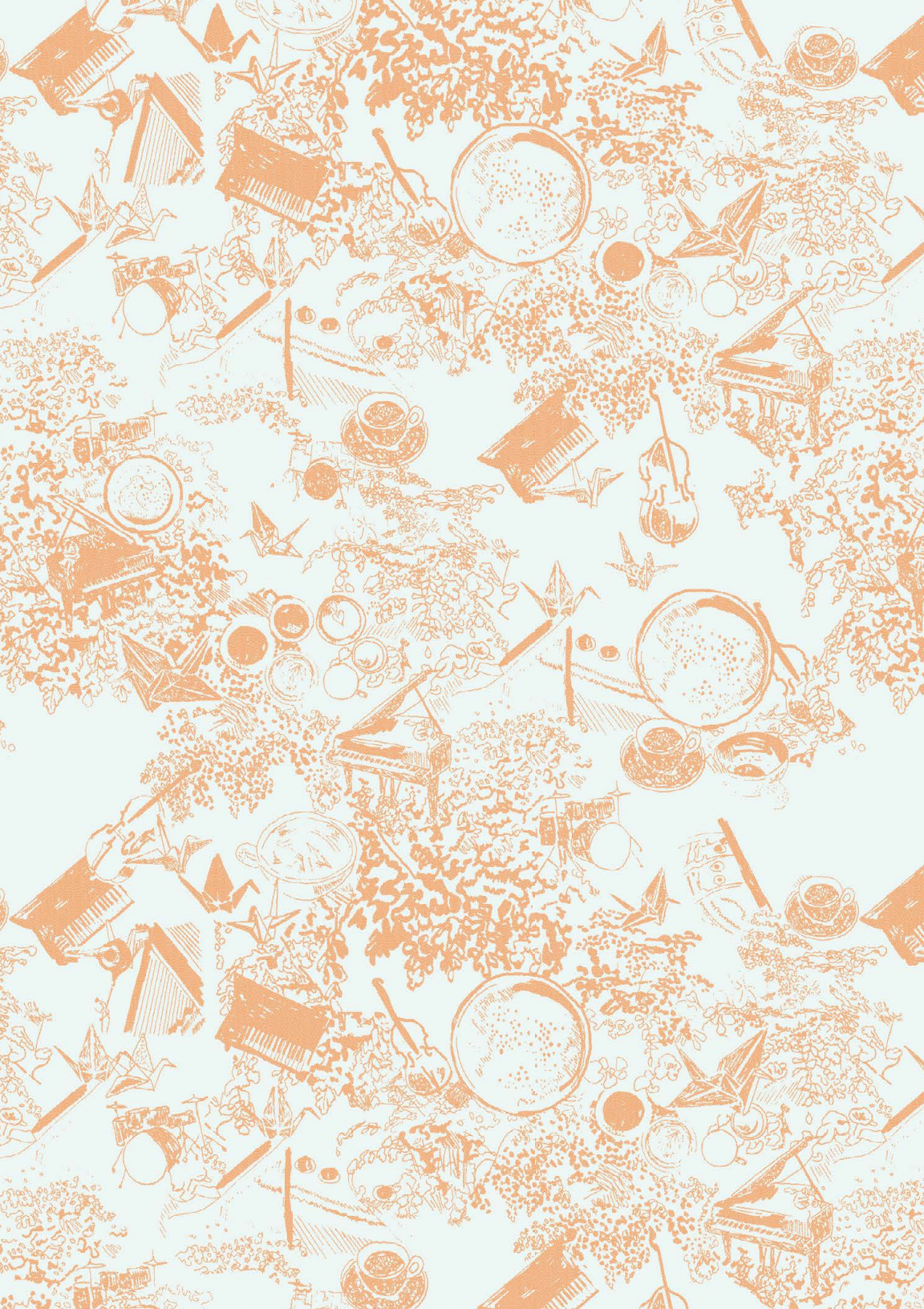


Ben Spooner's

BEGINNER TO COMPOSER IN

14 DAYS

B & H Spooner



Ben Spooner's

BEGINNER TO COMPOSER IN 14 DAYS

B & H Spooner

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THE AUTHORS

Ben Spooner

Creator of Beginner To Composer In 14 Days

Ben is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and creative. He is a piano and drum kit tutor and examiner for Rock School & Yamaha across seven popular instruments. He previously studied MSc in Music & Sound for Film and Games at Hertfordshire University and performed as a session musician with artists at The Roundhouse, Abbey Road, The Edinburgh Festival and other notable venues.
benspooner.co.uk

Hayley J C Spooner

Co-Writer

Hayley is a writer, singer-songwriter, pianist and violinist. She studied BA English Literature and Language at Oxford University and Songwriting at Pointblank Music School, and works today as a copywriter for brands and creative projects.

Ciara Connick – Illustrator

Nicole Ellis – Designer

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INTRODUCTION

MUSINGS FROM A SOMERSET PUNK

Hello, I'm Ben and I want to open this book by telling you why I wrote it. As a boy I decided I wanted to become a musician. No one else in my family played an instrument and I had no access to music lessons, but for some reason I answered the call. I saved my wages and treated myself to table top drum pads. Then hounded my Mum for another few years, until one very special teenage birthday when a drum kit appeared, glowing in our front room. My idol then was Sid Vicious, naturally for an aspiring high school punk, which gives you an idea what my Mum was letting herself in for. I have fond memories of that time, of the bands I formed with friends, of the garage we'd rehearse in. What we lacked in skill we made up for with passion, and the unbridled creativity that flows from teenage pores. We were rock stars. Somerset's finest, perhaps, known only to each other.

Fast-forward to my twenties, to London, where I found myself slogging away in a factory, in a post room and as a chef in a busy cafe. It was the recession and despite having a degree in music it was hard to find work. In one of those roles I led a strike, ever the anarchist. My colleagues and I wanted minimum wage, not an unreasonable request, but it didn't end well. It's a bit of a blur but I have it on good record the boss held scissors to my neck. Needless to say, change was in the air. I was desperate to escape the grind, to work for someone I looked

up to, or failing that work for myself. I was a drummer, not the greatest, but there was an idea at least. I could get better. I moved in with my sister, commandeered the living room in our one bed flat above The Salisbury pub on Green Lanes. Splitting the rent with her meant I could quit one of my three jobs. No prizes for guessing which one. I used my newly reclaimed time to practice, practice, and practice some more.

It probably looked a bit like obsession, but it was a lifeline. A vehicle for my faith in a bigger, better life. In truth it wasn't just the crap jobs and sticky finances that had got me down. There'd been trauma in my childhood, somewhere between the gigs and good times, and the shockwaves were still reverberating through me. Releasing those tremors through cymbals and skins was catharsis. My kit, my daily conversation with it, gave voice to experiences that had never before found words. Then a neighbour complained. I could hardly blame them, and I took the kit down.

I decided to buy a keyboard (and a set of headphones). I'd been curious to learn the piano for years but overnight it had become essential. Having already taught myself the drums I knew I could teach myself the piano, and yet navigating the sea of information proved tricky. Books for beginners tended to be aimed at kids, meanwhile books for adults

assumed prior knowledge that I didn't have - so many technical and theoretical terms. The thing that kept me going was curiosity. Not so much curiosity in the concepts themselves, but in how I could apply them. I'm a creative person (I believe we all are) and the act of composing my own music has always been what's spurred me on to acquire more theoretical know-how. Just as I'd previously played around on the drums, I would now sit and noodle on the piano, allowing interesting patterns and melodies to unfold, and turning them into pieces.

There's a magic to composing. It's surprising what's inside of you, surprising to hear it transmuted into rhythm and song. It can surprise others too. My partner has both laughed and cried at pieces I've created, at my riotous basslines and haunting musical reportage. It was essential for me that any book I wrote about learning an instrument emphasised the act of tuning inwards, of experimenting intuitively with what you find there, and channelling it through the keys. I want others to experience the thrill of direct contact with their innate creative nature, to become curious about what they could manifest, whether that's a ten second riff, a pop song or a symphony. Since writing this book I've learned that curiosity is in fact scientifically proven to enhance learning. It sounds like common sense and yet it's uncommon to find

educational programmes that put curiosity front and centre where it belongs. In 2001, researchers Alberti and Witryol found a positive correlation between curiosity and intellectual performance among students completing a laboratory task. They also identified a positive relationship between the students' intellectual performance and the curiosity of their teacher. Curiosity is infectious it seems, but I digress...

Back at my flat, between shifts at the factory and the cafe, I was gradually getting the hang of the keyboard. With hindsight, this was also the period I learned discipline, how to take responsibility for myself and my prospects. When I listen to how other people talk about their lives I can always tell whether they've had that realisation yet or not, the one that goes 'I'm in charge here', 'I decide the quality of my life'. When I sense that someone has that lesson still to come, I can't help but wax lyrical about the benefits of self-tuition - the act of helping oneself - in any field of study or area of life. I get fanatical imparting pearls of wisdom: the confidence they'll gain, the empowerment they'll feel. No one needs to suffer life and when that penny finally drops, you're free. I tell that to anyone who'll listen.

Writing this today I'm a drum and piano tutor, teaching all styles from classical and jazz to rock and pop. I'm also an examiner for music

boards like RSL and Yamaha, and a composer creating original material across a range of projects. On the performance side, I've had the privilege of touring the UK with a number of bands and artists, immersing myself in a wide range of genres including hip-hop, folk and contemporary jazz. I've come a long way since my days in the factory, but my reason for writing this book is not to lay the foundations for your satisfying musical career. Indeed many of my readers are adults, already invested in work of a very different nature. Instead I want to persuade you that playing an instrument is a life enhancing gift you give to yourself, and that following your own curiosity and creative impulses is the fastest, most enjoyable way to progress. An instrument is a way to meet people, like the dear friend I got to know through playing together in a band, or my partner who I first met at an audition. It's a way to relax, a form of meditation to shake off the day and connect more deeply with yourself. It's also a vehicle for expression, a medium of communication from one heart to another, a dialogue from soul to soul. Music is a metamorphosis of the raw stuff of human experience. Since we're all human, we can all create something beautiful. If you're lucky, you could create something sublime.

So there you have it. The benefits of learning an instrument are just too damn good to be

bestowed exclusively on the young, and despite what you may think it's not too late to start now, whatever age you happen to be. So what are you waiting for? Give yourself the gift of learning the piano, starting today. I also urge you not to wait until you're 'good' to start experimenting with your own musical ideas. In fact this book won't let you, you'll have your own composition in just fourteen days. Adults are terrible perfectionists, painfully aware when we sound bad and comically prone to comparing ourselves with the greats (even on our first go at making music). 'An expert...' says Nobel Prize winner Niels Bohr, '...is a man who has made all the mistakes which can be made in a narrow field'. I wholeheartedly agree. Accidents have led to some of the most original and innovative compositions out there, so first and foremost approach this book with the intention to have a good time. Making good music will naturally follow, I've no doubt.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

You better believe it, in fourteen days you'll have your very own composition, even if you've never played the piano before. You will start by learning the fundamentals of music and begin improvising and unlocking your innate creativity. Lessons are sequential, so be sure to work through each one in order, taking notes on your worksheet as directed.

Your **Worksheet** is where you'll gradually build your composition, before translating it to a professional lead sheet.

Your **Lead Sheet** is a clear articulation of your music which can be read and played by other musicians.

As your piece becomes established you will encounter more ways to develop your composition, like techniques to help you refine your melody, and more interesting patterns for your left hand.

Whenever you see the instruction **Time to choose** you'll need to pick the 'ingredients' for the music you're about to make. There are only three kinds of ingredients: notes, chords and rhythms - that's it. **Time to choose** lays bare these underlying elements and structures of music, peeling back the composer's curtain if you will.

Time to choose is also designed to push you, to coax you out of your comfort zone little by little so that progress is inevitable. You might choose something you're not yet familiar with for example, or something you haven't practised for months. Although we typically resist challenge and change, dipping your toe into uncharted waters is the best way to learn.



Throughout this book you'll find exercises that I'll ask you to try for just one minute. It might not seem like a lot, but in my experience bitesize practice is the way to go. Even when a task seems daunting, you can always manage a minute, and more often than not things are never as hard as we think they are going to be. I like to tell my students, the point of exercises is not to succeed every time. Success is simply doing the exercise, getting from beginning to end. I also encourage repetition, multiple passes at each exercise until you feel like you've had a breakthrough. Some aspect of the exercise begins to feel like second nature. Repetition isn't sexy but it sure as hell works.

You can find videos demonstrating the exercises in this book on my YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/benspooner

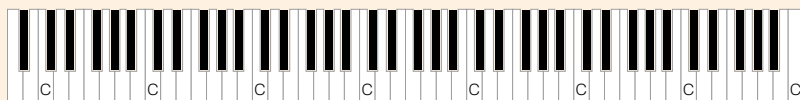
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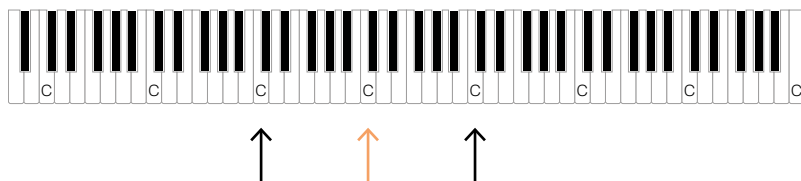
EBONY & IVORY
EXPLORING THE NOTES
OF THE PIANO

C notes

At first glance the keys of the piano look complex, but chances are you can already see a pattern emerging. Black keys are in groups of twos and threes. You can use these groups as signposts, to navigate your way to any other note with ease. I'll demonstrate with the note C. C's are always located to the left of black key pairs. How many C's are there on your piano? Take a moment to work it out.



What's the difference between all of the notes we call C? The answer is pitch. Some sound high, some sound low. Others sound somewhere in between. The C in the middle of the piano is called middle C. The distance between a C and the next C to its left or right is called an octave (8ve).



You're going to try an exercise now to familiarise yourself with all of the notes of the piano. You can use any finger you like, on your right or left hand. Don't be afraid to try a few or all of your fingers. Each time you play a note say it out loud, to drill the names of notes.

- Play the first C above middle C.
- The first C below middle C.
- All of the C's ascending.
- All of the C's descending.
- All of the C's on the piano in any order.
- Create a short excerpt of music using only these C's.
- Repeat your excerpt.
- Perform it (even if that's just to the cat).

White notes

Next find all of the F's. F's are always to the left of black keys grouped in three. Then find all of the D's, always in between black note pairs. Now all the A's...

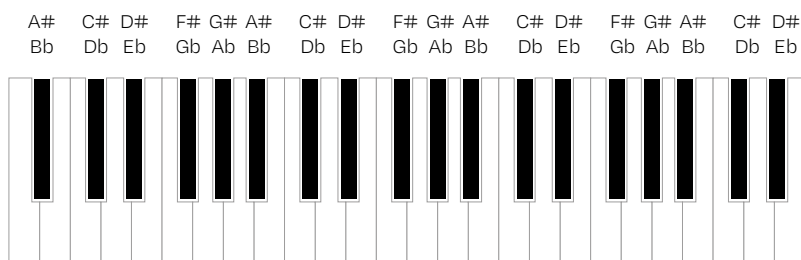


- Repeat the bullet points above, this time with each of the white notes - A, B, D, E, F, G.

Black notes

Time for the black notes. Did you know black notes have two names? When we move from C to the next key up, we call that black note C sharp (C# for short). When we move from D to the next key down, we call that same black note D flat (aka Db). Can you find all the C#'s? All the Db's? (Gotcha, they're the same keys). How about all the F#'s? The Gb's? Now you're getting it.

- Repeat the bullet points above with each of the black notes.

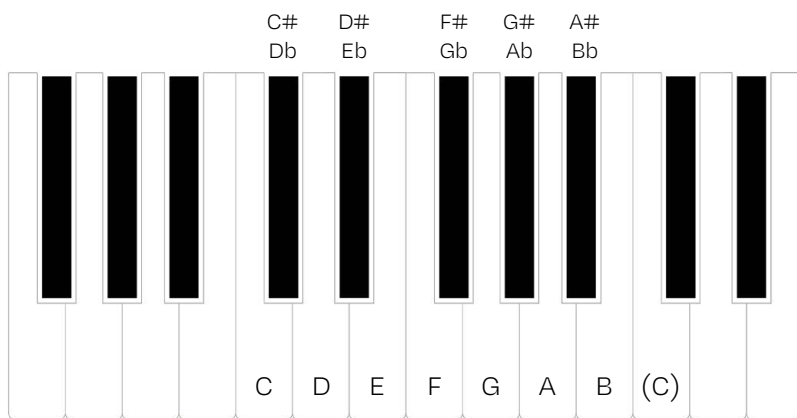


A rose by any other name

C# is the enharmonic equivalent of Db. An enharmonic equivalent is simply a note that shares the same pitch as another note, though it bears a different name. Big words for a deceptively simple concept.

C chromatic scale

Play every note, white and black, from one C up to the next C (one octave). You can use either hand and any of your fingers. Think exploration rather than perfection and say every note you play out loud: sharps on the way up, flats on the way down.



Can you do two octaves? How about four? Notice how every note is the same distance apart, the smallest step possible in western music (things get a little more interesting in the East but that's a story for another day). The distance you've identified is called a semitone (S). Playing semitones in order like you've been doing is called a chromatic scale. Let's break that word down. Chromatic indicates movement in semitones, while scale just means ordered notes.

- Play the C chromatic scale ascending then descending (one octave).
- Two octaves.
- Four octaves. See how fast you can play it accurately.

Time to choose: When you're confident that you know the names of all twelve notes of the piano it's time to choose the starting point of your piece, your 'root' note (R), your anchor. If this is your first time reading this book, you may want to use a white note as your root, or use C like I do in the example below. If you've taken this journey with me before or have some experience with the piano already, choose any note, white or black.

Turn to your worksheet. Write in your root note under R on the Major Key table. If you choose a black note, write its flat (not sharp) name. Here I've used the example C.

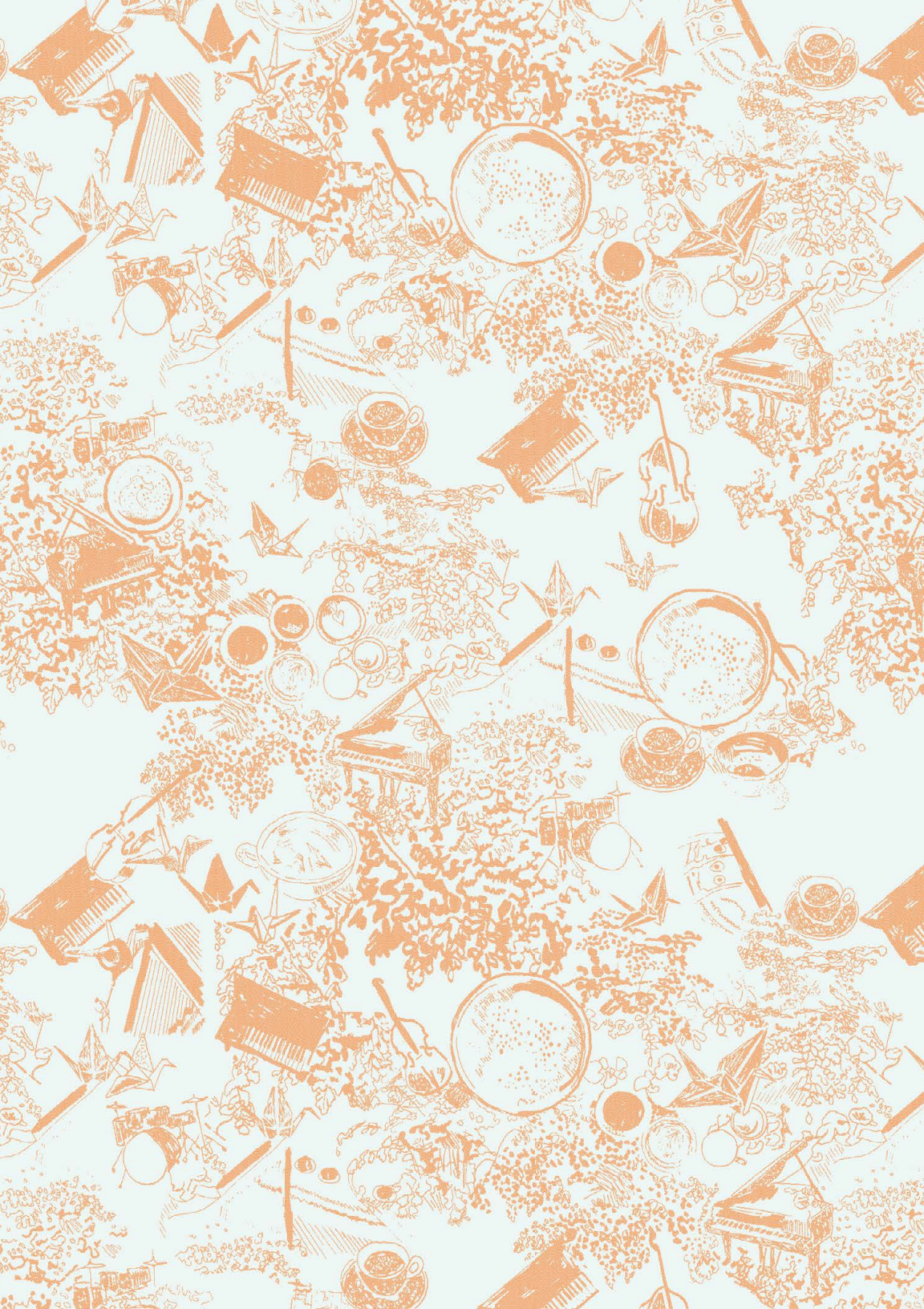
MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C							
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

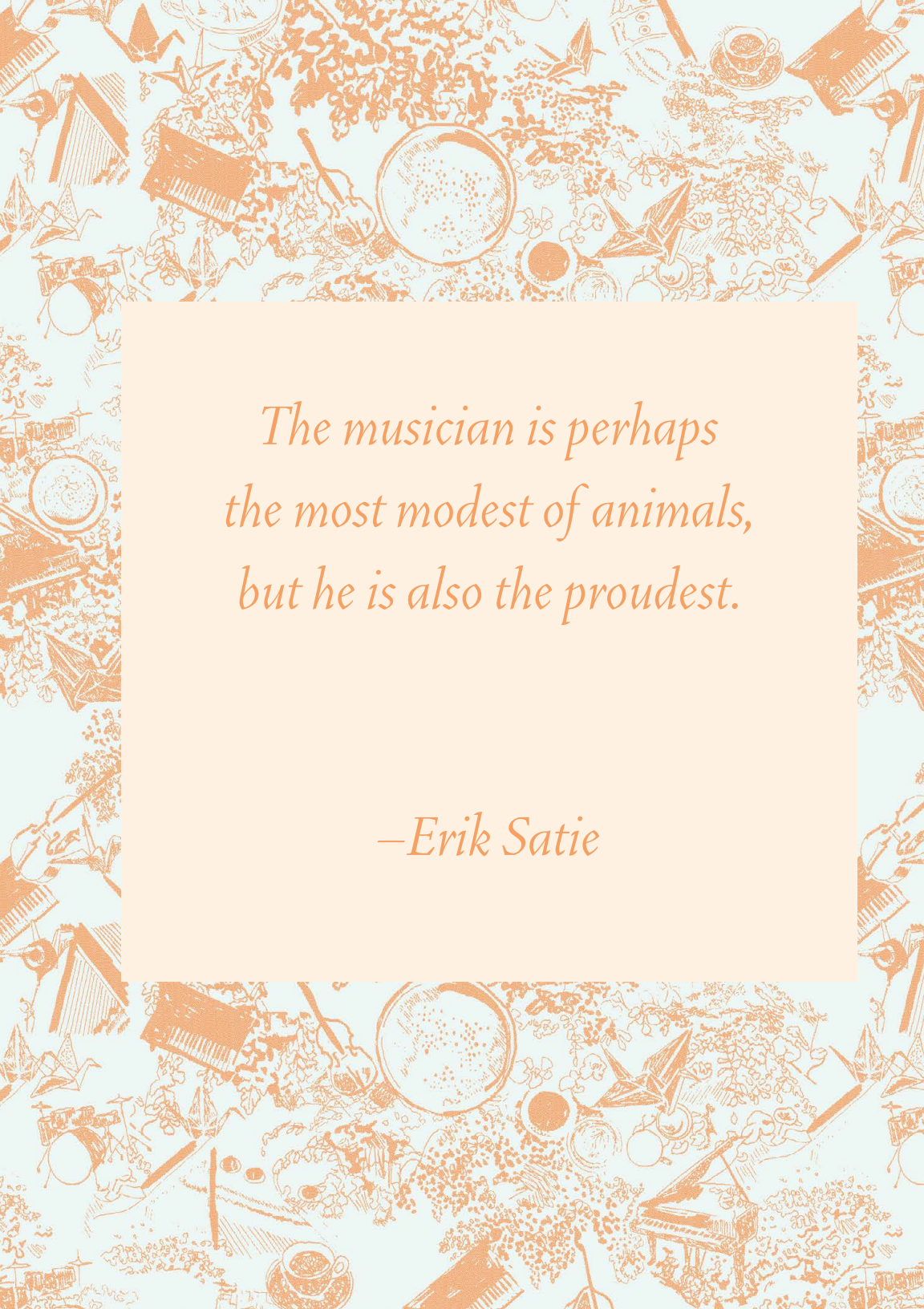


This is where the fun begins. Improvise for one whole minute using your root note. No cutting it short. You'd be surprised how creative you can be with just one ingredient. Allow your imagination to flow, don't worry about what's coming out. Many great songs started with a happy accident. Need a bit of help getting started? Here are some suggestions for you.

- Use just your right hand, just your left or alternate between the two.
- Play hands together.
- Switch fingers each time you play a new note. Don't forget the little finger!
- Try playing one note at a time. Now two together, now three.
- Explore every inch of your instrument. The higher end, or register as it is formally known. Now the lower register.
- Use your right hand to play high notes and your left to play low notes. Or the reverse.
- Vary the tempo at which you play. Tempo means speed: fast, moderate or slow.
- Add dynamics: how softly you play, how loudly.
- Try expressing different emotions, like anger or sleepiness.
- Try touching the sustain pedal below your right foot. How does this alter the mood? Does it enhance it or take something away?

Time to choose: When your time is up choose another note to improvise with for one minute. You can repeat this as many times as you like.





*The musician is perhaps
the most modest of animals,
but he is also the proudest.*

—Erik Satie

DAY

si

SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM

UNDERSTANDING SIMPLE RHYTHM








Pulse & rhythm

The pulse or beat in music is at fixed points in time, like a regular heartbeat or a ticking clock. If you clap along to the seconds of a clock you'll be establishing sixty fixed points over time, or to put this in more musical terms, sixty beats per minute (60bpm).

Rhythm then, is the word we use to describe everything that happens between the fixed points, different combinations of long and short sounds and spaces.

Rhythmic values

Here are three common rhythmic values for you to explore. At the top is the rhythmic value that is longest in length: the whole note, which is worth four beats. On the next row is the rhythmic value that is half the length: the half note, worth two beats. At the bottom is the value that is half the length again. Notice how every row always adds up to four beats.

RHYTHMIC VALUES				
Name	Beat 1	Beat 2	Beat 3	Beat 4
Whole note (4 beats)				
Half note (2 beats)				
Quarter note (1 beat)				

Bars

In music we divide pieces up into bars to help us keep track of where we are. A bar commonly contains two, three, four or six beats (more in complex pieces). To keep things simple, imagine a four beat bar.

The Rhythmic Values table above shows you the rhythms that can fit into four beats. Many different combinations of the three common rhythmic values are possible.

Tap your foot to the second hand of the clock, counting 1, 2, 3, 4 / 1, 2, 3, 4 / 1, 2, 3, 4 to the pulse (60bpm). Now clap each row of the table in turn, whilst your foot keeps a steady pulse. Don't pause between the rows:

- Whole notes (clap only on beat 1).

- Half notes (clap on beats 1 & 3).
- Quarter notes (clap on beats 1, 2, 3, 4).

Repeat this exercise but instead of clapping, play the root note you chose on Day One. Play it anywhere over the piano, but always keep the rhythm and pulse intact.

Whenever you try an exercise in this book, repeat it multiple times, *only* calling it a day when you can complete it without mistakes. It's easy to skip over this advice, but repetition is the fastest way to ingrain new concepts and develop the muscle memory that will stand you in good stead.

Turn to your worksheet. It's time to create an interesting rhythmic phrase.

Rules

Some simple rules will help you get to grips with the possibilities:

- Whole notes = Four beats. They can only be placed on beat one of a four beat bar, because whole notes last for all four beats of the bar.
- Half notes = Two beats. They can only be placed on beats one, two or three.
- Quarter notes = One beat. They can be placed on any beat.


Time to choose: Select a rhythmic value for beat one. Write it here on your worksheet, where I have used a whole note as an example.

A													
	o												

Now choose the next rhythmic value. Check it fits into the bar (refer to the rules above). Continue choosing rhythmic values until you have a complete four bar phrase, like the example one here.

A													
	o				o				o			♪	♪

- Clap your phrase from the beginning to the end. Do this along to the second hand of the clock (60bpm) to keep the pulse stable. Tap your foot to help you keep a steady pulse.
- Repeat this until it becomes not just comfortable, but easy.
- Now tap your foot twice as fast (120bpm). Can you clap your phrase along to this new pulse?
- Now try 240bpm! This is twice as fast again.

 Improvise for one minute, putting together your rhythmic phrase and the root note you chose on Day One. Here's some ideas to get things rolling.

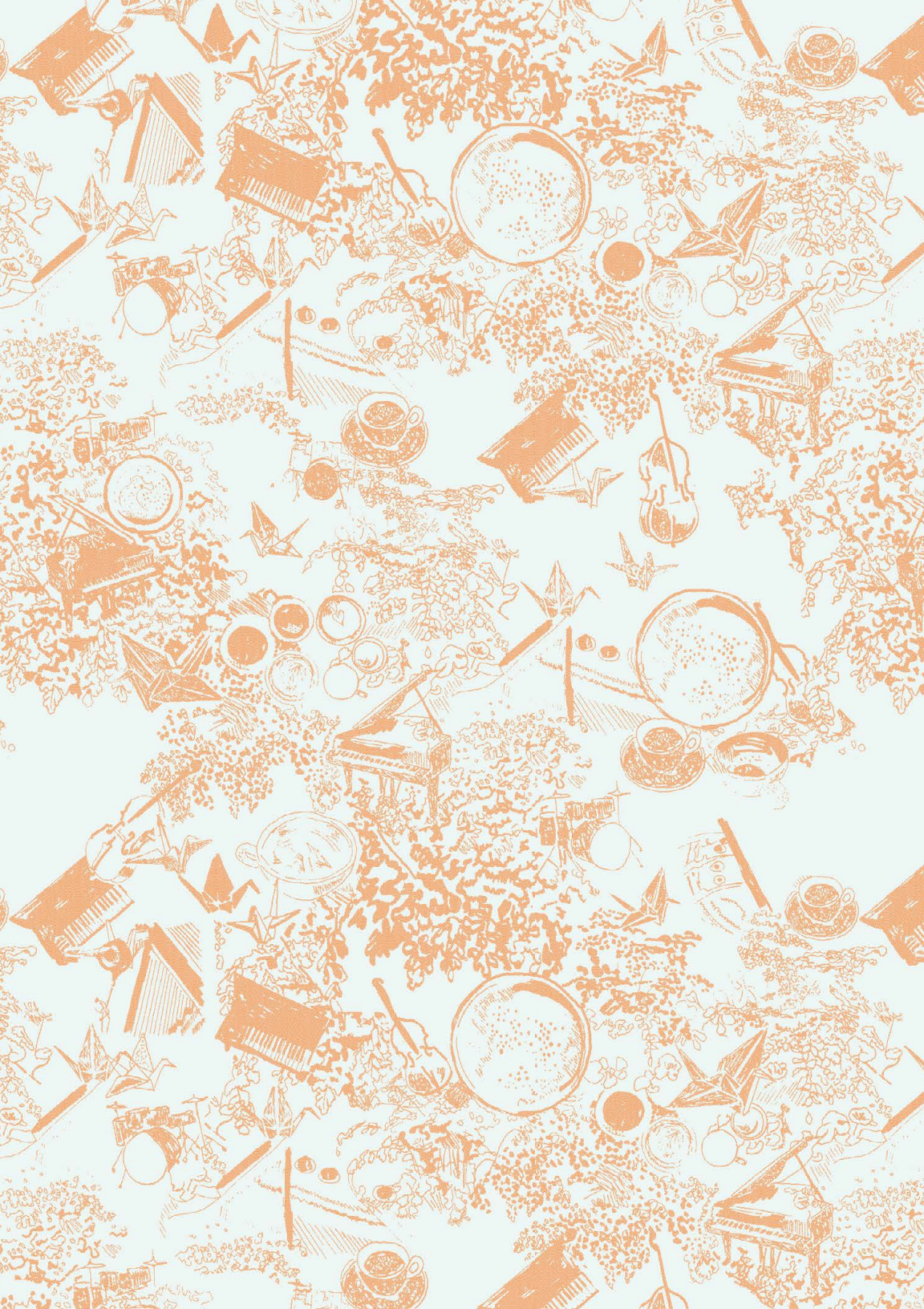
- Play hands together and apart.
- Play with one hand in the centre of the piano, the other in the higher/lower *register* (remember that word?)
- Play loudly with one hand, while the other plays softly (remember the word *dynamics*?)
- Try expressing different emotions.
- Try at 60bpm. Then try at 120bpm.

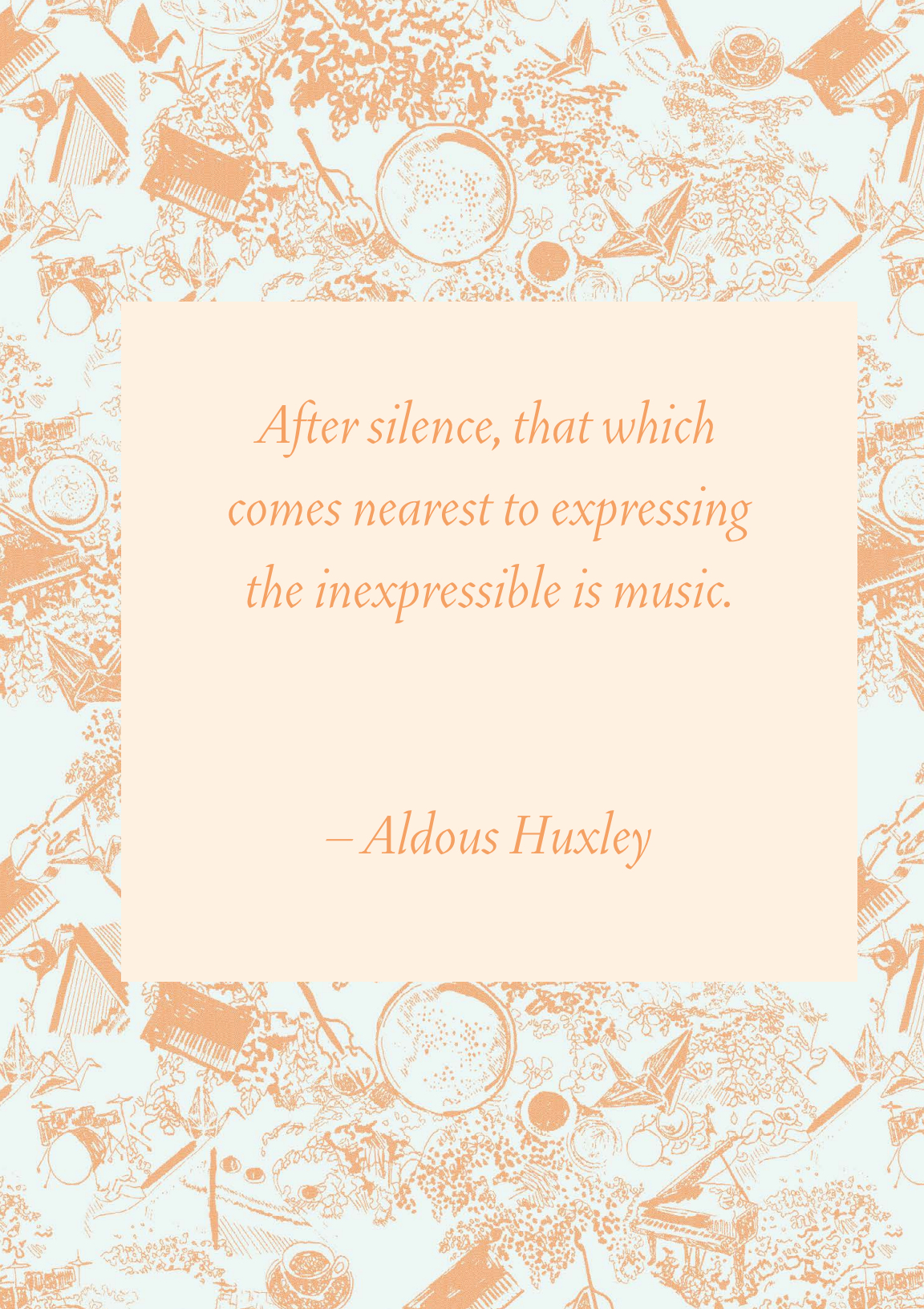
Now choose an excerpt from your improvisation to focus on. Try to make your root notes flow from one to the other. Think smooth. Repeat your excerpt until it becomes effortless.

Rhythm helps your two hips move

Struggling to spell 'rhythm'? You're not the only one. Just remember:

Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move





*After silence, that which
comes nearest to expressing
the inexpressible is music.*

—Aldous Huxley

DAY



GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR TOM PLAYING IN A MAJOR KEY

Key

If you've ever watched live jazz music, then you've probably seen musicians conferring what key they're going to play in before they start a new piece. 'This one's in the key of Bb' you'll hear, or 'this one's in Eb'. Think of keys as the 'home' of the piece. Each home features a particular group of notes that gives it its distinctive feel. A piece may wander off to incorporate other notes for a bit of variation, but the majority of the time is spent in the home key. Playing with the original group of notes that is. There are major keys and minor keys e.g. the key of C major, the key of C minor. Compositions in major keys sound happy and bright. Compositions in a minor key sound sombre.

Major keys

To work out the notes of a major key there is a simple formula: RTTSTTTS.

As you know, R stands for root note. S stands for semitone, the smallest distance between two notes (you learned about semitones on Day One). T is new. It stands for tone, a fractionally larger distance between two notes. The higher note is just two semitones away from the lower note. Alternatively, think of it as skipping a semitone.

Example: C major

Here I have used the major key formula to find the notes of the C major key. A piece in the key of C major would be made of these notes most of the time.

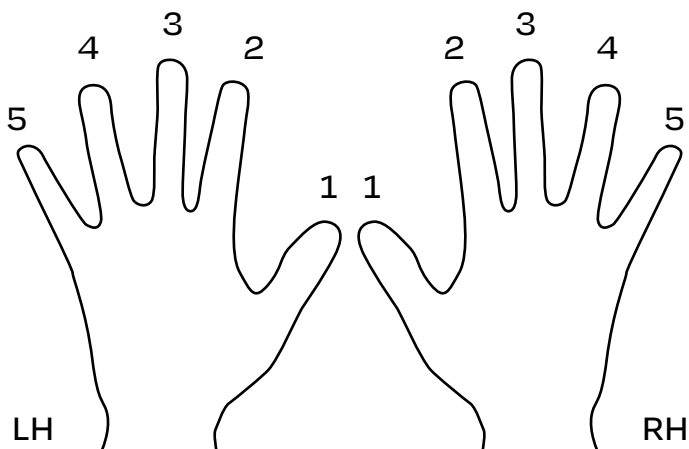
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

Cover the major key formula and memorise it. Make sure you can say it aloud several times without looking before you continue.

Major scales

When the notes of a major key are played in order we call it a major scale and the easiest way to play them is with finger patterns. When you see musicians playing at lightning speed, eyes closed, they're relying on their muscle memory of patterns practised and perfected over years. You can learn them too. First assign numbers to your fingers and thumbs. Thumbs

are always one. Index fingers two. Middle fingers three and so on. Notice how the hands and numbers are mirror images of each other.



Here's the right hand (RH) finger pattern for C major (one octave):

R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5

RH FINGER PATTERNS FOR MAJOR SCALES (1 8VE)

R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S	Summary of black notes
C 1	D 2	E 3	F 1	G 2	A 3	B 4	C 5	-

Sharp major keys

When you start a major scale on these white notes, the black notes you play are called sharp.

G 1	A 2	B 3	C 1	D 2	E 3	F# 4	G 5	F#
D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	F# C#
A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A	F# C# G#
E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E	F# C# G# D#
B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B	F# C# G# D# A#

Flat major keys

When you start a major scale on these notes, the black notes you play are all called flats.

F 1	G 2	A 3	Bb 4	C 1	D 2	E 3	F 4	Bb
Bb 2	C 1	D 2	Eb 3	F 1	G 2	A 3	Bb 4	Bb Eb
Eb 2	F 1	G 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	C 1	D 2	Eb 3	Bb Eb Ab
Ab 2	Bb 3	C 1	Db 2	Eb 3	F 1	G 2	Ab 3	Bb Eb Ab Db
Db 2	Eb 3	F 1	Gb 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	C 1	Db 2	Bb Eb Ab Db Gb
Gb 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	Cb 1	Db 2	Eb 3	F 4	Gb 5	Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb

Major keys that start on sharp notes

Remember enharmonic equivalents?

That's right, a note that shares the same pitch as another note, though it bears a different name e.g. Db and C#. All of the major keys that start on flat notes can also be written enharmonically, however it is only common to see Db and Gb major written in their enharmonic form.

Db major: Db Eb F Gb Ab Bb C Db

C# major: C# D# E# F# G# A# B# C#

Did you notice how E# and B# are white notes in C# major?

Gb major: Gb Ab Bb Cb Db Eb F Gb

F# major: F# G# A# B C# D# E# F#

Did you notice how Cb is a white note in Gb major? And how E# and B# are white notes in F# major?

Turn to your worksheet. The root note you chose on Day One will form your major key. Write the notes of your key here under the major scale formula RTTSTTTS.

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

Now add the RH finger pattern for the corresponding major scale.

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

Play this major scale ascending and descending on a loop, paying close attention to the finger pattern, as it's this pattern which will enable you to make the scale (and in time the

beautiful melody you're going to write) sound smooth. Aim for even delivery rather than quickly rushing through.

- Once you've got the hang of it try playing your scale as quarter notes, along to the second hand of the clock (60bpm).
- Then try quarter notes at 120bpm. (That's two notes to every second of the clock).
- Finally, can you repeat with quarter notes at 240bpm? (That's four notes to every second of the clock).



Now without any specific tempo or rhythm, improvise with the notes of your major key all over the piano for one minute. When you're confident playing in the lower, middle and higher registers, bring in your rhythmic phrase from Day Two (the four bar phrase on your worksheet), setting the pulse at 60bpm. Using the notes of your major key still, loop your rhythmic phrase, experimenting with different combinations of notes each time. Here's a little inspiration for you...

- Start with single notes in your left and right hand, before playing two or more notes together.
- Try starting in a high register and slowly descend as you improvise, before ascending again to end the minute.
- Try putting your hands at either end of

the piano and work towards the middle, then back out again.

- Try playing root notes in a low register with your left hand (LH) while your RH moves around freely. Can you manage two root notes an octave apart with your LH?

What part of your improvisation did you enjoy playing the most? Choose that excerpt and focus on playing smoothly and beautifully. Repeat your excerpt until it becomes effortless.

**SEXY
CURVY
BAS**

'You've got to be joking' she said, not so much a question as a statement, as she opened the living room door and clocked the shiny six foot bass obstructing the feature wall. 'It's sexy..' I offered up, '...it brings the room to life!' Commentary on home style never failed to rile Hayley up. I had a knack for delivering it right after she'd spent an hour reorganising a shelf, changing it up to include 'more negative space' between the books and trinkets. 'Ben, you can't play the bass?' Now this one was a question, she was genuinely confused. The answer was obvious. 'I'll learn'.

As a self-taught drummer and pianist, the prospect of learning something new never phases me. The only thing standing between me and my vision of delivering a smooth, jazzy bass line was a steady stream of work. Accept that fact and the rest is not so bad. I grabbed the bass and walked it up the garden path. A few minutes later I'd succeeded in squeezing it through the music room doors, *double* doors may I add. I marvelled at my new companion and its autumn coloured glow. I especially loved the snail shell at the top, carved from a fist of wood that held on tightly to the strings. I noticed how close it all was to the ceiling, and remembered this bass was on loan.

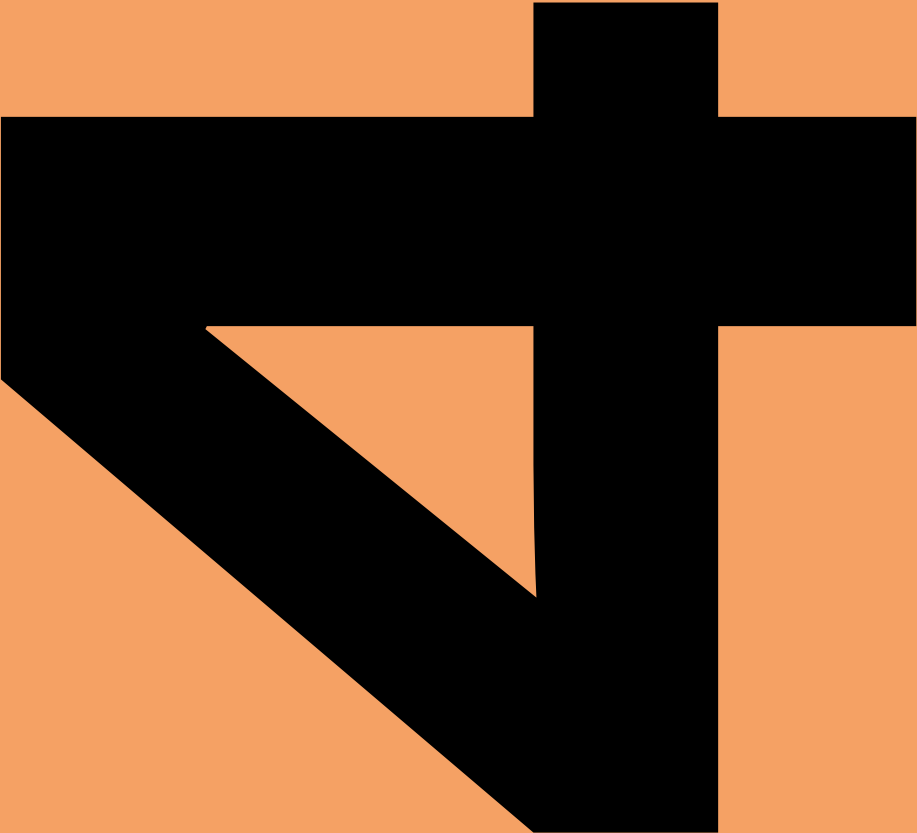
Over the weeks that followed I tried my hand at writing and playing simple parts. Some days I'd notice heat in my fingertips, a rawness

setting in, and I'd stop and take a break. Other days I ignored the tingling sensation, and paid the price in blisters all that night. Gradually the positions of many different notes became second nature; that and I got better at bending them in tune whenever I initially missed the mark. I challenged myself to finish writing one of the pieces I had on the go for voice, keys and bass. Then I got a phone call from a friend who was putting on a gig online, an evening of music to raise money for the NHS. It was the second national lockdown since the outbreak of Covid-19. Could my piece be ready in time?

I twisted Hayley's arm. The whole thing made her nervous but she let me sign us up; a duo with Hayley on voice and keys, and my debut on bass. Practice was a tense affair. Hayley's a perfectionist and I was still off-key, yet somehow I was sure I'd get there by the night. Deadlines are the rocket fuel we sometimes need, I truly believe this. One time running through, I noticed how patterns I'd ingrained over years spent playing drums were influencing my bass lines. Bubbling, driving rhythms baked into my tissues came flowing through the hourglass shaped box. It was this moment that birthed my spirited enquiry into multi-instrumentalism, essays on the theme, and the rapid expansion of my instrument collection - across every room in the house.

On the night of the gig we moved a sweetheart plant from the bathroom to the music room, followed by a yucca and a palm. Next we shook the pretty woven rug and moved it into view, took our seats and counted ourselves in: 'one', 'two', silent three and four. At the end of our performance Hayley smiled and I watched her shoulders drop an inch or two. We waved into the camera and registered the clapping coming through back at us. Afterwards my stepdad sent a text, a few short lines in praise of my technique. It took me by surprise, he's a tough nut to crack. I popped a nice prosecco, caught the cork and marked it with the date. 'Let's treat ourselves...' said Hayley, '...that went well!' My thoughts began to wander, minutes passed. Something about a vase and post-pandemic spa day drifted through the air between us. 'I've got it!' I proclaimed. 'Let's buy a xaphoon.'

DAY



TAKE YOUR PROTEIN PILLS & PUT YOUR HELMET ON

MAJOR KEY CHORDS

Three common chords

You've probably already noticed how some groups of notes sound great together, while others just don't. Here's why... There are relationships between notes. Some notes are well-matched, some are unstable. The quicker you get to know which ones make beautiful music, you'll do just that. All music, from nursery rhymes to complex jazz, can be boiled down to three common groups of notes we call chords. To be even more precise they are triad chords, reflecting the fact they are made up of three notes.

Major chords: Sound happy.

Minor chords: Sad.

Diminished chords: Dark and edgy.

All that's needed to play these chords is a simple formula.

THREE COMMON CHORDS		
Chord Name	Formula	
Major	R, 4, 3	Root note. Add the note four semitones above. Add the note three semitones above that.
Minor	R, 3, 4	Root note. Add the next note three semitones above. Add the note four semitones above that.
Diminished	R, 3, 3	Root note. Add the note three semitones above. Add the note three semitones above that.

Cover the table and say the three formulas back to yourself. This is another one of those instructions that’s easy to gloss over. Don’t!

Now make a C major chord using the R, 4, 3 formula:

C E G

R 4 3

Turn it into a C minor chord, noticing how the E simply moves down a semitone:

C **Eb** G

R 3 4

Finally, the C diminished chord. This time the G moves down one semitone:

C **Eb** **Gb**

R 3 3

See how only one note changes as you progress from major, to minor, to diminished. Whatever your root note, this is always the case. The shape your hand makes feels slightly different for different major, minor and diminished chords (so you can hit the black notes required) but the fact is all major, minor and diminished chords are constructed using the same formula - a formula that only changes by one note each time.

Root skip skip

Notice how the C minor chord is written as C, **Eb**, G. Not C, **D#**, G even though Eb and D# are enharmonic equivalents of each other. It's easy to work out which alphabetical name to choose when you know how. The trick is to write your root note, skip a letter, write the next letter, skip, write. Like this:

C major	C D E F G
C minor	C D Eb F G
C diminished	C D Eb F Gb
A major	A B C# D E
A minor	A B C D E
A diminished	A B C D Eb

When you play chords in really low registers they often sound muddy, like a noise rather

than something more harmonious. In the higher registers chords can sound too shrill. Take a moment to experiment and find registers that sound satisfying. Use either hand. Both hands perhaps.

Time to choose: Select a root note and create its major chord, then its minor chord, then its diminished chord. Then reverse back through the minor, ending on the major. Repeat this a few times to learn the three forms of several chords.

How many major chords are there? There are twelve in total, one for each note of the piano. How many minor chords do you think there are? Again, there are twelve in total. Getting to know your chords is a crucial step in developing your piano playing.

The chords of major keys

When you're playing in a key, like you're going to for your composition, you need to know which chords belong to that key. Not all chords belong to every key. Here's how to work out which chords belong. Play the major scale of the key you've decided on for your composition. For each note there is a corresponding chord. These are the chords that belong to your key:

R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
MAJ	min	min	MAJ	MAJ	min	dim	MAJ

Notice UPPERCASE is used for major chords and lowercase for minor. It's a useful convention to help you take in the chord type more quickly. So is using Roman numerals:

MAJ min min MAJ MAJ min dim MAJ
I iim iiim IV V vim viio I

UPPERCASE Roman numerals are for major chords. Lowercase for minor, with a small m. A small o indicates that the chord is diminished.

Example: C major chords

R T T S T T T S
C Dm Em F G Am Bo C
 I iim iiim IV V vim viio I

Add the lowercase m's and a small o to the notes of your major key table on your worksheet. This transforms the notes into the correct chords that belong to your key. Use the bottom row to help you.

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bo	C
1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

- Run through all the chords that belong to your key, with your RH then your LH.
- Can you do hands together (HT)?

Time to choose: Select one chord from your major key e.g. I, iim, iiim.



Improvise with the notes of this chord for one minute, plenty long enough to get your creative juices flowing. Before you look at any of my suggestions below, try experimenting on your own terms. You might find you don't need my suggestions to fill one minute. See how long you can stay in the driving seat.

- Play a combination of notes from your chord at the same time.
- Alternate your RH then your LH. Then alternate at a different speed.
- Play your RH and LH at the same time.
- Play the root note in the lower half of the piano (the bass) while improvising with the other notes of the chord in the upper half of the piano (the treble).
- Can you put together the notes of your chord with your rhythmic phrase (the phrase on your worksheet)?

Time to choose: When your time is up choose another chord to improvise with for one minute. You can repeat this as many times as you like.

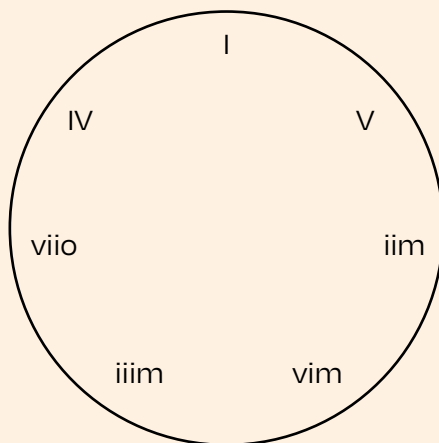
DAY

LO

CAN YOU HEAR ME MAJOR TOM? THE MAJOR KEY CIRCLE

Strong chord movements

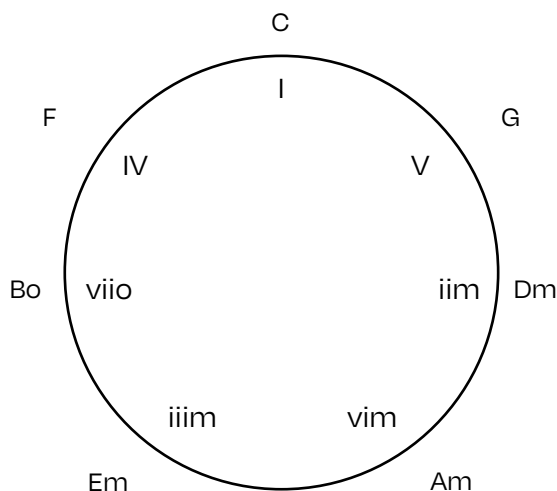
Last lesson you learned that different chords belong to different keys and identified the chords that belong to the key that's on your worksheet. Now you're going to find out the strongest way to move between these chords, the best sequences to make your chords sound musical. This is where the major key circle comes in.



Wherever you start on this circle, move to the next chord (clockwise or anti-clockwise) to create the

most natural sounding chord progression. Moving clockwise gives the impression of a sunrise, a feeling of opening. Moving anti-clockwise is more like a sunset, an ending.

Example: C major circle



Fill in the circle on your worksheet with the chords that belong to your chosen key.

- Use your RH to play the chords as whole notes, anticlockwise all the way around the circle. Start and finish with the root chord.
- Now use your LH.
- Now try playing the major scale written on your worksheet with your RH while you keep the LH chords going (whole notes). Play the scale with the finger pattern and as quarter notes, twice through. That's ascending and descending, without pausing


at the top or bottom, or hitting the same note twice. When you play the scale twice through like this, it gives you the perfect amount of time to cover all the chords on the major key circle with your LH - starting and finishing with the root chord.

- Practise this exercise until you can play it on a continuous loop with no mistakes, to a steady pulse like 60bpm or 120bpm. You know you've really got it down when you can play it *and* hold a conversation. Go on, give it a go.

Students always love this exercise. It's satisfying to play, but more than that, it gives you a glimpse behind the composer's curtain. It reveals the underlying chord movements, the enchanting alchemy that makes music sound musical.

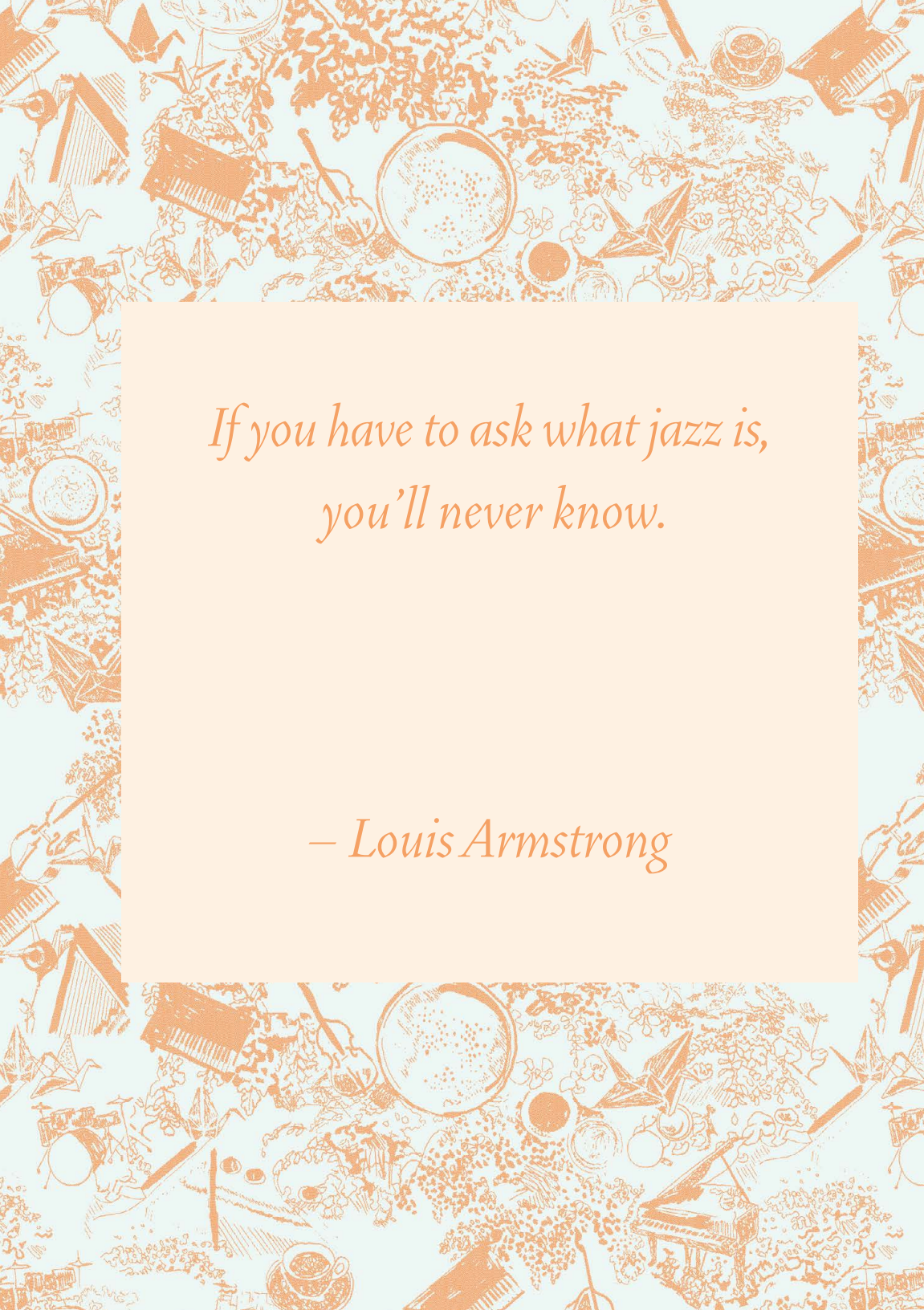
Time to choose: It's time to up the ante. Select a new rhythm for your LH chords as they move around the major key circle e.g. half notes like in the table below. Then select a new rhythm for your RH scale e.g. quarter notes, which you'll continue to play using the finger pattern. There are quite a few different combinations that you could choose, so this should be interesting! Remember, change chord every four beats no matter what rhythms you've chosen. You could think of it like changing chord at the start of every bar. Practise until you can keep a steady pulse of 60bpm.

LH CHORD RHYTHM	RH SCALE RHYTHM
Whole notes	Whole notes
Half notes	Half notes
Quarter notes	Quarter notes

 Now it's time to start training your ear to hear which notes of the key sound best over your LH chords, which you're going to play now as whole notes for one minute. Meanwhile, use your RH to improvise with *any of the notes* of your chosen key. You can use *any rhythm* you like for your RH notes, I want you to feel really free as you explore. Create short phrases. In music, a phrase is a short section that forms part of a bigger whole. You can liken it to a short section that forms part of a sentence, like in the example below. End each of your phrases with a chord tone, a note that is also in your LH chord, to help each phrase sound complete and rounded.

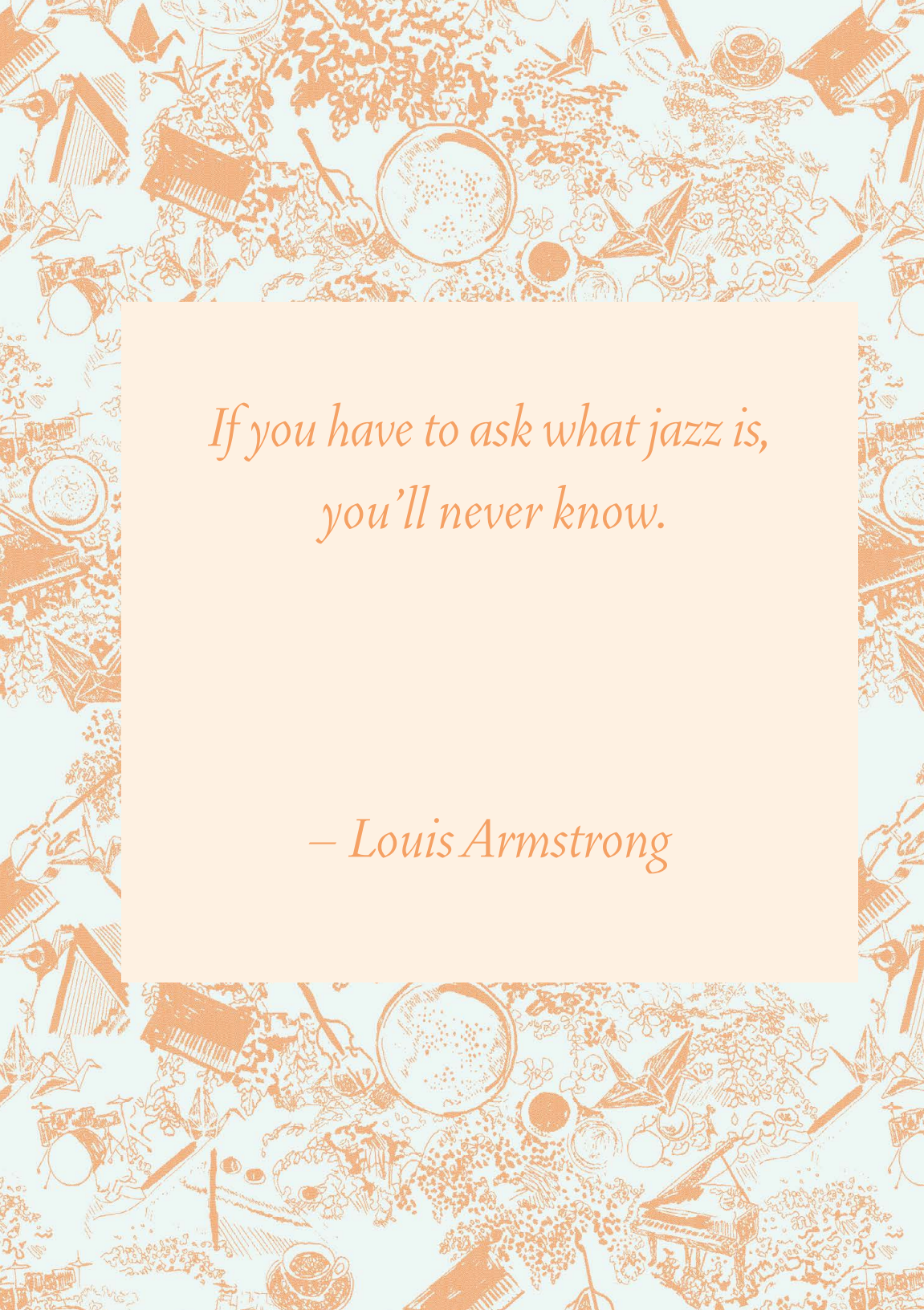
'Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom.
Phrase 1 Phrase 2 Phrase 3

If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.' - Charlie Parker
Phrase 4 Phrase 5



*If you have to ask what jazz is,
you'll never know.*

— Louis Armstrong



*If you have to ask what jazz is,
you'll never know.*

— Louis Armstrong

DAY



TAKE THE A TRAIN

CREATING THE A SECTION OF YOUR COMPOSITION

ABA form

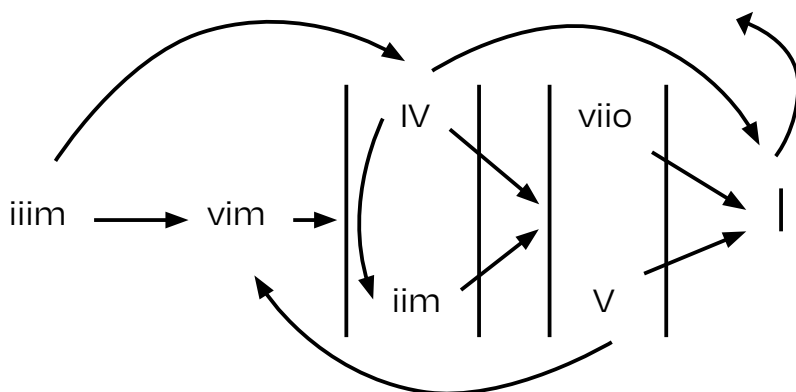
Somewhere Over The Rainbow and Great Balls Of Fire. What on earth could these two songs have in common? The answer is their form. Many compositions are underpinned by a structure we call the ABA form. A and B are the names of sections. The underlying chord progression of the A sections always remains the same. If the A section is in a major key, which it often is, the B section might move to a minor key to keep things interesting. (We'll get to minor keys tomorrow). The B section typically introduces a new melody, another way to reinforce the new mood created by the minor key.

Long and winding road

The Beatles liked to extend the classic ABA form to keep the excitement going for longer. Hey Jude. I Want to Hold Your Hand. Hard Day's Night. All these songs are structured AABABA. Can you think of any other Beatles records that progress in this way?

Exploring the A section

I want you to explore an A section in the major key you've already set for your composition. You could move around the major key circle from the last lesson, that would be perfectly acceptable. However there are more options for your sequences of chords beyond the basics of the musical circle, more creative possibilities, all of which are captured here for you.



The beauty of this diagram is that you can start on any of the Roman numerals, on any of the chords. From there you simply follow the arrows to determine what comes next. The viio chord only has one arrow moving it forward. That means there's only one chord that will sound right after viio and that's I. All the other chords though can move forward in at least two different ways, like vim can move to IV or iim, and V to I or vim.

The I is special. From here you can move to any other chord. It's also the best chord to bring things to a close, to make things sound finished and complete. This is because the I chord is your root, the key you are playing in. In other words, it's like coming home.



You could move *endlessly* around the chords in the diagram, but I'm going to ask you to improvise for just one minute. Remember you can start on any of the chords, and when you're ready to bring things to a close move to the I and stay there. You might like to try:

- Playing with one hand only (RH or LH).
- Playing HT.
- Using one rhythmic value for each chord (eg. half notes).
- Switching between rhythmic values as you move between chords (e.g. whole and half notes).

By now you will have found many beautiful chord progressions. Write your favourite four bar progression on your worksheet, write in the A section.

	C	G	C	G
A				
	o	o	o	♪ ♪ ♪

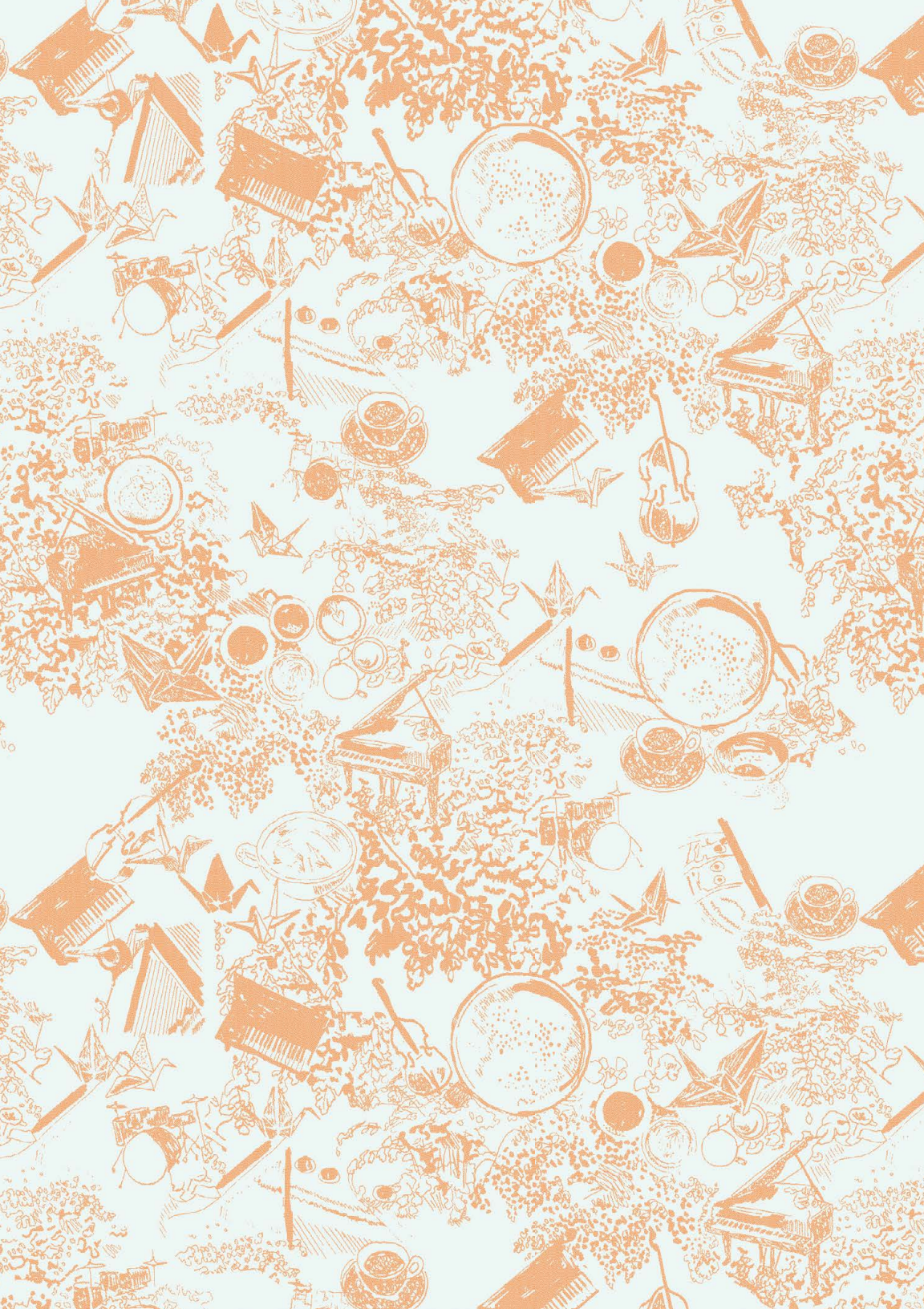
- Improvise with the chord tones of your chord progression, the individual notes that make up your chords. Use both hands all over the piano. Improvise without any specific rhythm or pulse restricting you. Be free.
- Now play your chord tones to the rhythmic phrase written on your worksheet, still using both hands. Steadily work towards a pulse.
- Can you play the last step using only your RH?


Time to choose: With your LH, play your chord progression, as chords this time, not individual chord tones. Choose a rhythmic value for your LH e.g. half notes. Whatever value you choose, the chord change should always fall on beat one. Meanwhile your RH is going to play the chord tones that correspond with each LH chord, set to the rhythmic phrase on your

worksheet. Challenging? It will be. Now try this:

- Keep your LH in a really low register.
- Move your RH all over the piano, even down to the lower registers.
- Experiment with the sustain pedal (under your right foot).
- Now choose a different rhythmic value for your LH and repeat this exercise.

Draw on the moments of your improvisation that you enjoyed the most to create a short excerpt. Something memorable that you can repeat. Practise your excerpt until it's committed to memory and you can play it perfectly. Perform it, to a real person this time, not just to the cat. It's never too soon to start composing and playing for others.





*Do it again on the
next verse and people
think you mean it.*

– Chet Atkins

DAY



HE'S GOT TWO LEFT HANDS

LEFT HAND CHORD INVERSIONS

So far you've been playing your LH chords in what is known as root position. This simply means that the root note is the lowest note of the chord (R).

C major chord in root position:

C E G
R

The root note is also sometimes called the 1 of the chord:

C E G
1

E and G are called the 3 and the 5:

C E G
1 3 5

These numbers simply refer to the position of the notes in the order they occur in the C major scale:

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	(1)

Triad chord inversions

There are two other ways to play triad chords, where the notes remain the same but you play them in a different order. These chord inversions are a great way to make the LH accompaniment smoother. When you only play root position triads, your LH has to jump around quite a lot, which can sound bumpy and disjointed. When you have chord inversions at your disposal, you can opt for chord sequences that require much less movement between each chord.

TRIAD CHORD INVERSIONS		
Chord type	Notes of the chord	Example
Root position (R)	1, 3, 5	C, E, G
First inversion (1st)	3, 5, 1	E, G, C
Second inversion (2nd)	5, 1, 3	G, C, E

As you get to grips with inversions, challenge yourself to keep your LH sequences within one octave, or as near as dammit. You'll really notice a difference to the overall flow of your composition.

Easy does it

Want an easy way to find triad chord inversions? Start with a triad chord in root position. Then let go of the root note at the bottom and put it on the top instead. Voilà, that's first inversion. Now let go of your new bottom note and move that to the top. Second inversion! Finally, let go of your new bottom note and move it to the top, to come back to root position.

- Choose any one of the three inversions for the first chord of your composition.
- Next, locate any notes (*if there are any*) that are also in the second chord of your composition. Keep a hold of this note/s.
- Play this note/s again, this time adding the other notes needed to form your second chord. Notice how creating your second chord in this way makes for a fluid transition.
- Work your way through your A section, chord by chord, focussing on creating the least possible movement between chords.

When you're happy you've explored your options and found the smoothest movements between your chord progression, write the names of your chosen inversions next to your chords in your worksheet.

	C (2nd)	G (R)	C (2nd)	G (R)
A				
	o	o	o	♪ ♪ ♪

Time to choose: Select a rhythm for your new LH chord inversions e.g. quarter notes.



Keeping a steady 60bpm pulse, play your LH chords as your chosen rhythm and remember that your chord changes will still always fall on beat one of each bar no matter what rhythm you are using. Improvise above with your RH using your composed rhythmic phrase and the notes of the key, but with a focus on using chord tones. Play for one minute.

- Try one round with your RH close to your LH, then on the repeat try it an octave higher.
- Can you play the exact same thing twice? Can you remember what you play?

ARE

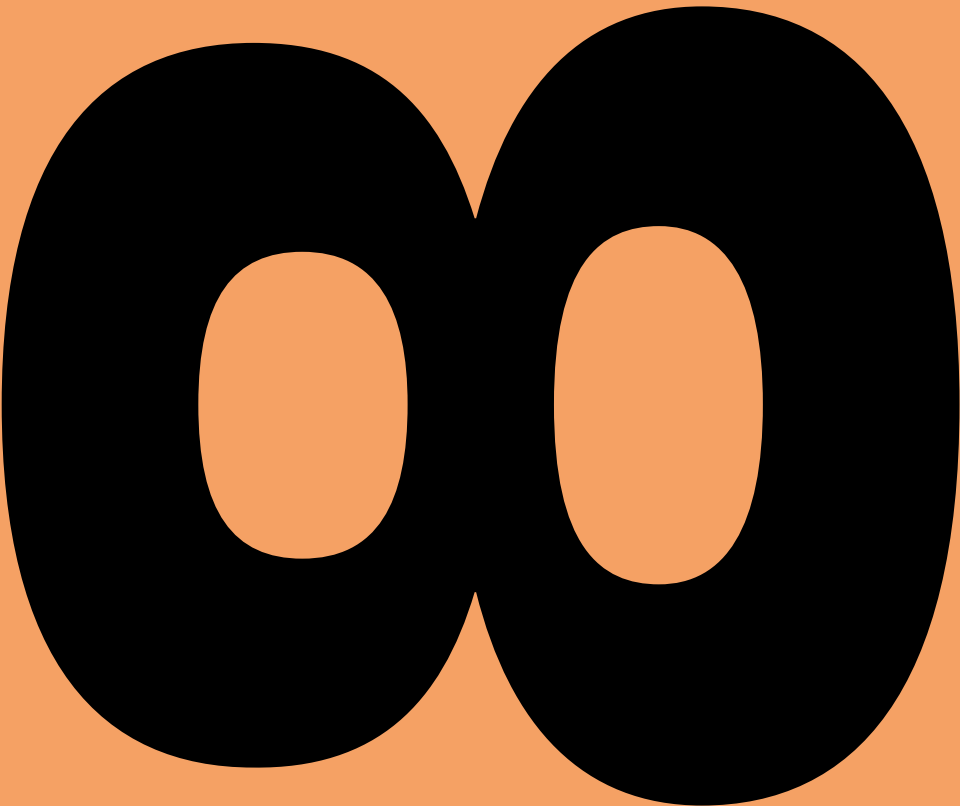
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Rivulets of rain gather, burst and race down the window of my studio. Outside my neighbour's cat shoots across the glossy green lawn, desperate to get out of the wet. A week ago, sitting in this same spot, I'd been noodling at the keys when a piano part arrived; landed fully formed and quite complete, like it had always existed - simply elsewhere. In the days that followed I explored it, adding this and changing that, but for the most part kept returning to the way it tumbled out the first time around. I decided to record it, not a perfect take but good enough to play along to on my double bass and drums. Again the parts appeared to write themselves, no force or labouring required. It felt a bit like cheating.

Not every composition goes like this. It's special when it does, like a gift. All you have to do is show up to receive it. As the music comes through I get the sense that time does not exist. This is something I have heard, but now I feel it; like embodying the past, present and future all at once. It leaves me feeling high the whole week long. Light, like walking on air.

Anyone that tries enough times to create something will eventually get an experience like this. I liken it to falling in love, only with something you can't see, touch or fully understand. I score the final bars and see the whites out on the line begin to drip. A blouse slides through the pegs and slaps the ground. The encounter is over.

DAY



YOU MET YOUR MATCH

CREATING THE B SECTION OF YOUR COMPOSITION IN A MINOR KEY

Keys come in pairs

You've played a lot already in your major key, so you're probably feeling like a change. So you're going to move into the relative minor key. Every major key has a relative, corresponding minor key, and it is really easy to work out what it is. The relative minor key is always the sixth note of the major key.

Example: The relative minor of the C major key is A minor

R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

The notes of the relative minor key will be the same as the notes of its major pair. The only difference is that you start in a different place.

Example: A minor starts in a different place to C major but has the same notes

C major key

R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

A minor key

R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A

This makes the formula for the notes of minor keys: RTSTTSTT

Minor scale finger patterns

The easiest way to play minor scales is of course with finger patterns.

Example: A minor RH (one octave)

R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5

PAIRS OF MAJOR & RELATIVE MINOR KEYS WITH RH FINGER PATTERNS FOR MINOR SCALES

Major key	Relative minor key	R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T	Summary of black notes
C	A	A 1	B 2	C 3	D 1	E 2	F 3	G 4	A 5	-

Sharp minor keys

G	E	E 1	F# 2	G 3	A 1	B 2	C 3	D 4	E 5	F#
D	B	B 1	C# 2	D 3	E 1	F# 2	G 3	A 4	B 5	F# C#
A	F#	F# 2	G# 3	A 1	B 2	C# 3	D 1	E 2	F# 3	F# C# G#
E	C#	C# 2	D# 3	E 1	F# 2	G# 3	A 1	B 2	C# 3	F# C# G# D#
B	G#	G# 2	A# 3	B 1	C# 2	D# 3	E 1	F# 2	G# 3	F# C# G# D# A#


Flat minor keys

F	D	D 1	E 2	F 3	G 1	A 2	Bb 3	C 4	D 5	Bb
Bb	G	G 1	A 2	Bb 3	C 1	D 2	Eb 3	F 4	G 5	Bb Eb
Eb	C	C 1	D 2	Eb 3	F 1	G 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	C 5	Bb Eb Ab
Ab	F	F 1	G 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	C 1	Db 2	Eb 3	F 4	Bb Eb Ab Db
Db	Bb	Bb 2	C 1	Db 2	Eb 3	F 1	Gb 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	Bb Eb Ab Db Gb
Gb	Eb	Eb 2	F 1	Gb 2	Ab 3	Bb 4	Cb 1	Db 2	Eb 3	Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb

On your worksheet add the relative minor of the major key that you've used for your A section. Don't forget to add the RH finger pattern of your minor scale too.

MINOR KEY							
R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
im	io	III	ivm	vm	VI	VII	im

- Now play your relative minor scale as quarter notes (60bpm). Ascend and descend twice over, never repeating the top or bottom note. Keep it rolling.
- Now try at 120bpm.
- Can you try the tricky 240bpm?

 Improvise for one minute with the notes of your minor key all over the piano, without any specific tempo or rhythms. Be sure to play your root note from time to time in the lower register, to help you really feel the key you're in. You can even catch the root note with the sustain pedal to make it last for longer.


Time to choose: Remember ABA? Well now you're going to create the four bar rhythmic phrase for your B section. Start with any rhythmic value, then keep adding more until you reach the end of the four bars, making sure

that what you choose fits into your four bars. It's useful to recap the rules:

- Whole notes = Four beats. They can only be placed on beat one of a four beat bar, because whole notes last for all four beats of the bar.
- Half notes = Two beats. They can only be placed on beats one, two or three.
- Quarter notes = One beat. They can be placed on any beat.

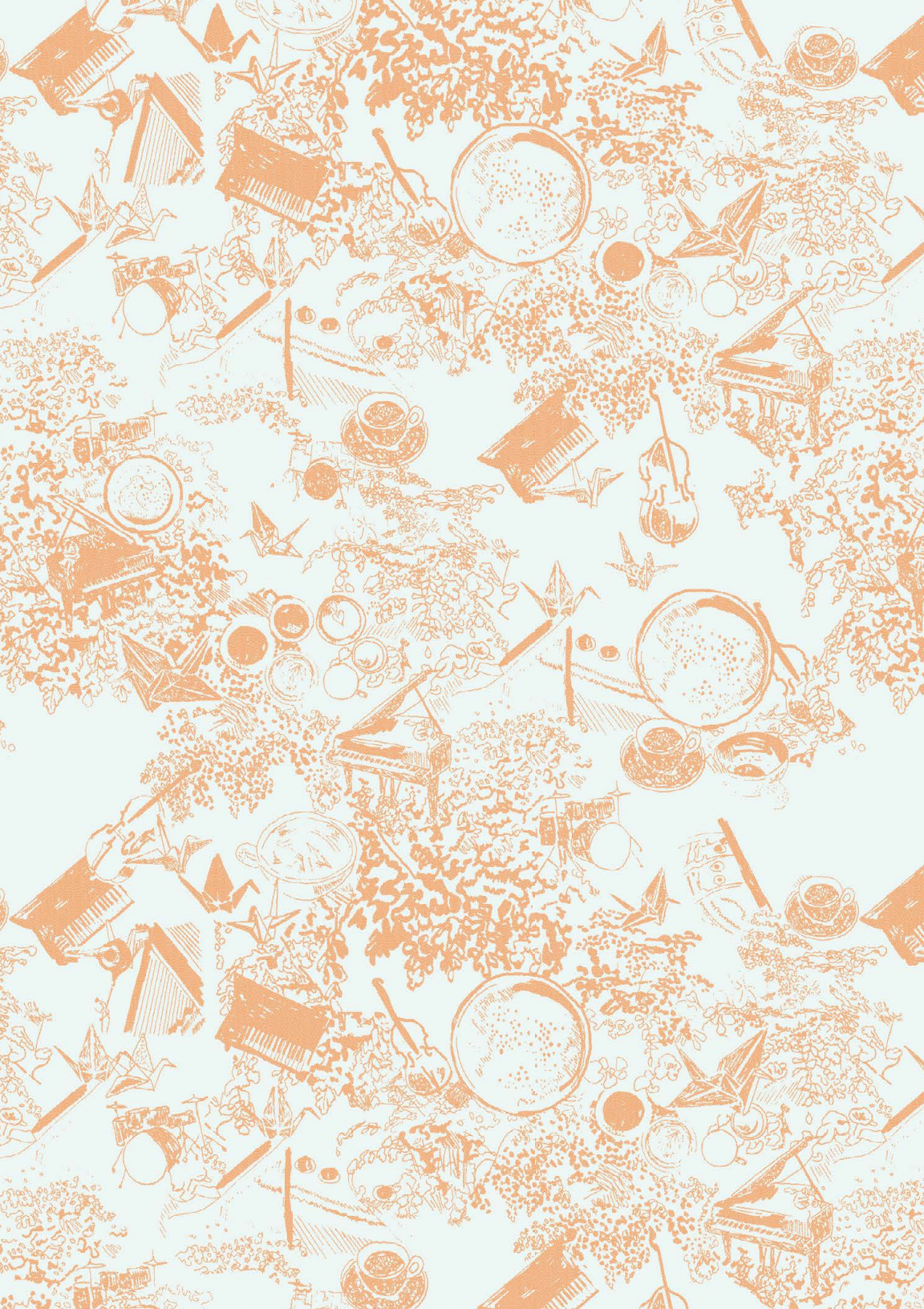
Write your rhythmic phrase here in section B of your worksheet.

B																
	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪	♪

 Using the notes of your minor key, play your rhythmic phrase over and over on a loop (60bpm). Try my pointers if you want some guidance and keep improvising for one minute:

- Start in a high register and slowly descend the piano as you improvise, before ascending again.
- Place your hands at either end of the piano and work towards the middle, then back out again.

- Keep your LH low while your RH moves around freely.
- Improvise with two notes at the same time, now three, now four.
- Keep a low root note underneath, try as an octave and use the sustain pedal.



*The music is not in
the notes, but in
the silence between.*

– Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

DAY



LIVING IN A MINOR KEY

MINOR KEY CHORDS

The chords of minor keys

Remember from Day Four how major keys have certain chords that belong to them? Well, it's the same with minor keys. For each note of the minor scale there is a corresponding chord:

R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
im	ii^o	III	iv^m	v^m	VI	VII	im

Now take a look at this, because major and relative minor keys are *related*, the chords that belong to them are the *same*. You can see this clearly when you lay out both the major and relative minor scales, with the chords that belong to them below:

C Dm Em F G Am Bo C

Am Bo C Dm Em F G Am

Of course the Roman numerals always start from the beginning to ensure the root note of

each scale is always a I or i, and that everything flows in order from there:

C Dm Em F G Am Bo C

I iim iiim IV V vim viio I

Am Bo C Dm Em F G Am

im iio III vim vm VI VII im

On your worksheet, add the lowercase m's and a small o to the notes of your Minor Key table. This transforms the notes into the correct chords that belong to your key. Use the bottom row to help you.

MINOR KEY							
R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
Am	Bo	C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am
1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
im	iio	III	ivm	vm	VI	VII	im

- Play each chord of your minor key in succession, first with your RH.
- Now with your LH.
- Try HT.

Time to choose: Choose a minor chord. It can be one of the minor chords written in the

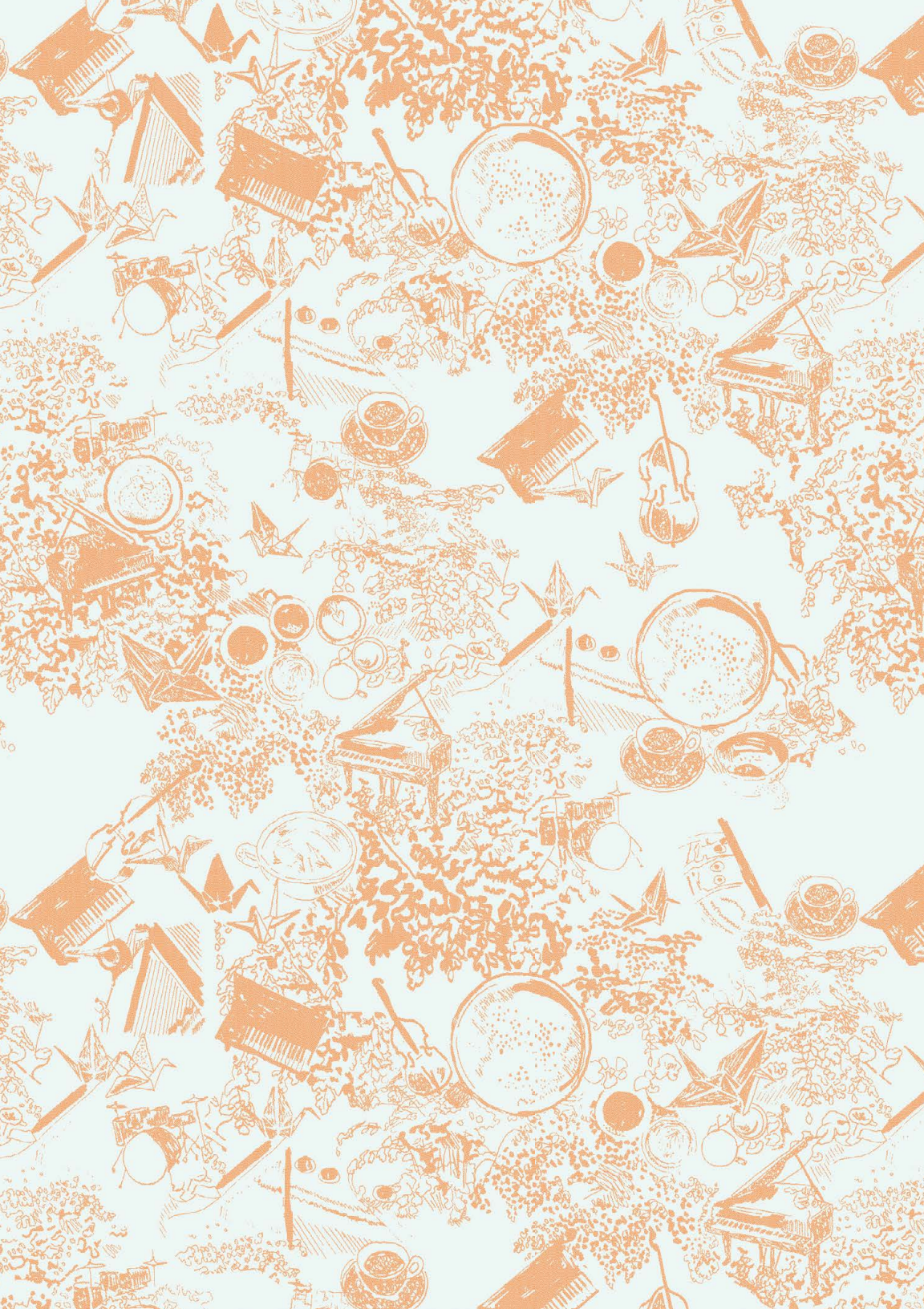
Minor Key table on your worksheet or a totally different minor chord.



Now improvise for one minute with this minor chord. I wonder how long you can go it alone, before resorting to my pointers below?

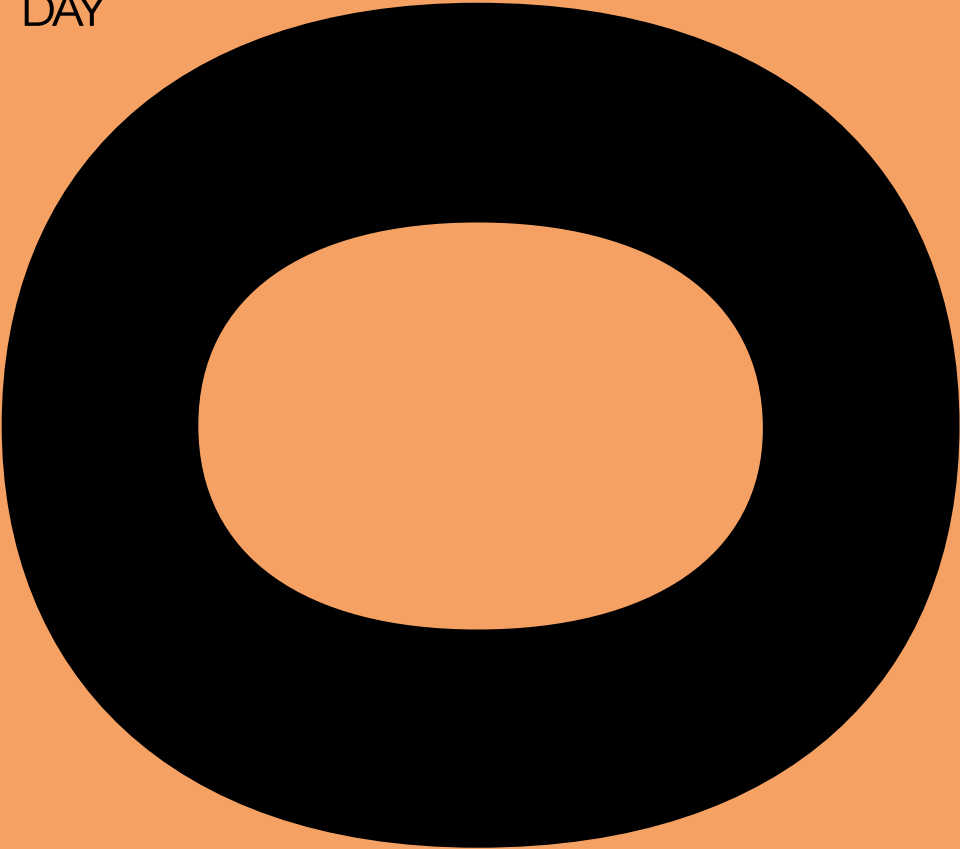
- Play a combination of notes at the same time.
- Alternate between your RH and LH, each hand playing at a different speed e.g. slow RH, fast LH.
- Play with your RH and LH at the same time.
- Play the root note in the bass while improvising with the other notes of the chord in the treble.
- Use your RH to play notes from your minor chord using your rhythmic phrase on your worksheet.
- Now use your LH.
- And finally, HT.

Time to choose: When your time is up choose another chord to improvise with for one minute. You can repeat this as many times as you like to fully comprehend the chords of the minor key.



[illegible][illegible]

DAY

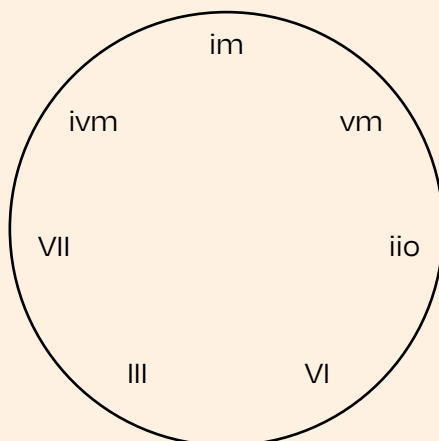


IT'S JUST A MINOR THING Y'ALL

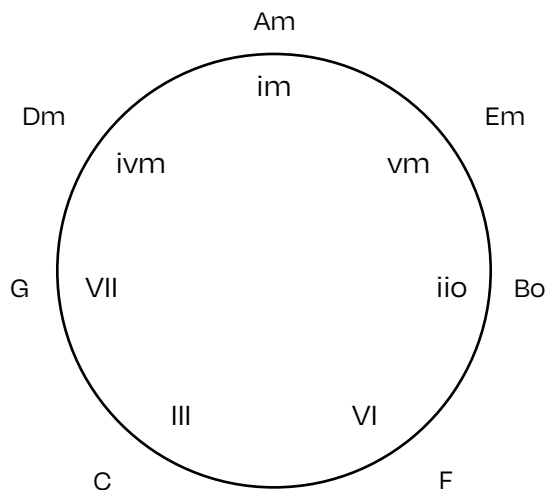
THE MINOR KEY CIRCLE

Strong chord movements

Now you know which chords belong to the minor keys you're going to find out the strongest way to move between these chords using the minor key circle. Remember you can move around the circle clockwise or anti-clockwise, just like you did with the major key circle. Both directions sound good.



Example: Minor key circle in A minor




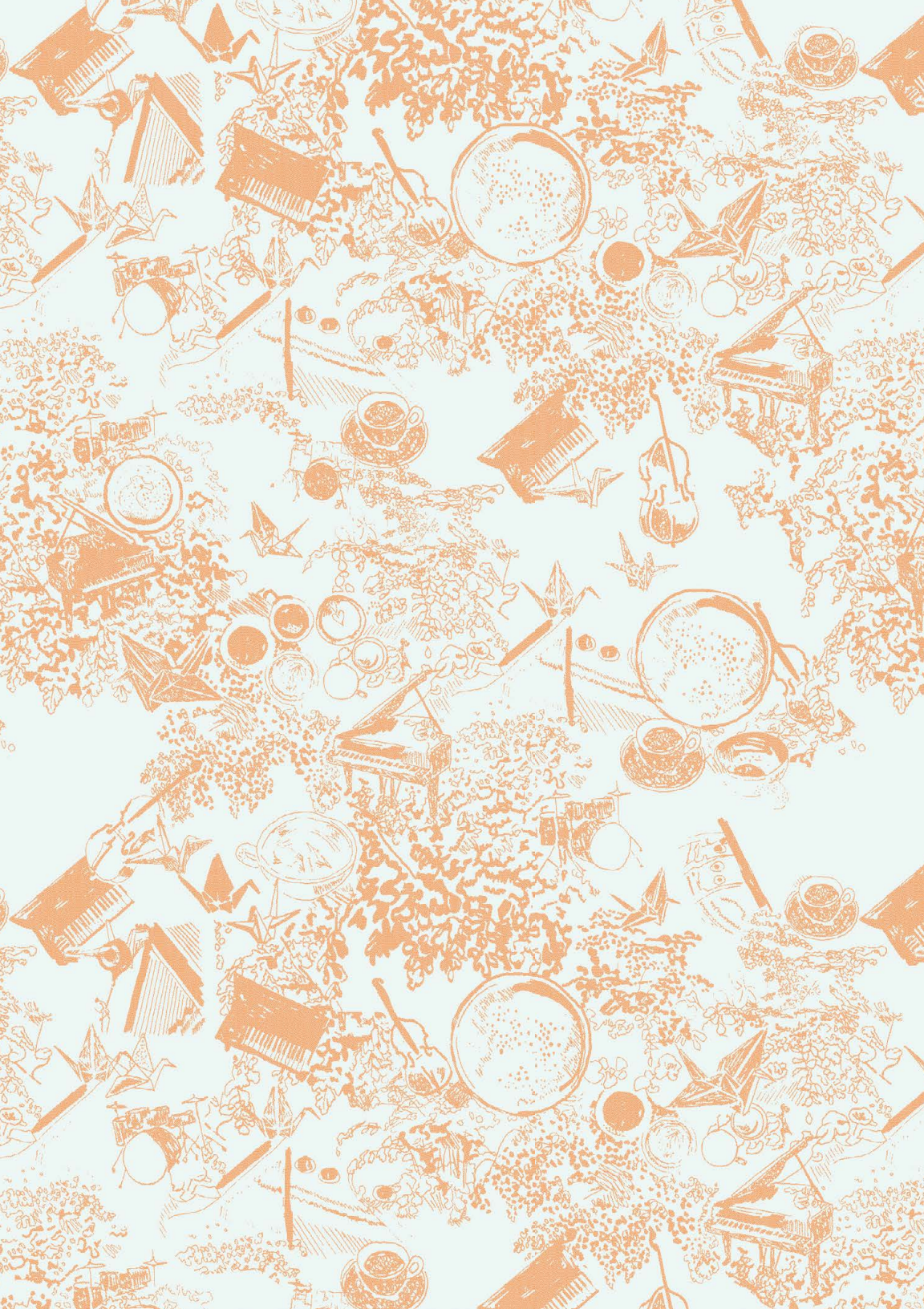
Add the chords of your minor key to the circle on your worksheet. Starting on the root note chord, move anticlockwise once around the circle, playing each chord as a whole note. As soon as you've got the hang of that, move on to this fun little exercise that you'll no doubt recall from Day Five:

- With your RH, play the minor scale as quarter notes, starting on the root note. Ascend and descend twice without repeating the top and bottom notes. Keep it rolling, using the minor scale finger pattern to help you flow.
- With your LH, start on the root note chord and move once around the circle anticlockwise. Hold each chord as a whole note.
- Combine your RH scale and your LH chords.

Time to choose: Get ready to add a new layer to this much-loved exercise by choosing a new rhythm for your LH and RH e.g. half notes and whole notes like in the table below. Remember to change chords every four beats, no matter what rhythms you decide on for your LH and RH.

LH CHORD RHYTHM	RH SCALE RHYTHM
Whole notes	Whole notes
Half notes	Half notes
Quarter notes	Quarter notes

 It's time to start training your ear to hear which notes of the key sound best over your LH chords. To do this, use your RH to improvise with any of the notes of your chosen key. Remember to create short phrases, each one ending with a chord tone, a note that is also in your LH chord. Play for one minute.



[illegible]The background features a complex, repeating pattern of musical-themed illustrations in warm tones of brown, tan, and orange. The motifs include acoustic and electric guitars, various styles of drums (like snare and bass), grand pianos, stringed instruments such as violins and cellos, and other items like record players, musical notes, and abstract shapes. These elements are scattered across the entire frame, creating a rich, textured backdrop.

*Without music,
life would be a mistake.*

– Friedrich Nietzsche

DAY



B SIDE BABY

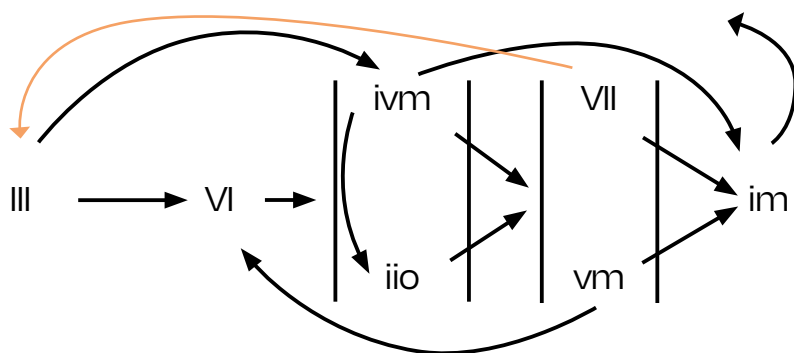
CREATING THE B SECTION OF YOUR COMPOSITION

It's time to create the B section of your composition, in the relative minor key already written on your worksheet. B sections always contrast with what listeners have heard before, switching up the mood and keeping things interesting.

Exploring the B section

There are many ways to move between the chords that belong to the minor key. The strongest movements are captured in the diagram below. It works in the same way as the one in Day Six. Start on any of the chords, then follow the arrows to find the most musical way forward through the chords.


The im can move to any other chord, giving you so many options to play with. When you're ready to bring your B section to a close, start aiming towards the im. When you reach it, end there, on the root of your minor key.



Déjà vu?

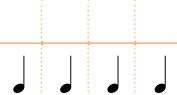
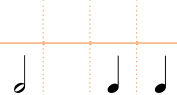
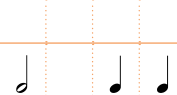

The diagram above is similar to the one you encountered on Day Six (major key chord movements). Can you see how the minor key chord movements diagram has changed? Firstly, the Roman numerals relate to the chords of the minor key, like im for the root instead of I. Or III instead of iim.

Secondly there is one extra arrow, one more way to move between the chords of a minor key. It's the highlighted arrow in the minor movements diagram above.

 Go to town trying all the different chord movements that are possible with this diagram for one minute, always ending on im.

- Play one hand only (RH or LH).
- Play HT.
- Play without a pulse or specific rhythms.
- Play the chords to a rhythm e.g. half notes.
- Switch to a new rhythm each time you move to a new chord e.g. half notes to quarter notes etc.

Choose your favourite four chord progression and write it in on your worksheet.

	Am	F	C	G
B				

- Improvise with the chord tones of your chord progression, both hands all over the piano. Improvise freely without any specific rhythm or pulse.
- Now play your chord tones to the rhythmic phrase on your worksheet, still with both hands. Steadily work towards a pulse.
- Can you play the last step using only your RH?

Time to choose: Choose a rhythmic value for your LH e.g. quarter notes, and play your chord

progression as chords this time. Whatever rhythm you choose, you'll still always change chords on beat one. With your RH play the chord tones that correspond with each LH chord, set to the rhythmic phrase on your worksheet. Lastly, try my pointers below.

- Keep your LH within one octave.
- Keep your RH in the highest registers of the piano.
- Now choose a different rhythmic value for your LH and repeat this exercise.

TAFFETA

EUPHORIA

It's the year 2000 and I have not long been ten. Around me in a horseshoe are cushions, lifted from all corners of the house. The best one is the taffeta, the snare. It makes a satisfying 'dat' when I hit it with my sticks. For toms I have curated harder toys and books, overlaid with tea towels for a better kind of 'bom'. Knowing I'd get told to turn it down, I savour the brilliant opening bars of the chorus of Heart Shaped Box. I thrash along wildly. If I go loud enough I can say 'I didn't hear you' when my Mum inevitably appears, and she might just believe me. I played like this for years, perfecting the layout of my 'kit' by studying my favourite drummers on TV.

At fourteen I saved the wages from my paper-round and upgraded to slick, black table top pads. My mates and I decided it was time to gig and chose Oh Yeah by The Subways to perform to the school. Tom on guitar, Matt on vocals, and Jim on bass. We crossed the stage like gods. I was on the kit, a real one this time, which it quickly transpired felt nothing like the rubber practice pads I was used to. I can still remember the name of our band. It was the stuff of teenage brains, a string of words inspired by an ever-present impulse to offend.

Fast-forward to my twenties, a new band and an audience of eight-hundred people moving to our music in the sun. In the run up to the

gig we had rehearsed like crazy and it showed. At the front was Ahmar, singing and bouncing around with waist-length dreads that at high points he'd let loose and send flying across the stage. To his left, Mensah, a London rapper, all street slang and swag. To his right, Missy, petite but powerful with a thick Edinburgh accent, taking care of the high notes. Behind this dynamic trio was me and the rest of the rhythm section.

For all our differences in looks and performance style, this was a band with serious rapport. The climax of the gig came after several minutes of high intensity hip-hop rock. Missy and the two guys busted out a dance sequence, expertly choreographed to hype the fans. Suddenly the routine would stop, synced perfectly with the most epic crash of the cymbals I could muster. A brief moment of silence followed and then Missy would begin to rap. No one in the audience ever saw it coming, and there was something about this tiny blonde Scot's rhymes that sent the crowd absolutely loopy every time.

From the stage I could see them all. Some were fans we recognised, others were new. Everyone was present in the moment, united in the music and aliveness of it all. There's a symbiotic relationship between band and audience, both feed off each other to create an

energy unique to each gig. You become part of something bigger than yourself. Euphoria. Any festival goer will know the feeling. I remember getting close to it in my garage at fourteen. We were the epicentre of Ilminster, my buddies & I. The sensation at the festival was the same, only amplified. Nothing else existed but our bodies in the sound and our hearts inside the beat.

DAY



PATTERNS IN THE RAIN

LEFT HAND PATTERNS

Changing the LH chord patterns has a huge impact on the mood of a piece. Here are two common approaches for you to experiment with. After all, why should your RH have all the fun?



Oom-pah chords

To create a joyful, bouncy feeling split your LH chord like this:

Oom - Will be your root note anywhere in the lower half of the piano.

Pah - Will be your whole chord around the middle of the piano.

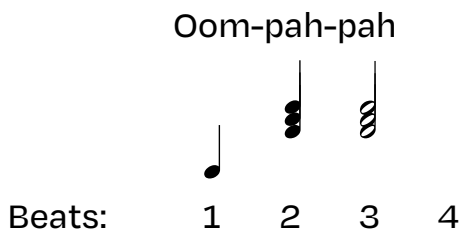
VARIATION 1: Oom-pah

	Oom		pah	
				
Beats:	1	2	3	4

The simplest form is for both the Oom and the Pah to be half notes on beats one and three. Start with the Oom only one octave below the Pah. Then as you get more comfortable, try playing it lower in the piano so you have to jump up much further for the Pah chord. Remember, this is *all* being played with your LH!

- Try Variation 1 with your B section chord progression.

VARIATION 2: Oom-pah-pah



Play the Oom on beat one as a quarter note and then play two pahas: the first as a quarter note on beat two, followed by a half note on beat three.

- Try this with your B section chord progression.

Variation 1 can be used to add a little interest (oom pah close together) or a lot of interest (oom pah far apart). Variation 2 sounds very different, more like a French waltz. Think about whether either of these variations could suit

your composition, or come up with your own variation. There are an infinite number of ways to bring to life the Oom-pah technique, each creating a different energy and mood.

- Apply Variation 1 to the LH chords in your B section. Practise your LH only until you get through without stopping.
- Still focussing on the B section only, try adding your RH rhythmic phrase, improvising with the notes of the key but keeping a strong focus on chord tones. Go slowly, only speeding up to your desired tempo when you're confident you can keep up the Oom-pahs *and your RH perfectly*.
- Now try with Variation 2.

Arpeggiated chords

Now this one is truly dreamy. Done well it can sound like sparkling, flowing water. To 'arpeggiate' your LH chords all you need to do is break them down into individual notes. Remember your chord is made up of the 1, the 3 and the 5. Try these variations of arpeggiated chords to get started, one cycle per bar:

VARIATION 1

Root 3rd 5th 3rd



Beats: 1 2 3 4

Example: A C E C

(A minor chord)

Notes span one octave

VARIATION 2

Root 5th 3rd (an octave up)



Beats: 1 2 3 4

Example: A E C

(A minor chord)

Notes span two octaves

- Apply Variation 1 to the LH chords in your B section. Practise your LH only until you can get through without stopping.
- Still focussing on the B section only, try adding your RH rhythmic phrase, improvising with all the notes of the key but keeping a strong focus on chord tones. Go slowly, only speeding up to your

desired tempo when you're confident you can keep up in both hands.

- Now try with Variation 2.

Now that you've got to grips with some new LH patterns, reflect on whether any of them could enhance your composition. Perhaps many of the patterns felt good to you, or perhaps only a few complemented the mood and picture you're trying to paint. Whether you choose to oom-pah your way through your entire composition, or arpeggiate just here and there, don't forget to add your LH patterns to your worksheet, just like I have in the example below.

	Am (OP1)	F (R)	C (AC2)	G (AC2)
B				

Use my abbreviations:

OP1 = Oom-pah chords variation 1

OP2 = Oom-pah chords variation 2

AC1 = Arpeggiated chords variation 1

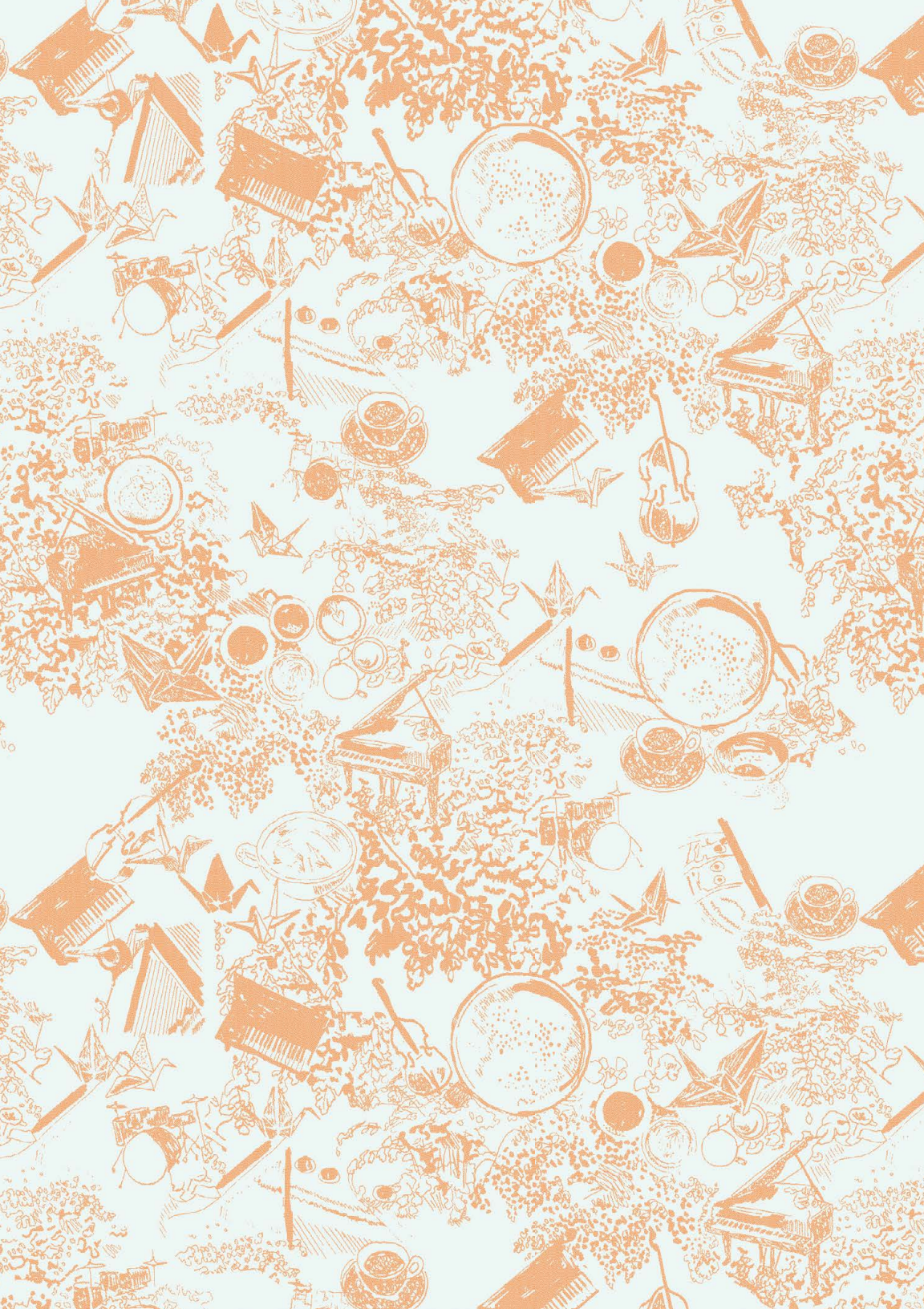
AC2 = Arpeggiated chords variation 2

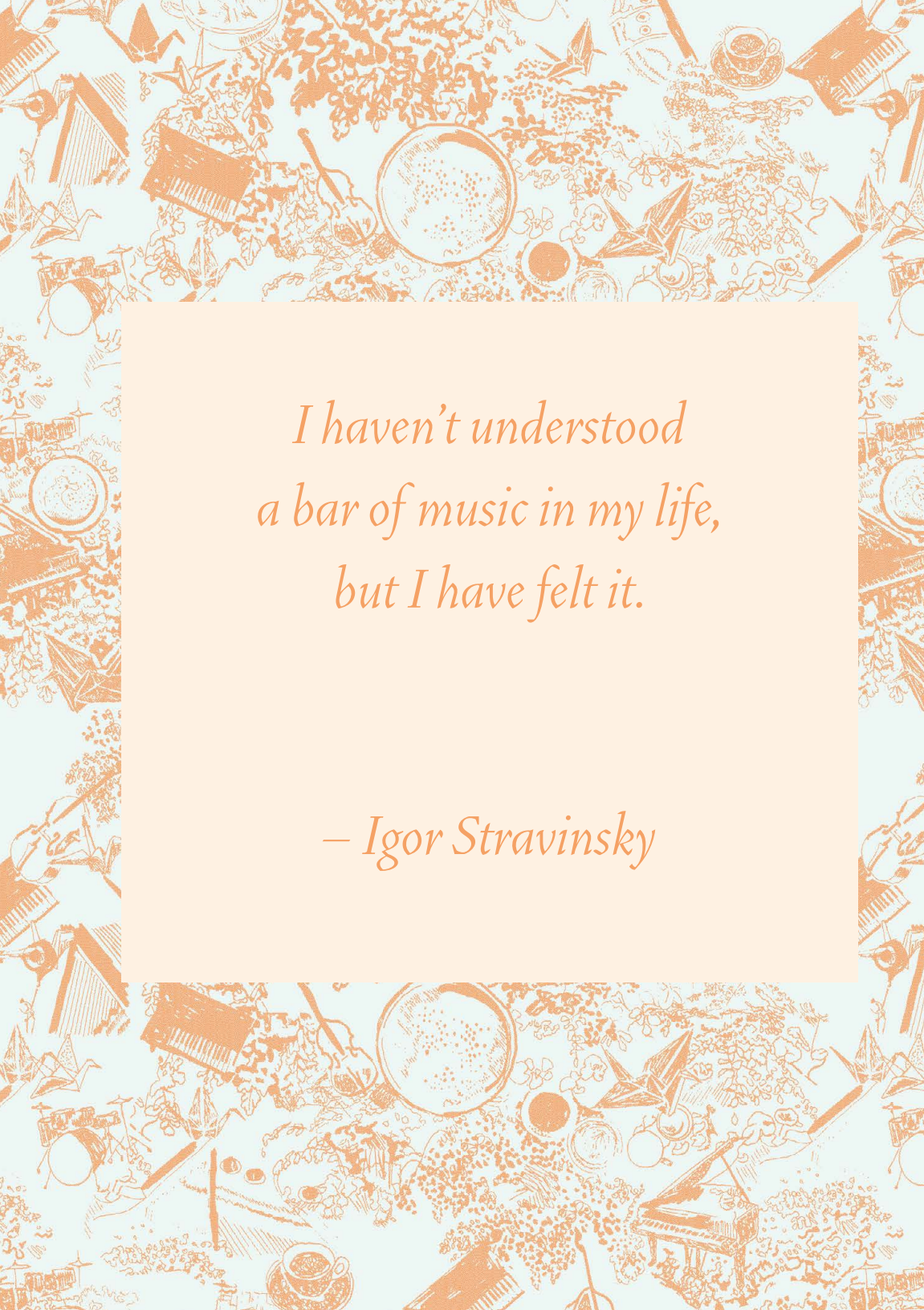
If you're not adding a pattern just note down the simple chord you want to play:

R = Root chord

1st = 1st inversion

2nd = 2nd inversion



[illegible]

*I haven't understood
a bar of music in my life,
but I have felt it.*

— Igor Stravinsky

DAY



CH-CH-CH-CHECK OUT MY MELODY

CREATING YOUR MELODY

This is the moment you've been waiting for. It's finally time to create the melody for your composition. You already have the rhythm. All that's left to do is settle upon the right notes.

Building blocks of melodies

There are two important things to bear in mind when creating a melody. Firstly, just know that any note within the key has the potential to work in your melody. Chord tones always sound good, but other notes can work too. Experiment with all of the notes of your key over every chord. Focus on the chord tones to anchor your melody, then pepper in other notes around them.

The second thing to consider is that your melody will flow better if it moves mostly in small steps, as opposed to jumping large distances across the keys - large intervals as we call them in music. Don't get me wrong, a few large intervals can sound great, but for the most part try to create a melody that *steps*

rather than hops. A good way to test if you're on the right track is to hum your melody. If it's too difficult to hum it's probably because your melody jumps around too much.

The final thing to say here, is that while theoretical principles are super useful, don't be afraid to use your ear. If you're reading this, there's a good chance you're a music lover who's listened to hundreds - if not thousands - of records over the years, which is as vital a part of your musical education as reading any book. If you hear a melody in your head that you think might sound nice, try it out, even if it means changing your rhythmic phrase, often compositions begin one way, and then transform as they progress. Or you might find that it *already* adheres pretty closely to the principles above.

- Have fun creating your melody for both your A and B sections. Don't worry about getting it perfect right from the off. Many hit tunes started life as happy accidents.

Time to choose: If you're unsure how to choose your melody notes you can simply choose at random from the notes that belong to your chord, writing them on your worksheet above the rhythmic values.

Tying notes together

If you want to join two or more notes together (of the same pitch) you can tie them together with a tie symbol. Tied notes sound like one long note when played.



- Add ties to your melody if you wish.

When you've settled on the notes of your melody, add them to your worksheet. Play through your composition in the ABA structure. Is it interesting? Does it flow? Make any adjustments that are needed. Ta-da! Your melody is set.

	C (2nd)	G (R)	C (2nd)	G (R)
A	D	D	B	B G A
	o	o	o	o

	Am (OP1)	F (R)	C (AC2)	G (AC2)
B	B C B G	G G E	E E D	D G A
	o	o	o	o

- Play your melody (RH only).
- Play your melody along with the LH chords, make sure that you keep to the inversions and patterns that you've set.
- Play your song in the ABA format: that's once through the A section, once through the B section, and finish with the A section one last time.
- In Day Six you learnt how the Beatles extended their songs by repeating sections. Try repeating different sections of your composition e.g. AABBA, to see what sounds most satisfying to you. Make a note of what works for you.
- Try slowing down as you near the end to signal to the listener things are about to wrap up.

The final flourish

When you reach the finish line play the root note of your key with both hands, at the far ends of the piano e.g. a low C and a high C. Notice how a finishing 'flourish' such as this can help make your piece sound more complete.

Congratulations. You have now created all the ingredients of a bona fide original composition, and captured them in your worksheet. You've come such a long way.



*A painter paints
pictures on canvas.
But musicians paint
their pictures on silence.*

– Leopold Stokowski

DAY



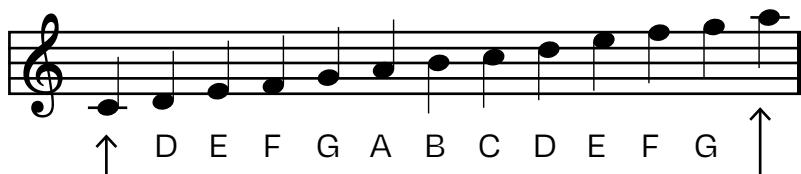
WHERE YOU LEAD

CREATING YOUR LEAD SHEET

When composers (like you!) are ready to share their work, they create a lead sheet. A lead sheet is a standardised way of writing music so that others can easily follow. It captures the core ingredients of a composition such as the notes of the melody, the key, the chords, and sometimes some rhythmic understanding of the accompanying chords.

Musical notation

In your worksheet you have written down the *letter names* of the notes of your melody, but with so many different A's, B's and C's on the piano, how will other musicians know which to choose? The solution is musical notation. In the excerpt of notation below you can see how each note represents a *specific* key on the piano. The first note, for example, is middle C. Not the C above or the C below. This note only ever refers to *middle* C.



Middle C

A

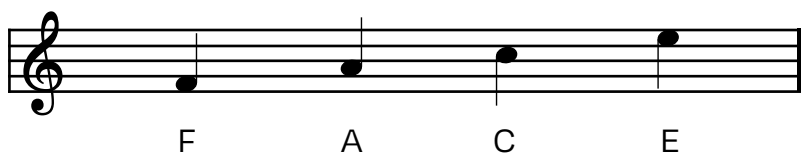


↑
Middle C

↑
A

After middle C the notes ascend up the *white* keys, all the way up to the A an octave above. The curly symbol at the very start of the excerpt is called a treble clef. It's this clef that assigns the five horizontal lines their notes (EGBDF). We call these five horizontal lines the stave.

There's a handy way to remember what the spaces between the lines mean too, 'FACE':



So there you have it. Transforming the letter names on your worksheet into notation is simply a matter of identifying the right horizontal line or space to use for each note.

But what about when you want to write a *black key*? A sharp or a flat?

Key signatures

To add in sharp or flat notes, simply write the ones you need all together next to the treble clef. A collection of sharps/flats like this is called a key signature. It lets the reader know the home key of the composition, in other words what sharps or flats to play throughout the whole composition. While the sharp/flat symbols in key signatures sit on just *one* horizontal line/space, they in fact turn *all* the notes that share that name sharp or flat. For example, the key signature for D major has F#’s and C#’s. In a composition starting with this key signature, you would *always* play F#’s and C#’s instead of regular F’s and C’s. The key signature for Bb major has Bb’s and Eb’s. In a composition starting like this, you would *always* play Bb’s and Eb’s instead of regular B’s and E’s.



D Major key signature



Bb Major key signature

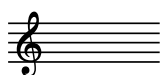
Look at this short melody in the key of A major. There are three sharps in the key signature. But how many sharps are actually played in the melody?



The correct answer is there are two sharps in the melody. Did you find them both?

- Find the key signature of your composition below, the *home* key that your A section starts in. Now add it to the start of every stave on your **lead sheet**.

KEY SIGNATURES: MAJOR AND RELATIVE MINOR



C major
A minor



G major
E minor



D major
B minor



A major
F# minor



E major
C# minor



B major
G# minor



F# major
D# minor



C# major
A# minor



F major
D minor



Bb major
G minor



Eb major
C minor



Ab major
F minor



Db major
Bb minor



Gb major
Eb minor

Notice how major keys and their relative minor keys have the same set of sharps or flats. This means that the key signature you've added to your lead sheet works for both the A and the B sections of your composition. Also notice that C major and A minor do not require a key signature as there aren't any black notes in their key - the key signature is left blank.

Notating your melody

Your melody is made up of the notes you want to be played and the rhythm of those notes. Musical notation captures both simultaneously. In the excerpt below the first note is a D and a whole note. So is the second. Next comes a B whole note, and so on.

Notice the pair of 4's at the start of the lead sheet. That is the time signature and its function is to tell people that each bar has four beats in it (as per the top 4), each one lasting for a quarter note (as per the 4 underneath). As you progress your studies in music, you will discover many different time signatures, with different numbers at the top and bottom. However $\frac{4}{4}$ is a great starting point, as it's one of the most common time signatures in western music.



Stems

The stem is the line that connects to the note, required for half and quarter notes. For notes above the middle line of the stave, the stem needs to start to the left of the note and point downwards. The reverse applies for notes below the middle line of the stave, their stems start on the right and point upwards. If you have a note on the middle line (the note B) the stem can go in either direction.

- Locate the position of your starting note on the stave. Make a final decision about which register to begin your melody in e.g. middle C or the C an octave up.
- Write your starting note at the start of your lead sheet, being sure to choose the right rhythmic value e.g. whole note, half note etc. Is your stem pointing in the correct direction?
- Visually divide each bar into four beats and align your notation accordingly. This will help you evenly space your notation, making it easier to read and play back.
- Continue notating your melody all the way to the end.
- Remember to include any ties you have included.

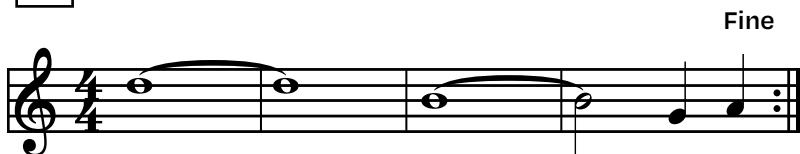
Useful shorthand for repeating A and B sections

Rather than writing out sections multiple times (yawn) musicians have developed a shorthand. First they label their sections with a capital A and B. These are called rehearsal marks, and are added to the lead sheet where the sections begin.

Next they add a repeat symbol: double dots and lines at the start and end of whichever section you want to repeat. If you want to repeat the first few bars just put the repeat sign at the end of those bars, it's not required at the start as well.

To show you want the A section to be repeated *after* having played the B section, add 'D.C.' at the end of the B section. It stands for 'da capo', which is Italian for 'from the beginning'. It tells you to jump back to the start of your piece. At the end of the A section add another Italian word, 'Fine' (pronounced 'fee-nay'). 'Fine' means 'finish' the piece here.

A



B

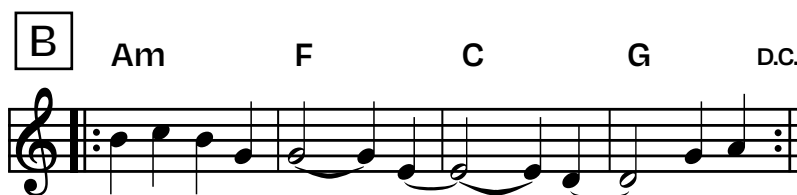
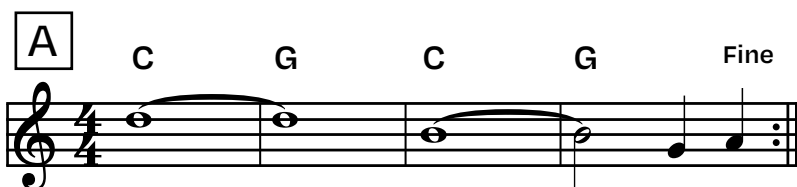


- Add rehearsal marks, 'D.C.' and 'Fine' to your lead sheet to create a basic ABA structure.
- Now add any repeat symbols you need to further extend your piece the way you want.

Adding the LH chords

Accompanying chords can be captured on the lead sheet by simply writing the chord names above the stave.

- Add your LH chords, writing them directly above beat one of each bar where they fall.
- Don't forget to use lowercase m for minor and o for diminished chords.



Leave it out

Take a moment to notice what *isn't* on your lead sheet. That's right, it's *how* you play your LH chords: the chord inversions and LH patterns (e.g. Oom-pah, arpeggiated chords) that you detailed on your worksheet. Why is this? Well, if you were to give your lead sheet to a saxophonist or bass player, your LH directions would make no sense to them. They apply specifically to you on the piano. Of course, *you* will still want to remember them, so jot them down on your lead sheet - on *your* copy only!

There's one other thing that's not on your lead sheet, and that's the root notes that you end the piece on. It isn't needed on the lead sheet because it's convention to finish on the root, to come back home so to speak.

Hit it!

You can now give your lead sheet to other musicians and have some fun jamming together. When playing with others, it's common to play the A and B sections once through exactly as written to establish the foundation of the piece. Don't forget the repeats: AABB.

From there you can repeat the A and B sections multiple times, to give each player a shot at improvising, taking it in turns so as not to

clash with each other (musically or otherwise!) When it's your turn to take a back seat simply play your LH chords and leave out your RH. Over time you'll be able to add decorative RH touches as others do their improv, but be sure to start simple. Less is usually more.

When everyone has had a go at improvising, play the piece one last time as written, with just a few embellishments to keep things spicy. Finish with the A section one final time.

- First time through - AABB exactly as written.
- Second time through and beyond - AABB AABB... players take turns to improvise.
- Last time through - AABB AA as written with embellishments as you wish.
- In summary - AABB (AABB AABB...) AABB AA.

Congratulations my friend, you have finished your composition!

**HERE'S ONE I
MADE EARLIER:
EXAMPLE
LEAD SHEET**

A C G C G Fine

A musical staff in 4/4 time, treble clef. It contains five measures. The first measure has a half note C (middle C) with a box labeled 'A' above it. The second measure has a half note G (G4) with a box labeled 'C' above it. The third measure has a half note C (C5) with a box labeled 'G' above it. The fourth measure has a half note G (G4) with a box labeled 'C' above it. The fifth measure has a half note C (C5) with a box labeled 'G' above it. A long slur connects the first and fourth measures. The staff ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

B Am F C G D.C.

A musical staff in 4/4 time, treble clef. It contains five measures. The first measure has a half note C (middle C) with a box labeled 'B' above it. The second measure has a half note Am (A3) with a box labeled 'Am' above it. The third measure has a half note F (F3) with a box labeled 'F' above it. The fourth measure has a half note C (C4) with a box labeled 'C' above it. The fifth measure has a half note G (G3) with a box labeled 'G' above it. A long slur connects the first and fourth measures. The staff ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

A NEW COMPOSITION IN AN AFTERNOON

Now that you have worked through this book once and created a composition you'll be able to make many more, and in no time at all.

It's common in books and films for artists to be portrayed as tortured souls, haunted by unfinished paintings and symphonies, mad as hatters until the job is complete. It doesn't need to be like that, I'll prove it to you.

Set aside an afternoon, just one, no more. Work your way through The Ultimate Challenge, a condensed version of this book with zero fat. Don't get caught up in perfectionism. If you find some parts difficult that's fine, in fact it's to be expected. Do what you can at the level you're at right now, and tell yourself you'll do that bit a little better *next time*. Not every composition needs to be 'the one'. Some will be stepping stones to great works, without which great work would never be made.

In short, *just keep moving*. Take small breaks to re-energise but don't lose focus. With the right mindset you can absolutely do this, and when you do you'll never look back. On your marks, get set, go!

1. Choose a root note. This is your home key. Write it on your worksheet under the R on the Major Key table.

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

2. Create a rhythmic phrase for your melody. Write it here on your worksheet.

A									

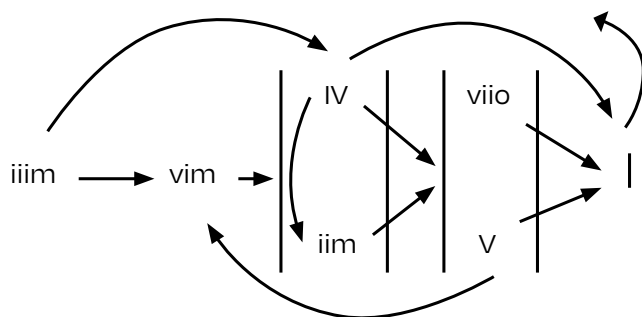
3. Write the notes of your home key here under the major scale formula RTTSTTTS. Add the RH finger pattern for this major scale.

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

4. Add the lowercase m's and a small o to the notes of your Major Key table on your worksheet. This transforms the notes into the correct chords that belong to your key. Use the bottom row to help you.

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

5. Fill in the major key circle on your worksheet. Explore different ways to move through these chords, using the diagram of recommended chord movements to guide you.



6. Write your favourite four chord progression on your worksheet in the A section.

A																

7. Take a moment to find the smoothest inversions for your chord progression, write the names of your chosen inversions next to your chords.

A																

8. Identify the relative minor to your major home key. Add it to the Minor Key table on the worksheet, along with the RH finger pattern for this minor scale.

MINOR KEY							
R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
im	iio	III	ivm	vm	VI	VII	im

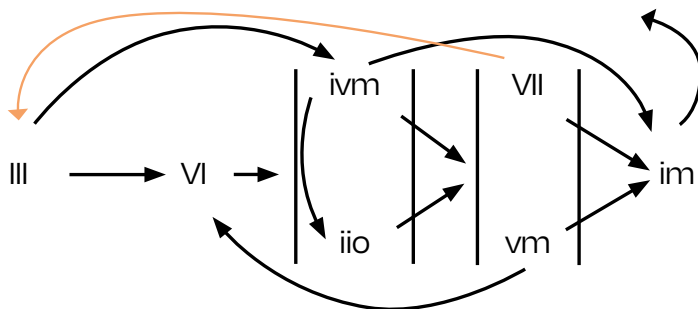
Next, create a rhythmic phrase for your B section melody. Write it here on your worksheet.

B							

9. Add the lowercase m's and a small o to the notes of your Minor Key table.

MINOR KEY							
R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
im	iio	III	ivm	vm	VI	VII	im

10. Fill in the minor key circle on your worksheet. Explore different ways to move through these chords, using the diagram of recommended chord movements to guide you.



- 11.** Write your favourite four chord progression on your worksheet in the B section.

12. Explore LH patterns (e.g. Oom-pah and arpeggiated chords) and when you've decided what you want and where you want them, write the names next to the chords.
13. Create a melody and write it on your worksheet. Remember to experiment with any note from your key, but keep a strong focus on chord tones.

A																

B																

- 14.** Translate the information from your worksheet to your lead sheet. Use musical notation for your RH melody and add in your LH chords above the staff.

If there are any notes in your melody that sound a little off, try other notes from your key. Small movements between notes often sound better than huge jumps. Make any necessary revisions on your lead sheet. This is also a good moment to add in a tie or two if you think they enhance your melody.

Did you manage it? Did you get to the end in one afternoon? Roll over Beethoven.

**AFTERWORD:
EXPRESSION,
FLUENCY &
SERIOUS FUN**

After reading *Beginner To Composer In 14 Days* people often assume I'm against the more conventional forms of musical education, when in fact I teach and examine music grades, and I'm the first to wax lyrical about their value. I do however recognise their limitations. The purpose of the exam route is to promote steady progression in technical ability, performance and theoretical understanding. Improvisation seldom comes into it, with the exception of a few jazz syllabuses; but even then students commonly *memorise* an 'improv' in inverted commas way ahead of their exam. Composition never comes into it. It's simply not what these regular kinds of exams are designed to do.

For a student to receive a rounded musical education they can't lean solely on doing grades. That would be like learning French, but only how to read and speak other people's words. It's an approach that renders you passive in the world, unable to construct a single sentence of your own and contribute something of your own experience. To me, that's missing out. Music is a language, a medium to communicate and share a glimpse of what's inside of us. What a shame to only be able to receive, when each of us has something beautiful and unique we could express.

If that romantic notion doesn't stir you then perhaps this will. Learning to improvise and

compose will significantly improve your musical fluency. I define musical fluency as the ease and speed at which someone reads, writes and plays musical notation; their grasp of music as a language, with grammar-like structures and syntax of its very own. It's common sense that someone who writes as well as reads and plays, is going to have a deeper understanding of their instrument. One skill cross-pollinates the other, strengthening the whole.

To close I'd like to recap my musings from the very start of this book: the vital importance of *curiosity* in learning and progressing in a field. I used to think it was just me that needed creative freedom in order to 'stick at things', a quirk of my personality (a hint of authority complex perhaps). Today, after more than a decade teaching students of all ages, levels and dispositions I can confidently say *we all* benefit from creative freedom. The evidence is clear, it's the *personal*, specialised enquiry into music that stimulates one's appetite for it. 'How can my opening bar feel more like that film scene I love?' 'How can my improv sound a bit more like Anna?' These are the idiosyncratic kinds of questions that exist outside of organised syllabuses. The questions that tempt students to sit a little longer at the keys, and to raise that most important of bars, the one they set for themselves.

So there you have it. While *Beginner To Composer In 14 Days* is a lot of fun, it's also the manifestation of a man on a mission. For students, I hope it empowers you not only to play the greats but to create something great too; and to begin a dialogue with your instrument, a supportive and revelatory conversation that will last a lifetime. For educators, I hope *Beginner To Composer In 14 Days* becomes a trusted resource, something you can lean on to help you deliver a holistic, humanistic musical education. Whoever you are, I hope you've enjoyed hanging out. Thank you for jamming with me.

GLOSSARY

Bar

Music is divided into bars. Each bar contains a set number of beats, for instance four beats.

Bass

Notes which are low in pitch. The low notes on the piano.

Bass clef

A symbol used at the beginning of a stave to indicate bass notes.

Beat

The beat is the underlying pulse of music. It's the thing you dance along to!

BPM

Abbreviation: beats per minute.

Chord

A group of three or more notes played at the same time.

Chord inversion

The notes of a chord, but played in a different shape.

Chromatic

Moving in semitones.

Chromatic scale

All twelve notes of the musical alphabet, played in order.

Da capo

'From the beginning' in Italian. Return to the beginning and continue through your piece.

Diminished chords

Three notes made of the formula: root note, 3 semitones above, 3 semitones above.

Dynamics

The volume of music. The range between quiet to loud.

Enharmonic equivalent

When a pitch has several names e.g. C# / Db.

Fine

'End' in Italian.

Flat / b

A note that is lowered by one semitone, to become the flat form of that note.

Interval

The musical word for the distance between any two pitches. (Semitone / Tone).

Key

The group of notes that a song uses.
Can be major or minor.

Key signatures

The visual representation of a key, indicating which notes are sharp / flat.

Major

A key, scale, chord or interval relating to the major tonality. Music in a major key sounds happy.

Major scale

A group of notes organised by the following formula: R T T S T T T S.

Middle C

The note C in the centre of the piano.

Minor

A key, scale, chord or interval relating to the minor tonality. Music in a minor key sounds sad.

Minor scale

A group of notes organised by the following formula: R T S T T S T T.

Musical notation

The standard way of writing down music used in the West.

Notes

Different pitches / sound frequencies e.g. A, B, C.

Octave / 8ve

The interval (distance) between two notes that are twelve semitones apart, and share the same name.

Phrase

A brief passage of music that feels whole, much like a phrase or sentence in the English language.

Pitch

Different sound frequencies e.g. low pitch, high pitch.

Pulse

The underlying beat of the music, the thing you dance along to!

Register

The register is the pitch range in which an instrument plays, or a part is written e.g. the bass register for the double bass.

Rehearsal marks

Alphabetical letters or numbers used to signpost the different sections of a piece of music, used so players can quickly find the start of a section.

Repeat symbol

Repeat symbols indicate a musical phrase that should be repeated by the player/s.

Relative minor

A minor key that shares the same notes as its relative major key.

Rhythm

Different combinations of long and short sounds and spaces. Rhythm is laid over a steady pulse/beat.

Root position

The notes of a chord, played in a specific shape where the lowest note is the root.

Scale

A group of notes played in order, ascending or descending.

Semitone

Two notes right next to each other, the smallest possible distance apart in music e.g. C and C# are a semitone apart.

Sharp / #

A note that is raised by one semitone, to become the sharp form of that note.

Stave

The five horizontal lines that musical notes are written on, indicating the pitch of those notes.

Tempo

The speed, understood in relation to the clock e.g. the tempo 80bpm means 80 evenly spaced beats that fit within 1 minute.

Tie

A curved line connecting two rhythmic values together.

Time signature

The numbers at the start of a piece that tell you how many beats there are per bar, and the type of beats they are.

Tone

Two notes that are two semitones apart e.g. C and D.

Treble

Notes which are high in pitch. The high notes on the piano.

Treble clef

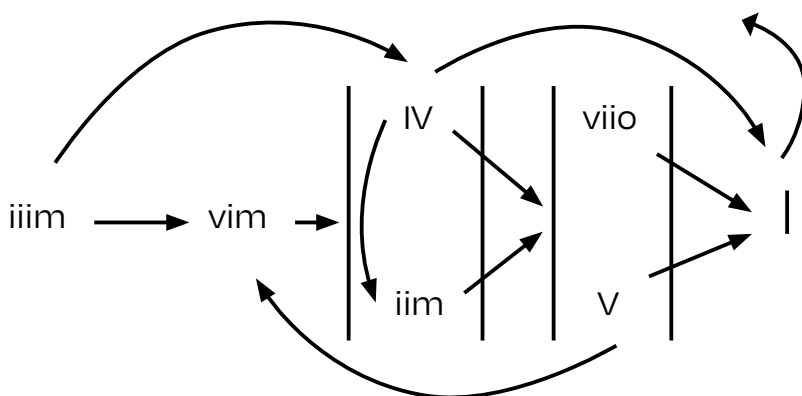
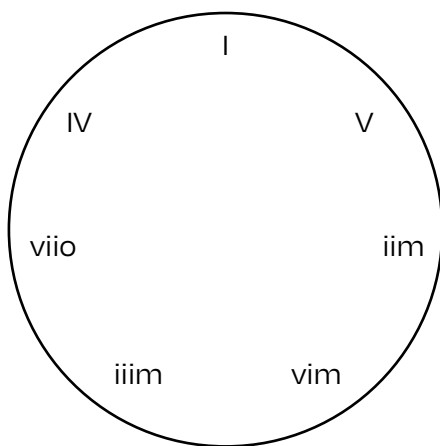
A symbol used at the beginning of a stave to indicate treble notes.

Triad

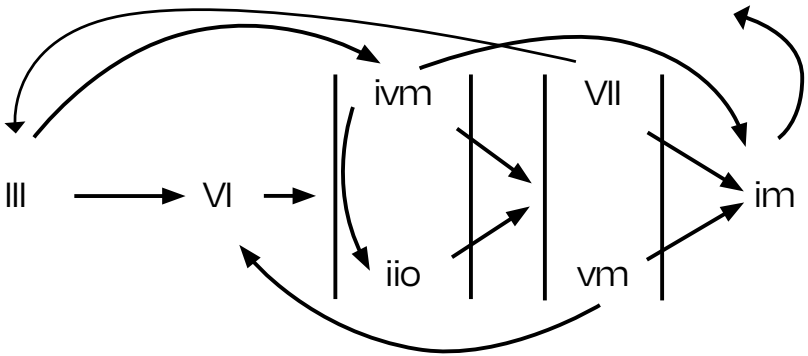
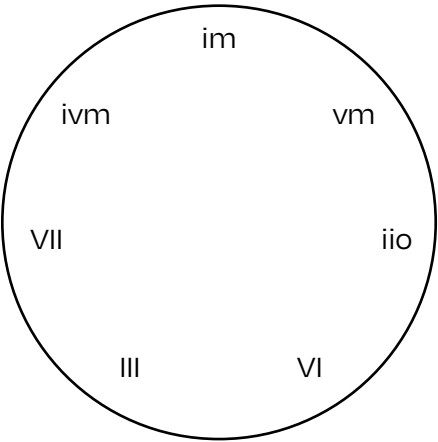
A chord consisting of three notes.

YOUR WORKSHEET

MAJOR KEY							
R	T	T	S	T	T	T	S
I	iim	iiim	IV	V	vim	viio	I

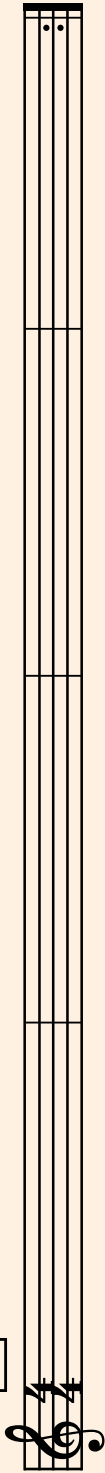


MINOR KEY							
R	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
im	iio	III	ivm	vm	VI	VII	im



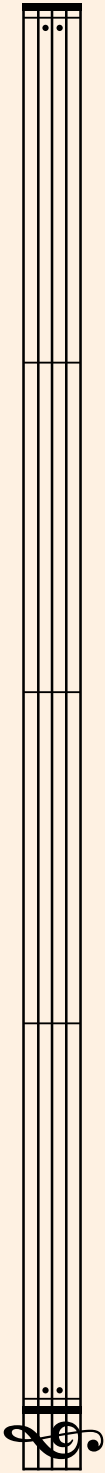
**your
LEAD
sheet**

A

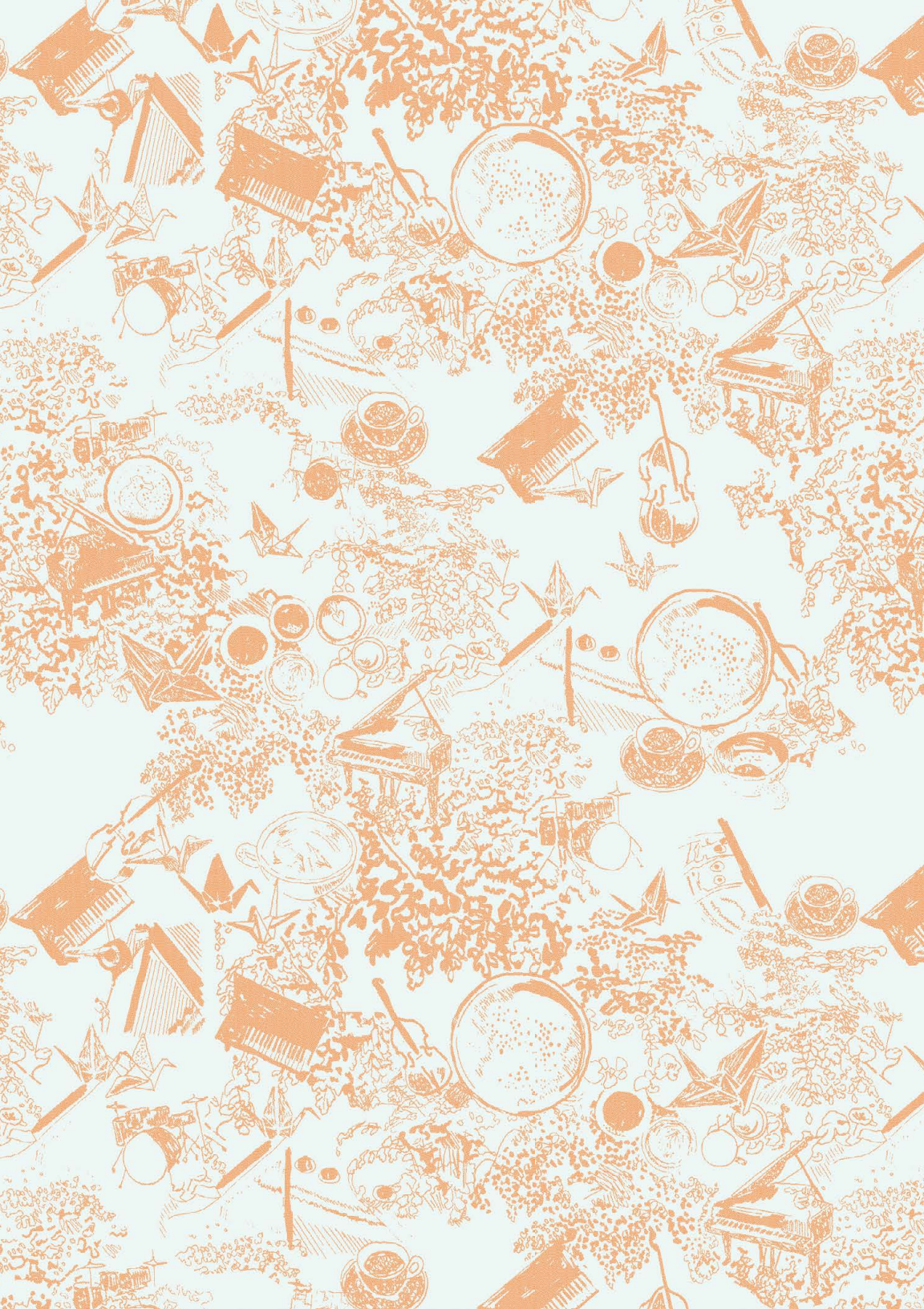


Fine

B



D.C.





Beginner To Composer In 14 Days is delightfully different. Moving swiftly from theory to action, Ben emerges as the teacher you always wished you'd had, championing radical creative freedom, improvisation and composition - even for beginners. Especially for beginners in fact. *"Students need freedom to truly fall in love with their instrument"* he writes, *"frameworks that pique their curiosity over and over again so that practice becomes play"*. Whether you're a complete beginner or have a little knowledge up your sleeve, you'll adore this dynamic and intimate guide to learning the piano, peppered with evocative vignettes of a life lived with music at its heart. Best of all, you'll come away with a method you can use time and time again to create your very own music, captured on professional quality lead sheets you can share with other musicians, to bring your work to life. Suitable for adults and a useful resource for teachers. Complements graded and traditional approaches to learning.