

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra in Your Classroom

Insights into the workings of music with Richard Gill AO

Composing as Inspired by Gordon Hamilton *SNAP*

Teacher Resource Booklet

Prepared by

Karlin Love and Jennifer MacDonald



©2017 Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Pty Ltd



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/au/>

Composing as Inspired by Gordon Hamilton *SNAP*

In this module you will listen to and engage with the orchestral work *SNAP*, a piece by Australian composer, Gordon Hamilton. Following on from this you will move to a task where you will complete activities to help develop your composition skills. You will then compose your own piece. In completing your tasks you will engage with listening, analysis, creating and performing. The tasks in this module can be used as part of a course and assessment under the Australian Curriculum (ACAMUM 100; 102; 104) or as part of the relevant senior secondary course within your jurisdiction.

To begin, listen to the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra audio track of *SNAP* before discussing the following topics in your class or as a small group.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-427073505/snap-by-gordon-hamilton>

Consider how the following music elements have been used to create a music structure. Comment on the following:

Tempo

Dynamics

Motif

Texture

Timbre

Rhythm

Listen again. Notice recording timepoints when something interesting happens.

A Download the score of *SNAP* by Gordon Hamilton:

<https://www.tso.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/SNAP-SCORE-FINAL.pdf>

B Find those timepoints (see Appendix 2: *SNAP* timepoints).

C Watch the video *Laying Down the Beat with Hamilton*, in particular bars 1-22 and bar 82-end to see how the sounds you've heard are produced. There might be some surprises!

Gordon Hamilton describes *SNAP*:

"In '*SNAP*' there is snap pizzicato everywhere – hopefully with minimal injury to instruments and players! 'Snap' or 'Bartok' pizzicato involves plucking the string vertically so that it rebounds off the fingerboard, creating a sharp percussive noise.

Repetitive rhythmic riffs are set up, adding new voices each repetition. These continually push into new variations, without revisiting previous riffs.

Instead of starting with a standard orchestral combination and then working out how to map the musical ideas onto a pre-existing ensemble, I began with violas and cellos, and then added instruments only as they became necessary. The result is a very unusual small orchestra with minimal winds and brass. Violas are the principal voice of the strings. Second violins are not used. Instead the double basses split into two sections, playing mostly in parallel fifths.

The piece is dedicated to Sue-Ellen Paulsen (star principal cellist of TSO), due to a perilous cello solo."

Here are some examples of how Hamilton has developed his motifs.

- Bar 1 is varied in bar 2 where it is repeated with a chromatic run at the end.

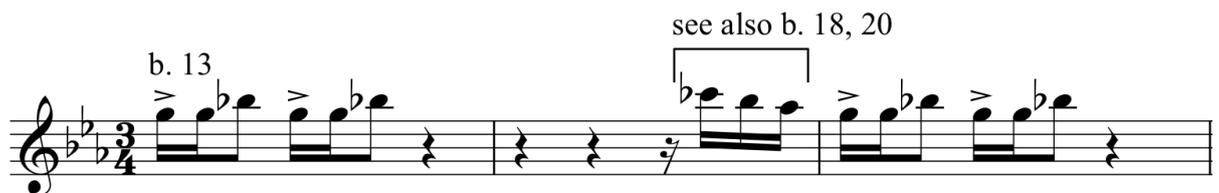
bar 1-4



- In bar 23 the rhythm is changed.



- Can you find where the motif in bar 13 (in the violin and oboe parts) has been manipulated two more times before bar 22 and how it has been manipulated?



Identify another variation of bar 1 and discuss how it is developed. The rhythm might be changed, there might be an extra note or notes might be deleted. Search and see what you can find.

Your tasks

1. Create a five to eight note motif.
2. Create a page of permutations of this motif using as many compositional devices as you can. Do at least six different things to it. You do not need to use the whole motif for each permutation.
3. Play all these permutations then choose three to five which you think you could build into a piece for instrumental trio. Consider how you are going to further develop the motif and, using a timeline, plan a texture shape for your piece. Consider the density, clarity, and volume for each section (beginning, middle, end). See Appendix 3.
4. Employ a range of music elements to reinforce your textural shape. These may include dynamics, timbre, tessitura, and articulation. Observe the ways you are continuing to manipulate your motifs to make your piece work.
5. Perform and record your pieces.
6. Revise and refine.
7. A **context statement** must accompany the composition. Discuss how you have developed motif and texture within your composition.
 - How have you used the music elements listed above to enhance your composition? Describe the elements individually and clarify your statements with specific examples from your composition.
 - Identify some compositional techniques used in your piece and describe what they contribute to the texture and/or the structure.

Extension Activities:

- Analyse waveform of the recording along with the score a) for your piece, b) for *SNAP*. See Appendix 4 for one version of a *Snap* waveform analysis.
- Find two more ways the passage in bar 5 in the bass clarinet and double bass has been manipulated anywhere in the piece.

Deliverables:

- **Performance**
- **Score – PDF (exported from Sibelius or Musescore or scanned if handwritten).**
- **Context Statement – PDF**

This activity can be assessed against tasks in many music syllabuses, both Australian and overseas. Below please find some examples of where these tasks would fit in some of the Australian contexts:

Australian Curriculum:

- Manipulate combinations of the elements of music in a range of styles, using technology and notation. (ACAMUM100)
- Plan and organise compositions with an understanding of style and convention, including drawing upon Australian music by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. (ACAMUM102)
- Evaluate a range of music and compositions to inform and refine their own compositions and performance. (ACAMUM 104)

TCE

Music 3 -

- Create and present original music statements
- Read and write music statements and identify use of music elements

Music Studies 2 -

- Create and present music statements
- Recognise and use music elements in aural and written contexts

VCE

Music Style and Composition units 1-4

Appendix I

Gordon Hamilton Biography

After freelancing for five years in Germany, composer and conductor Gordon Hamilton took over in 2009 as Artistic Director of one of Australia's foremost vocal ensembles, The Australian Voices.

Several recent compositions by Gordon Hamilton subvert expectations of the orchestra, including '*Ghosts in the Orchestra*' (2014), '*The Trillion Souls*' (2015), '*Thum Prints*' (for beatboxer and orchestra, 2015) and '*482 Variations on a Very Short Theme*' (2016). His '*Action Hero*' (2016) pairs the recorded voice of Arnold Schwarzenegger with orchestra and was premiered by WDR Funkhausorchester, Cologne.

His 50-minute choral opera 'MOON' (2011) has toured Australia, Germany and to the Edinburgh Fringe. Under a cheekier guise, Gordon reassembles the contributions of unwitting collaborators. His 'Tra\$h Ma\$h' (2012) reassembles fleeting grabs from pop songs. 'Toy Story 3 = Awesome!' (2011) – sets a stream of inane consciousness from his own Facebook news feed.

In 2018-19, Gordon will conduct the WDR Funkhausorchester (Cologne), the Nürnberg Symphoniker, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Chamber Orchestra of Havana.

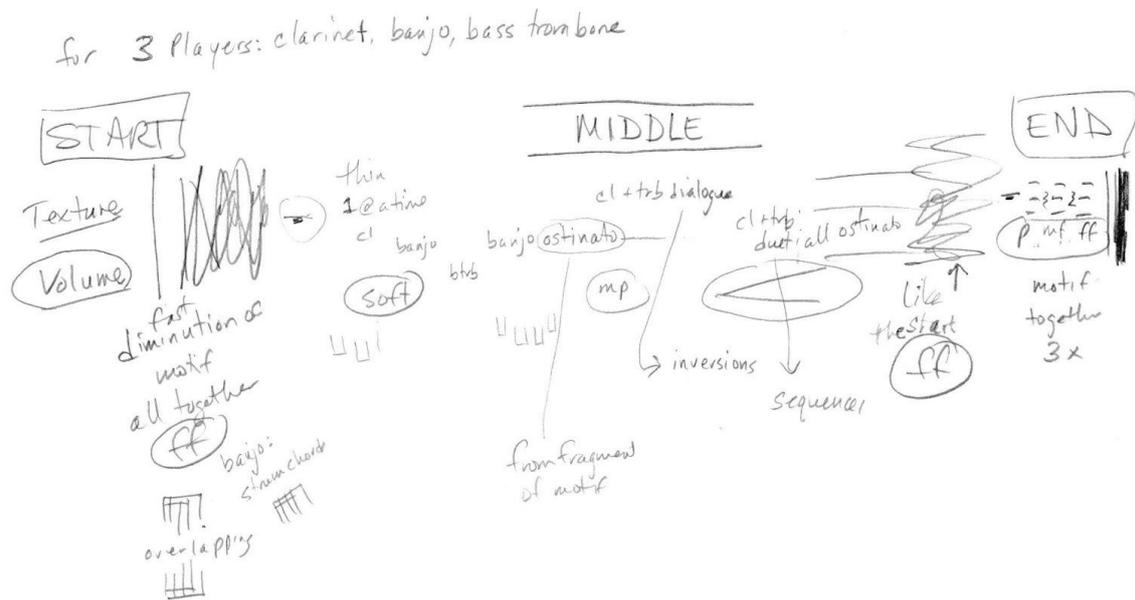
<http://www.hamilton-g.com>

Appendix 2

Score Bar #	Audio time	Video time
1	0:02	0:24
4	0:07	
5	0:08	
9	0:13	
13	0:19	
18	0:26	
22		0:57 end of video 1 st section
23	0:47	
33 1st x	1:03	
27 1st x	1:00	
38	1:1a	
23 - 2nd x	1:24	
47	1:48	
51	1:59	
51 - 2nd x	2:04	
55	2:09	
58	2:12	
66	2:37	
74	2:48	
81	3:00	
82	3:01	5:38 video 2nd section start
91	3:11	
105	3:26	
110	3:21	
117	3:39	5:54 cello solo only
126	3:49	
131	3:54	
141	4:10	6:53

Appendix 3

Composer's draft timeline example



Appendix 4

Waveform-timeline analysis of SNAP



Grid lines = 4 seconds

Note: 2 seconds of silence at start of this recording file

b. 21: tutti *ff*, >s followed by 5 beat rest. This is a strong section closer. The piece has gradually built to this dramatic stop. Rather than going directly on to a new section however, Hamilton repeats 8 bars, arrives at the same gesture, but immediately begins a thinner texture at *piano* dynamic (b. 23).

b. 31: The volume and rhythmic energy lifts here. He also introduces a larger melodic interval.

The texture thickens leading up to another strong section closer at b. 46 with *fp* < *f*. The following quieter section introduces 5/8 patterns and leads to a change of tonal centre at b. 51 (1:59)

Another strong tutti gesture at b. 55 and *fp* < *f* bring the piece back to C. This is approximately the halfway point of the piece. The texture thins and the rhythm becomes simpler but the volume is still fairly loud, so the dramatic change at b. 58 (2:12) isn't so obvious in the waveform.

b. 66 begins with a thinner texture that is also less volume and thus, a smaller waveform.

At b. 74 the waveform is very small. It approaches stillness, setting up anticipation.

At b. 82 a 2/4 version of the first material builds up to b. 91, and a powerful tutti gesture in 93. At 94, the texture thins and the volume drops to make room for the cello solo.

b. 126: This is nearly the end of the cello solo. She is playing very high, and probably as loud as possible. The rest of the orchestra is full and getting busier, and some instruments are now in more powerful registers. They close the cello solo section at b. 130 with a *ff* tutti semiquaver gesture.

Texture and volume build and drop back, reaching another tutti *ff* at b. 140.

The final coda-like section takes the 6-note semiquaver riff and repeats it with an equal amount of silence between repeats. Except it's not silence: the tam-tam and bass drum fill the gap dramatically. The waveform remains thick.

The piece finishes with one last tutti semi-quaver riff.

Hamilton uses the musical elements of volume, texture and rhythmic density to shape the structure of this piece. Since his harmonic language is quite consistent through the piece, with only a few short diversions from the main tonal centre of C, changes in other elements establish the form. The waveform (which shows only volume over time) gives a pretty good indication of the structure. He uses quieter sections to build anticipatory tension. Section boundaries are loud, full and have a clearly dominant tutti rhythm or *fp* < *f*. There are 3 extensive louder sections: at the beginning, from the midpoint, and at the end. The cello solo section is very intense and the volume parameter doesn't really reflect the increase in musical energy from 94 – 126.