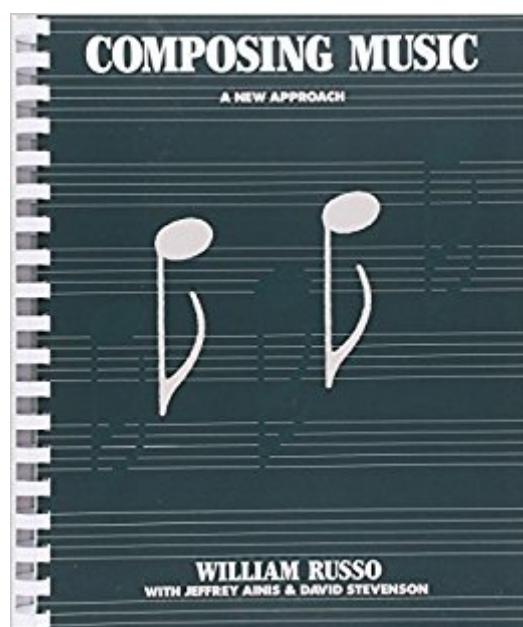


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Composing Music: A New Approach



Synopsis

Aimed at those who have some knowledge of music but not formal training in composition, this concise introduction to composing starts right in with a brief composition exercise, then proceeds step by step through a series of increasingly complex and challenging problems, gradually expanding the student's musical grammar. "This is a wonderful book for anyone who is developing improvising skills or who would like a fun way to explore music." — Jim Stockford, Co-Evolution Quarterly

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Customer Reviews

This is one of the best "How to" books I have ever read on any subject. It works on several levels. Even though it takes a "beginners" approach to introducing many topics, it doesn't shy away from "real" music. For example, even the first simple exercise contains something different - 5/4 time. A beginner will simultaneously learn the basics of chord progressions and melody writing, stripped down to the bare essentials, while delving into modern techniques like 12-tone rows and picture music. The key to the book is the concept of restricting the musical palette by some simple rules, to prevent the budding composer being overwhelmed by the possibilities. Right from the first page, you are working on real composition examples. Even though the book is not particularly aimed at computer music or sequencing, electronic music enthusiasts should find it useful. A lot of the minimalist techniques are ideal for sequencing. Plus, if your musical background is pretty basic, and you are looking to broaden it with a mix of traditional and contemporary techniques, this book should

take you a long way. By its very nature, a book like this can only touch on some areas. So you will probably want to supplement it with some other material if, for example, you want a bit more detail on counterpoint. Still, it manages to cover a huge amount of ground, with the most detail where it counts most - developing and harmonising melodies, and a very good section on writing music to lyrics (ie songwriting). One last point - a lot of theory and composition books miss the mark with contemporary musicians because they approach the subject from the purely "classical" angle of cadence and resolution. This book is soundly classical in its approach to harmonisation and melodic development, but uses the comfortable pop/jazz approach to chord progressions, so it shouldn't lose any reader. Highly recommended!

Russo's book is the best place to begin if you're seriously interested in composing music. His methodology is straightforward, and his rules sensible. The exercises bear fruit both as a learning experience and a stimulus for original compositions. Russo assumes you understand some rudimentary musical theory, and I suppose most people picking up this book will have that knowledge. Where I found this book most useful is in writing long themes, which had always daunted me. Russo's method is transportable, and when inspiration is stymied, I find what I've learned from this book can tide me over. One reviewer makes the point that this book doesn't tie all the exercises together into longer pieces, which is true, but that's a flaw that can be remedied by reading scores, and looking at structural examples of other composers. I wish I'd found this book years ago.

I'm a musician and songwriter with a degree and many years' experience. But when I took on a project to create an opera with a playwright friend I found that my theory was rusty -- and I was also venturing into types of composition I'd never done before. I wanted a good solid book that would help me review my long-ago theory classes and layout a framework that would help me structure my composition. The book's been a very pleasant surprise. It's quite intermediate in level. If you're not comfortable with a lot of theory basics, it would be a hard place to start. Similarly, experienced composers looking for inspiration for new directions probably won't find it here (or not enough to make it worthwhile). However, especially for composers with some experience, the book is an valuable way to brush up on theory, begin to apply that theory to examples and exercises and try some new approaches to writing. If that's the type of book you're looking for, I heartily recommend this title.

I picked this book up a few years ago, and am still getting a lot out of the exercises. The processes used are very refreshing, from a music student's perspective. The approach is from the view of more contemporary music, and the text leaves out the stuffy, "unnecessary" theory. If you want to study theory, get a theory book. This book is designed to teach the individual who has little experience outside of very basic music fundamentals. From the first page you'll be writing "mini-compositions". The book works through the following concepts (chapter by chapter): 1. The Cell, the Row, and Some Scales 2. Harmony (I) 3. Transformation 4. The Small Theme and the Large Theme 5. More Scales and the 12-tone Row 6. Isomelody and Isorhythm, Combined 7. Ostinato 8. Accompaniment Procedures 9. Harmony (II) 10. Counterpoint 11. Organum 12. Imitation: A Useful Game 13. Words and Music 14. Picture Music 15. Popular Music as a Source 16. Minimalism Although you certainly don't need to have advanced theory knowledge to make use of this book, once you do gain those skills, the book will prove that much more helpful.

This book is full of small exercises for getting the beginner to start composing. Covers most of the techniques a composer will want to know without giving you a headache. However, the scope of the book doesn't cover where and how to use some of the techniques. Though not methodical toward composing mature pieces, overall the book is highly educational for those with a background of half a year of college piano or theory class. I would recommend it to anyone.

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