
TEACHING RESOURCES

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PIECE ON A POSTCARD

TEACHING RESOURCES KINDLY
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FIRST PERFORMANCE

Piece on a Postcard was first performed in the Music for Youth Regional Festival Series in 2012.

ABOUT PIECE ON A POSTCARD

Piece on a Postcard is a rhythmic composition presented visually in the form of a postcard. It was conceived as a musical activity appropriate for all – irrespective of musical experience or skill level.

The piece consists of five grooves (repeated rhythmic patterns or ‘feels’) that can be played in any combination and on any instrument, including voice and body percussion. The performers can choose which of the grooves to include and how to structure the music. They can also invent and add parts of their own.

Piece on a Postcard was composed by Rob Farrer who is a freelance percussionist, teacher and composer.

HOW TO PLAY PIECE ON A POSTCARD

The notation for *Piece on a Postcard* (in postcard format) is available to download from the Music for Youth website at: www.mfy.org.uk/evolve/thesoundvault. There is also an explanatory video by the composer and two filmed performances – one using body percussion and the other a brass group.

The postcard shows five separate lines (grooves) of music; each a two bar repeated rhythm pattern. In general, a player (or group of players) would perform just one of the grooves throughout, although a more complex structure could also be adopted.

GROOVE 1

Groove 1 is a simple pattern in 4/4 time, comprised equally of quaver notes – sometimes off-beat, sometimes accented – and quaver rests.

GROOVE 2

Groove 2 is the same pattern as *Groove 1* but displaced by two beats. *Groove 2* fills in the rests created by *Groove 1*, and vice versa. To get the full antiphonal effect of this “hocket” it would be good to place *Groove 2* and *Groove 1* players at opposite sides of the ensemble.

GROOVE 3

Groove 3 has a Hip Hop / Rock feel and is written like a drum-kit part, with tails up and down to indicate different sounds. This could be interpreted as two different tones (e.g. chest slap for lower, clap for upper) or two different pitches if you are using tuned instruments.

GROOVE 4

Groove 4 is a faster, more complex pattern formed from a repeated idea three semi-quaver beats in length. In effect, it provides an interesting cross-rhythm that ‘corrects’ itself again at each new repeat. As in *Groove 3*, the notes have up and down tails indicating different sounds.

If using body percussion for *Groove 4* it would be advisable to use a variety of actions so that it is less tiring to perform. The composer demonstrates one possibility for this on the tutor video.

GROOVE 5

Groove 5 is in 7/4 time and is one beat shorter than the other grooves. It has a motif of two accented notes next to each other, which, because of the shorter pattern length, dramatically appears in a different place with each new repetition.

MAKING CHOICES

There are many ways that the piece can be constructed and lots of fun to be had through experimenting.

At the beginning, the players (or player groups) could enter one at a time, building up the groove combinations gradually until all are heard. The grooves could also be introduced in different combinations. Players can drop out, or move into the background or foreground through changes of dynamics. There are also possibilities for solo improvising.

The performance could be led by a conductor, who could then initiate changes to the piece as it progresses. The body percussion performance video on the website shows some interesting ideas for a 'conductor arranger' to try.

The piece can follow any structural design and be of any length. The speed indicated (crotchet = 112) is recommended 'to get a good sense of groove' but is not prescribed.

Piece on a Postcard can be turned into a performance for tuned instruments. The composer suggests using any combination of pitches that work – jazz modes, tone-rows, blues scale – arranged to suit the instrumentalists. Finding patterns that work musically can, of course, become part of the creative process for the players.

STARTING POINTS AND FURTHER EXPERIMENTATION

There are no set rules of how to learn, play or perform *Piece on a Postcard*. On the tutor video the composer teaches all of the grooves to the players first, enabling everyone to enjoy and get a 'feel' for each. He teaches them by ear, repeating each pattern until it feels comfortable. He then allocates the parts appropriately to individuals before conducting a 'performance.' Students can learn to play *Piece on a Postcard* through playing along with the tutor video.

The grooves need to be internalised. Some are quite tricky and may need a lot of practice. *Groove 3* might be a good one to introduce first as the class / ensemble will, most likely, be familiar with it.

The relationship between *Groove 1* and *Groove 2* is an interesting project in its own right (see 'Hocket' boxed inset). The two grooves could be practised as a pair-work activity, or with the whole class divided.

When the group can hold the parts confidently, individual students can take it in turns to become 'conductor arrangers'.

The ensemble will need to find an effective way to end the piece. In both of the video performances the music stops dramatically on the first beat of the bar.

Students could study the pitched arrangement of *Piece on a Postcard* played by the brass ensemble in the performance video. The notes used for this particular arrangement are based on the Aeolian mode. Over the page is a reduced score (at concert pitch) indicating the melodies used for each groove.

The image displays five musical grooves, each on a separate staff. Groove 1 is in 4/4 time, using a treble clef and featuring a sequence of eighth notes with accents. Groove 2 is in 4/4 time, using a bass clef and featuring a sequence of eighth notes with accents. Groove 3 is in 4/4 time, using a bass clef and featuring a sequence of quarter notes with accents. Groove 4 is in 4/4 time, using a treble clef and featuring a sequence of eighth notes with accents. Groove 5 is in 7/4 time, using a bass clef and featuring a sequence of quarter notes with accents.

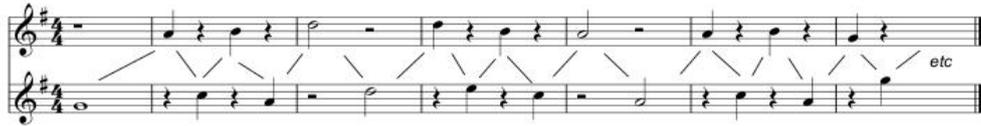
The class / ensemble could make their own performance using this material, or use it as a starting point for creating their own melody lines.

It is interesting to note here that *Groove 1* and *Groove 2* are themselves in two-part harmony. It would be a challenge for students to create their own harmony version of a groove or, indeed, to make up their own groove 'from scratch' to add to the piece.

HOCKET FACTS

The word Hocket describes a composing technique where a single melody is divided between two (or more) voices – the overall flow thus staying intact, but the individual parts being disjointed and with as many rests as notes.

Here is the beginning of Offenbach's *Can Can* as a hocket:



Hocketting creates an unusual – sometimes overlapping, sometimes disjointed – sound. **Hocket** literally means 'hiccup'. It is particularly effective when the players are standing a distance from each other.

Medieval and Renaissance composers (Machaut, Dufay, Palestrina) commonly used the **Hocket** in short passages within their compositions – particularly in church music, where the notes can be bounced from one side of the choir stalls to the other. The technique has been revived more recently (Peter Maxwell Davies, Bobby McFerrin, Meredith Monk, King Crimson, Louis Andriessen), and there are obvious connections that can be made with beatbox, multi-track recording and panning.

Andean panpipe music is largely constructed through hocketting. The technique gives the music its characteristic overlapping sound and also enables performers to play fast and breathe at the same time. Indonesian Gamelan bands also use the same technique (called *Imbal*), interlocking repeated melodies between two instruments.

In the natural world songbirds are known to '**hocket**' their calls. The Ugandan Bou-bou Shrike makes up very elaborate hocket patterns with its partner, which they then extend (in length and complexity) throughout their lives. They can perform at great distances and are rhythmically accurate to within a few hundredths of a second. Famously, the Bou-bou Shrike can also hocket in a trio with two other birds. Here's a short warning call:



(John Davy – *Songs for Swinging Shrikes*)

HOCKET ACTIVITIES

In a pair or group, think up a short, dramatic sentence. Assign a word to each member in rotation. Stand apart and practise saying the whole sentence until

it sounds natural and flowing.

With a partner, try singing a song (or playing a tune) where each of you performs alternate notes as a hoquet. Choose a simple song that you know well. Try it at different speeds and performing it at a distance apart. Aim for perfect timing. Repeat with an accompanying instrument to anchor the sound. Try recording it to observe the effect. Write it down on two staves, inserting rests in appropriate places.

Try to create the same effect with the music technology available to you (pre- and post recording).

Research Meredith Monk on the Internet and watch a performance of the piece '*Hoquet*'. Listen out for the hoquet in Webern's arrangement of the Ricercare from Bach's *Musical Offering*.