



national foundation for
youth music

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make the song your own

'Drop in the Ocean' has been written to be a 'flexible' song. That means that you might think of writing a new verse with your young people. Writing lyrics is a skill and this might be a way into working on your own new songs.



1. Add new lyrics!

- Using the existing melody, write more verses based on relevant events in current world news. You can use newspaper articles and sound bites from TV news reports as a stimulus to generate lyrics.
- Translate the phrase 'Drop in the Ocean' into other languages that are spoken in your community. Think how the rhythms need to change to sing these translations?

2. Vocalise!

The Introduction, bridge or linking section and coda offer great opportunities for creating vocal soundscapes: Use vocal wave and sea effects before the song has started and continue these sounds in the three sections making decisions about dynamics and pitch

You can use the following ideas to create an atmospheric sound picture of the sea using voices. This activity works best with a large group. (NC Music Unit 18 Exploring Sound Sources)

- Make a list of words connected with the sea.
- Group the words, putting similar sounds together. For example, Sea, sand, shore, ship, shingle, shell etc.
- Join two or more words and say them together, enjoying the rhythm that their sound makes e.g. sea, sand, shore or shingle, shingle, shingle. Emphasise the s and sh sounds to increase the watery effect.
- Build in wave-like effects by experimenting with sounds which get louder and quieter
- Start to build layers of sound. Decide which group will go first and how many times will they say their pattern before the next group joins in. Ask the group to decide whether they say their pattern loudly or quietly and how long they will carry on for.
- Experiment by fading parts in and out or getting louder or quieter or by introducing changes in weather or other new ideas.

3. Experimenting with harmony can add so much to a song



You will probably find older singers experiment instinctively.

Alternatively you could use the harmonies for the coda that you hear on the CD track 1 or the harmonies and descant in the score (Letter E-G and H-I) as a starting point if it helps.

*'I can rise up as rain, I can fall down as thunder.
All it takes is just a drop in the ocean'*

Arranging your own accompaniment

Get the band more involved by arranging the song for instrumental accompaniment. The band parts in the pack can be used as a starting point for your arrangements and used in any combination depending on what instruments you have available.

Drums? Steel Pans? Sitar? Clarinets? Think about what instruments you have and what would be suitable for the song and the style you want to perform it in.

Why not listen to the backing track (CD track 2) and the rhythm track (CD track 3) to see if they give you any ideas for instruments you could use?

Or you could make your own backing track or you could download samples to re-mix from our web-site.



Here are some trade secrets for those who want to be more adventurous

There are two kinds of arranging. The first kind (orchestrating or scoring) is about 'spreading' the whole accompaniment over an instrumental ensemble. The other kind is about adding colour and texture to an existing accompaniment (e.g. keyboard, guitar, bass and/or percussion). This is the approach we'll take with Drop in the Ocean.

Solo instrumental lines can work in three different ways:-

1. Providing countermelody (duetting)
2. Providing fills – 'lifting' the music between phrases and sections
3. Providing momentum and texture through riffs and ostinati.

You choose. Then spot the various ways things work in the band parts provided. Often, an instrumental line will slide seamlessly between one function and another.

You might find a sustained duet or descant through a verse or chorus is only effective in one verse out of several, because otherwise it detracts from the focus of the lead melody.

More classy melody lines weave in and out of the lead melody, enhancing the climax, covering phrase breaks and lifting the energy where necessary. They don't need to be complex or difficult.

The secret is in where they start and stop.

Use the band parts provided as a model. Here's how they are planned:-

1. Examine the overall structure of the song - chorus, verse, bridge, modulation, etc.
2. Decide on the instrumental line-up.
3. Think about the character of the verse and chorus - what kind of accompaniment lines would suit?
4. Plan the use of instruments in such a way as to sustain a build-up, adding new ideas as the song proceeds.
5. Decide on where to use solo lines and where to use accompaniment riffs.

Here's the structure

INTRO	sustained chords
LETTER A	emphasise dominants; sustained (verse 1)
LETTER B	develop (verse 2)
LETTER C	rhythmic punctuation + short fills (chorus 1)
LETTER D	solo 1 (bridge)
LETTER E	elaborate verse ideas (verse 3)
LETTER F	repeat of chorus 1 idea
LETTER G	solo 2 (bridge)
LETTER H	new texture - riffs and repeated chords (chorus 3)
LETTER I	sustained chords (coda).

Here's some more trade secrets

- Keep the instrumental parts out of the way of the vocal line. How? Work in a different octave; play in the 'gaps'.
- Find a harmonic blend with the voice (usually in thirds or sixths) - aim for a sound which would work musically if all we heard was the voice and the solo instrument.
- Avoid too many 'heavy' instruments which might mask the voice, such as saxophones, horns and low clarinets - see point one above.
- Keep it moving. If the instrumental line merely moves with the block harmonies it contributes nothing.
- However, if the player is not very experienced, find a small range of notes around which to base the accompaniment. A good bet is usually the dominant of the key of the piece.
- Create a different texture for each verse and chorus - start simple and build the energy. (See Drop in the Ocean example.)

What else should you consider

If you have several instruments available, make up three-part chords and create an accompaniment riff - a repeating rhythm on easy notes. Once again, aim to keep the chord out of the way of the vocal line. With strings, widely 'spread' chords work well (i.e. where the notes are a 6th or more apart). With brass, the best effect is to keep the instruments close together in harmony. However, woodwind can go either way.

Supporting the melody

Occasionally you might want to use an instrument to enhance the vocal melody. Choice of instrument is important - see above. Flutes work well - an octave higher. But it's sometimes fun to double an octave below, e.g. with a horn - especially if there are no male tenor/baritone voices available. There is little point in doubling the voice at the same octave, as this will often cause intonation problems. The voices can't hear the instrument and the player might not be 100% in tune in any case. If this is difficult to avoid, look at ways of 'shadowing' the melody in thirds.

The golden rules of?

Simply, they are balance and movement. The accompaniment should always provide a counter-balance for the melody and it should never remain at rest, always moving the music forward (unless you want a particularly dramatic effect).