

The aim of the workshop programs I have developed over the last few years is to encourage everyone to get involved in creating music – i.e., composing, improvising and performing. A workshop or series of sessions has four main parts:

1. Warm ups that introduce basic music elements of listening, movement and rhythms, making sounds, and working together
2. Exploring and identifying with what and how we can make sounds – drawing on a mixture of instruments, everyday and found objects, recorded samples, and voices
3. Working out how we can communicate with one another and organise the playing in the group – copying certain sounds, modifying these, introducing new elements and establishing an order of events
4. Deciding upon an outcome for what we create – performance or showing, recording, installation, sound walk, sound bath or soundtrack for a silent film or artworks

The concept works with all ages – primary or secondary school students and adults – although it is generally best to have some basic age-based groupings (e.g., 5-9 / 10-15 / 16-adult) as some of the activities are explained differently for young and older participants.

A free-improvised musical approach is key because it enables people with different levels of musical knowledge, including complete beginners, to work together. We develop a curiosity for the sounds and interactions themselves, and musical structures grow out of this. Each person reacts and responds with a vocabulary they are comfortable with.

Participants in these workshops over the past two years often mention in their feedback that they are surprised, but then amazed, that music can indeed take many forms. Younger participants love working together to create music and relish having a say in its final form: *this music is good because we made it!* In teenagers, we notice a change in their confidence – *I have something to say and my voice is important.* They experience too that playing and composing is always in one way or another a collaborative activity. Adults welcome the parallels to other disciplines – e.g., visual art, literature or network theory – and often leave a workshop with new-found interest in hitherto *difficult* contemporary music.

Ideal group size is up to fifteen, and workshop length is flexible – 90 minutes per session is generally good. I think we could assemble an interesting mixture of locally-sourced instruments and objects – when I was last in Warrnambool I spoke to a few of the stall holders at the Fletcher Jones Vintage Market and they were fascinated with the idea of repurposing and up-cycling.

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Charles MacInnes began his career as an orchestral trombonist before moving into improvisation and composition. He completed a PhD in 2018 at Monash University researching and developing a framework for bringing improvisation into the contemporary art music ensemble. He is now at the forefront of a new generation of arts practitioners specialising in participatory projects. For the Community Engagement and Education Department at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg he writes and designs new workshop programs, where he has also led over 500 creative music workshops for participants of all ages. He was recently invited to contribute to a research seminar on the Social Impact of Music Making at Musikfabrik in Cologne, and is a regular presenter at conferences around the world including at the 2025 Australian Society for Music Education XXV National Conference "Music Ahead" in Brisbane.