



Roots to Inspire

Resources for
cross-cultural collaboration
through music making

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Introduction

This resource is for anyone interested in making music with other people. It focusses on working with people from different cultural backgrounds across different styles of music, but it also applies to any music making with more than just one person involved. The thinking also applies to working in groups of people of different ages and/or abilities.

The resource will hopefully be useful for professional and amateur musicians, music educators, workshop leaders and composers working in a wide range of settings.

It includes:

1. Findings from research that Dr Toby Martin from the University of Huddersfield has conducted around cross-cultural musical collaborations.
2. Examples of projects that took place as part of the *Roots to Inspire* programme.
3. Activities and ideas which you might try out if you're working in a group or even on your own, thinking about how you might work with a group, categorised as follows:

i. Discussion/oral activities - green

ii. Music making activities - orange

iii. Listening activities - purple

The resource is a starting point for ideas about cross-cultural collaboration rather than a definitive guide on how to set up and evaluate projects, although some aspects of project coordination are included.

Research background: Dr Toby Martin



Dr Toby Martin is a collaborative songwriter and composer from Australia. His practice-led research explores the potential for popular music composition to bring together diverse voices and traditions.

He is interested in:

- How improvisation (jamming) can open up a space for people's identity/diversity, allowing new types of music to emerge.
- How real stories captured through interviews and/or testimonies can become lyrics for music.
- How working together across cultures promotes awareness of diversity as well as highlighting the things we have in common.

Toby's cross-cultural projects have included:

- ***Songs from Northam Avenue***: a commission from Urban Theatre Projects to create a sequence of songs responding to the lives of people from the multicultural Sydney suburb of Bankstown. Beginning with a residency during which discussions with local residents were undertaken as a basis for song lyrics, the project developed into an extended collaboration with local musicians with various cultural backgrounds, including Iraqi, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Western.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23Q2V_Z4mPw&feature=emb_logo.
- ***Indigenous/non-Indigenous musical collaborations***: with Roger Knox and The Rugcutters <http://karenconradpublicity.com/?p=1263> & <https://www.facebook.com/NITVAustralia/videos/780734585631550/>
- ***Momentum II***: a series of composition workshops with refugees in Huddersfield and prisoners at HMP Leeds, engaging participants with songwriting and composition. Delivered in partnership with Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.
- ***Sounding Out Refugee Stories*** in Jordan, working with Jordanian musicians to make new musical settings of interview texts by Syrian refugees.
- ***I Felt the Valley Lifting***: a UK folk/Indie/Iranian music collaboration.
- ***Roots to Inspire***: 4 different music projects exploring fusions across a wide range of styles with local communities.

Through linking his own practical work with existing research literature, Toby has found that:

- Improvisation can open up common ground for people from different cultures.
- Cross-cultural collaboration can develop awareness of and respect for diverse sounds and tonalities, diverse ways of composing and recording music and building new and diverse audiences. It can also increase awareness of cultures other than one's own, in a broader, non-musical sense.
- Collaborators benefit from spending sustained periods of time together, including time outside the process of making music. This can help to build empathy, understanding and trust, which then informs the process of musical collaboration.
- Life story lyrics can be gathered through interviews and conversations in people's native language and with respect to the authenticity of their everyday speech and idioms.
- Group leaders should try to facilitate a safe space for people's music and ideas without speaking for them or presenting a "Western" framework for them to slot into.

His research has helped to:

- Create interesting new music
- Open up new creative paths and career opportunities for experienced musicians
- Provide creative outlets and recognition for novice musicians
- Get young people thinking in new ways about composing music
- Increase understanding of the cultural benefits of diversity - especially in countries where immigration is such a hot topic
- Give voice to stories and sounds that otherwise would not have been heard
- Raise the profile of cross-cultural collaboration

Further examples of this thinking and how it has been, and can be, put into practice are illustrated in this resource pack.



Roots to Inspire: overview

Roots to Inspire aimed to highlight the rich diversity of musical traditions in Kirklees through creative collaboration. The programme, supervised by Toby Martin, paired musicians/artists Sam Hodgson, Testament, Supriya Nagarajan and Lisa Luxx with community music groups in Kirklees in order to create new music or a new take on traditional music.

Roots to Inspire was delivered by the University of Huddersfield with funding from Kirklees Council via the Leeds City Region LEP's Business Rates Pool Fund.

You can watch a short film highlighting the four different projects here, and each project is described below:

<https://vimeo.com/370320058>

Lisa Luxx (spoken word artist) and WomenCentre (Huddersfield)

With Emily Druce (music therapist/songwriter) and Holly Marland (singer/composer/kora player)

Lisa aimed to bring together women from different cultures to explore new worlds of words, sounds and music - celebrating aspects of what it means to be a woman. Four morning sessions were held at WomenCentre with participants from Ethiopia, Pakistan, Syria and Yorkshire. New approaches to improvisation, wordplay, storytelling and the sharing of sisterhood evolved during the sessions. These approaches will inform new music created with WomenCentre which will be shared as part of Sound Women 2020.

Supriya Nagarajan (singer/composer) with Pentland Infant and Nursery School and Yorkshire Adabee Forum

With Duncan Chapman (sound artist), Lucy Nolan (harp), James Cave (piano), Beau Stocker (drums), Callum Coomber (guitar), Jess Baker (voice/sound artist)

Supriya worked with primary school children and older poets in Dewsbury, sharing stories from her childhood in rural South India and gathering ideas and responses which were recorded as samples by sound artist Duncan Chapman. She then had four sessions with a diverse ensemble of musicians - some of whom she had worked with before and others who were new to collaborative practice. Using her own narrative structure with specific Indian Raga (scales), recorded samples and space for collaborative improvisation, the group developed a new piece of music called ***Fireflies***.

Sam Hodgson (singer/songwriter) with the Huddersfield Mission and Huddersfield Community Gospel Choir

With Nigel Cudjoe (composition, vocals, production, mastering), Savvy (rap), Christine Avis (cello), Joel Robinson (composition, keys), Lizzie Berchie (vocals).

Music and lyrics were written in response to interviews with Huddersfield residents that were carried out online and at the Huddersfield Mission. The interview questions focussed on how people from around the world and from varied cultures can identify with 'being from or in' Huddersfield. The answers came from people who identified as being from or 'part of' India, South Africa, Poland, Czech Republic, Ireland, The West Indies, Germany, Thailand, Japan, South America as well as 'all the world', 'the mud and the woods' and more. However, everyone stated that Huddersfield is important to them in some way.

The resulting music is a diverse view of the town spanning through Gospel, Hip Hop, Classical, Folk and Blues and with excerpts of interviews from people living in Huddersfield: <https://samh.bandcamp.com/album/roots-to-inspire>

Testament (rapper/beatboxer) with Honley High School

Testament spent three days at the school, working with what he describes as a 'cocktail' of young people who were all at different academic and musical levels and had different backgrounds. Through intuitive, playful exploration of the voice and new approaches to playing instruments using very simple instrumentation, Testament was able to bring out new music that the music teacher described as '*awe inspiring - the best thing I've seen in 25 years of teaching*'. A step-by-step approach helped young people to move out of their comfort zones and to grow in confidence.

Testament with St Paul's Temperance Brass Band

With Leigh Baker (band director/arranger), Saju (rapper), Mike L and Ruby Wood (vocals)

Testament had never worked with a brass band before and wanted to fuse traditional Yorkshire brass band sounds with hip hop, rap, scratch DJ-ing, Jazz and poetry.

Testament with Beech Primary School and Leeds Libraries

Testament used beatboxing and singing within a 1-day workshop to create lyrics and melodies, to be used within a new song inspired by the pupils' input.



Why collaborate?



Toby and other researchers suggest that popular music has often taken snippets of music from other cultures and added them as an exotic flavouring to the mix. This type of borrowing, importation or, some might argue, theft of different cultural flavours has been happening for a long time. Exoticism was a trend in European culture that was first stimulated by Eastern Trade in the 16th and 17th centuries, becoming more popular as a result of colonialism.

New thinking around what it means to collaborate musically across cultures moves away from the idea of importing unfamiliar sounds into familiar musical frameworks. It is more focussed on how two or more different cultures can find a common ground or as Sam Hodgson (*Roots to Inspire*) puts it, ‘the space in between’.

Setting intentions, questioning ethics

Most funded projects require written applications that detail how a project meets the key criteria of the funding body. Project plans don’t always include enough lead in time to be truly representative of the diverse voices of all project beneficiaries. In the ideal world it is useful to find enough time to consult with potential project participants/stakeholders - bringing a diverse range of people together to collaborate in the project design *before* funding applications are made.

The *Roots to Inspire* project encouraged musicians to question the ethics behind their collaborations before they started. The following questions are worth considering:

- What is the intention behind the project? What are its aims and objectives?
- Who stands to gain from the collaboration?
- What will all the participants gain from the process and any outputs?
- What is the balance of power between collaborators?
- Who is funding the work? (are we box-ticking to fit their criteria or is there truly a match between the project and the funding body?)
- How can conventional hierarchies be levelled in order to reach ‘the space in between’?
- Who has ownership of any resources, materials created?

These are all important ethical issues. As an example, does securing funding to create a piece of music for Refugee Week truly benefit all the participant musicians in the longer term? Does the identification of musicians as part of the refugee community already put them on the back foot? How will the project create a legacy for participant musicians beyond Refugee Week?

Taking time to bring diverse voices together at this stage will reap dividends in the process of making new music, in the quality of any outcomes created through the project and any legacy the project creates.

Project timelines and outcomes



Although this resource is not a guide to project planning and management, it is worth making a few observations and pointing you in the direction of further guidance.

From running a single, hour-long workshop to planning a 6-12-month project or longer, we need to be realistic about what can be achieved. There is a lot of competition for pots of funding and as a result, applicants often overstretch themselves, promising more than they can realistically deliver in the timeframe. Aim for a realistic, achievable plan with a sufficient lead-in time, outlined in simple terms.

The ***Roots to Inspire*** projects each involved around 18-hours of workshop activity with an emphasis on exploring the process of collaboration rather than on producing public performances or recordings. Although some of the projects culminated in informal performances and recordings, the musicians involved commented on how liberating it was to be able to ‘rest in the process’ of working collaboratively with people across ages, cultures and musical styles. Being able to explore the collaborative process in flexible ways lifted the pressure of having to deliver performance outcomes.

Although ***Roots to Inspire*** was unique in terms of its flexible offer, there are funding streams available to practitioners which support periods of professional development through collaboration including:

- **Arts Council - Developing Your Creative Practice**
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/DYCP>
- **Help Musicians UK Fusion Fund**
<https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/creative-programme/current-opportunities/fusion-fund>

Most funders expect projects to work towards set outcomes. Defining your outcomes will also help you to evaluate your project. Youth Music, who fund projects with children and young people, offer some really helpful guidance on how to set a framework for projects based on various outcomes including musical outcomes, personal outcomes, social outcomes, workforce outcomes and organisational outcomes.

- **Youth Music Outcomes Guidance**
https://network.youthmusic.org.uk/sites/default/files/users/Outcomes/YM_OutcomesGuidance_web.pdf

Help Musicians UK have developed a Funding Wizard search tool to help musicians identify relevant pots of funding:

<https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/creative-programme/funding-wizard>

Running a group or workshop: practical tips



It may seem very obvious but it's worth pointing out that a group usually works best in a well spaced circle with seating provided and room for wheelchairs in the circle of seats if needed.

Running a group in a comfortable and quiet room without distractions can help a group to feel safe.

What are people's access and support/needs - would they benefit from the presence of a carer/family member/support worker/translator to fully participate?

It's good to let people know where facilities are located and about fire procedures.

Is there a separate quiet space where people can take time out from the group if they need to?

Are there water fountains or refreshments available in the venue?

Will what happens in the room stay in the room and if sessions are being recorded/video-ed/photographed, is everyone happy with that and who will be able to access the recording/video/photos?

In her work with women from different cultures and religions in Dewsbury, **Roots to Inspire** musician Supriya Nagarajan made sure she respected Ramadan due to sensitivities around working creatively with people during that time. Lisa Luxx made childcare support available to the women in her project to enable them to attend sessions.

Ask the group what they feel comfortable with and try to accommodate the times that they are able to meet and any additional needs they may have. These practicalities can make a huge difference to how successfully the group works together.

One researcher Underwood talks about collaboration being 'centred on the good of the other' (Underwood, 2009 p.14). With some groups it might be useful to agree a framework of shared values about how the group will work together. These might include respecting and valuing differences, not judging what people say or do, being willing to work together, not interrupting, listening, giving everyone space to contribute, giving people space to opt out. Let the group put forward their ideas and write them up so everyone can see.

Activity suggestions

What is culture?

Before thinking about what cross-cultural means, we could ask ourselves, *what is culture?*

Group activity a - What is culture?

In groups of 2 or 3, ask each other 'What's the first thing you think of when you hear the word culture?' - just the first thing. Report back to the group on what your partner(s) thought (i.e. not what you thought).

After you might want to invite the group to reflect on these questions...

- Were the thoughts positive, negative, neutral?
- Do you think the word culture has the same connotations in different countries?
- Invite members of the group who speak different languages to share translations of the word culture
- What's the relationship between tradition and culture?
- Is culture about more than just the things we consume?

As human beings, we are all 'enculturated'. Enculturation is how we absorb the 'ways of the world' around us - ways of eating, ways of talking to different age groups, attitudes towards other countries, opinions about history or politics, what to buy, how to look, what's fashionable, what to read, what to think, etc.

As much as we celebrate our individuality and our freedom of speech, a lot of what we say and do is shaped by the culture around us, without us realising it.

How we listen is also shaped by our cultural context. In our ever-expanding cities, we may become desensitised to sound because we are surrounded by a chaos of sound all the time. In Western culture, 3-minute pop songs, TV adverts and the fast pace of films are likely to impact on our attention span for listening.

When we listen to music, we are forming opinions about what we hear almost unconsciously, mentally classifying the music rather than just letting ourselves experience the sounds and flow at a physical base level.

Toby Martin references another researcher Brydie Leigh-Bartleet's idea that people intending to work musically across cultures together should try to spend time together not making music (Bartleet, 2016). Something as simple as sharing a meal can really help. A starting point for this is to create a space for shared listening.

Group activity b - Shared listening

Invite your group to listen to the sounds within the room/group space. Try to be as still as possible and try not to talk. You will let them know when the listening begins and when it finishes. Time the listening so that it lasts 5 minutes but don't tell the group how long it is going to be.

Alternatively, you could invite your group to listen to the 'sound of silence' and then ask the group after the 5 minutes if it really is silence? You will always hear the sound of creaking or heating/ventilation, people going past, etc.

After the 5 minutes, invite the group to reflect.

- Did it feel like a long time? How long do you think it was?
- What did it feel like? Was it (un)comfortable? Did it relax you?

Group activity c - Listening to different styles at 'base' level

Invite group members to bring to a session a song or piece of music that reflects something about their identity - this could be from their home country, in a style that particularly speaks to them, that they have composed themselves etc. and can be played live by them if they are comfortable to do that or via YouTube/digital platforms. The whole group will listen to a selection of songs/pieces (informed by how much time you have and the group size).

Invite the group to try and experience the music at a physical base level without trying to analyse, interpret or form a personal opinion about the music. Encourage the group to listen through their bodies without creating a mental narrative - it's easy for our mind to start creating subtitles when listening to music – e.g. 'I like this', 'I don't like this', 'this reminds me of when I went to...', 'this must mean that...', 'I wonder if I switched the iron off this morning'.

Whilst this exercise can help to highlight our own listening behaviours and encourage more open types of listening, you may prefer to simply invite people listen as they would like but not to speak or comment during a piece.

Invite the group to reflect on the experience of collective listening. If they listened at base level, how did the music make them feel? Did people express their responses to the music through body language at all?

Invite the person who brought the song/music to tell the group why they have chosen it - if they feel confident to do that.

Is there any relationship between what the group experienced and the reasons why the person chose the song/music?

Food for thought: Changing attitudes

Toby Martin talks about promoting social change through activities that involve diverse groups of people. There is something about bringing people from different cultures or of different ages and abilities together in the shared activity of making music and storytelling that can help to shift people's attitudes towards each other.

Immigration is a key political issue in Europe, USA and Australia and as Toby notes 'hostility to immigration and diversity has the potential to cause profound social unrest and foster extremism'.

Toby has been working with refugee communities in Syria, Australia and the UK, gathering real stories and working with musicians playing and singing in many different styles to create new music and narrative styles within songs. Toby has found that incorporating lyrics from different voices can produce more interesting art. Another important part of this approach is the development of empathy.

What is empathy?

Underwood speaks of 'addressing human suffering and encouraging human flourishing' (*Underwood, 2009, p.9*).

Bird Rose speaks of building 'relationships across otherness without seeking to erase difference' (*Bird Rose, 2004, cited in Barney, 2014, p.2*).

Thompson suggests that 'the recognition of difference requires decentering one's own norms, narratives and truths' (*Thompson, 2009, cited in Burnard, P., Mackinlay, E. & Powell, K. (Eds.) 2016, p.288*).

Empathy is not about putting ourselves in another person's shoes but about opening up a safe space where everyone feels comfortable taking off their own shoes and stepping towards each other.

The collective listening exercise on page 12 (Group activity c - Listening to different styles at 'base' level) is a way in to building trust and empathy within a group. Encouraging people to listen at the base level of physical experience without jumping to the next level of interpretation and opinion can help to place people on the same level.

Diversity and power

Toby Martin's research centres on how we can develop new types of popular music that genuinely represent a diversity of voices.

Western Popular artists are promoted globally with large amounts of money invested in recording, video production, global tours and all the associated promotion. Does this give Western Popular Music more power over music that is popular in other countries?

In some cultures, certain types of music making are forbidden or repressed. People may experience liberation of their musical expression and identity by taking part in cross-cultural projects.

Toby Martin suggests that if you are recording a fusion of musics from different cultures, you should try to fuse the recording techniques used in each culture. Western Rock music uses features overdubbing of parallel parts whereas Arabic music often features call and response sections and uses live recordings. Is there a way in which cross-cultural collaborations can honour the recording styles of the countries represented?

Power imbalances

What could stand in the way of truly representing different voices?

Who has the advantage, privilege, power in a mixed group of people?

Who has heard of Katy Perry? (If you ask Muhammed Saho, an eminent kora player in The Gambia, he says no even though she is one of the highest paid female singers in the world).

Who has heard of Helene Fischer? (Popular in the German-speaking world)

Who has heard of Ira Losco? (Malta)

Miriam Makeba? (West Africa)

Momina Mustehsan? (Pakistan)

and so on...

How we define and consume popular music is informed by our cultural context - it's part of our enculturation.

In the same way, if we are from the West, our understanding of music from other cultures is likely to be filtered unconsciously through a Western lens. Take as an example the famous Tibetan Singing Bowl, widely used in new age music. Many people associate these bowls with pre-Buddhist shamanic practice in Tibet but they are far more likely to have been developed and used in non-ritualistic practice in Northern India or Nepal. It was the American music industry that appropriated and marketed this exotic phenomenon.

We have to take care not to ‘appropriate’ (steal) ingredients from other cultures without understanding and respecting the people from those cultures and their music, traditions and stories. We also have to be careful not to assume that non-western cultures only listen to ‘traditional’ or non-western music. A Lebanese oud player may very well have listened to Katy Perry, or the Beatles.

Western interest in other cultures has been held up for scrutiny by a number of theorists including bell hooks. hooks’ theories can help us to reflect on and question our motivations for working across cultures.

Are we truly seeking and celebrating multiculturalism or trying to distance ourselves from the colonial past, idealistically proposing that our consumption of and/or participation in world musics will make us better people in the future?

Through commercialisation of activities such as the African drum circle, are we trying to ‘evoke a world where black people were in harmony with nature and with one another’ (*hooks, 2015, p.26*)?

hooks talks about the ‘cultural appropriation of other’ which ‘assuages feelings of deprivation and lack’ in today’s younger generations. Simply wanting to work with people from other cultures is not going ‘eradicate the politics of racial domination’ (*hooks, 2015, p.28*). There is a danger that cross-cultural collaboration just becomes the scenery for narrative structures that continue to privilege white people.

Toby’s work celebrates the multicultural societies we live in whilst trying to give everyone involved an input into the creation of new music. Acknowledging where cultures differ can help to establish common ground where neither culture is being subsumed by the other.

Returning to the idea of taking our shoes off, this means that everyone is on a level with each other.

How can this be achieved within the context of making music?



Improvisation

Toby suggests that when people jam/improvise freely without reading music that is already written down/scored it creates a chance for new types of music to emerge. Improvisation can be a way of creating an open space for people to explore their own unique expression and bring something of their identity into the music.

Group activity d - Musical conversations

Improvisation in some cultures can be complex and follow exact rules, think of Indian music and Jazz.

However, improvisation doesn't have to be complicated and it doesn't need to have specific notes in a particular order and within the same pulse.

Think about how people intuitively interact with babies using the tone of their voice to express emotional content, often melodic and often without words, copying the sounds the baby is making and answering and extending them.

A way in to starting improvisation can be to have a non-verbal conversation using just hand-held or body percussion. This is useful for people who do not already play a tuned instrument, but it can also help very confident musicians to think outside their usual musical toolbox. It can put a mixed group of abilities on a level with each other.

Body percussion - clapping or rubbing hands, finger snapping, tapping knees, mouth sounds, beating chest, slapping tummy, stamping feet - be inventive!

Select good quality percussion that are appropriate for age and ability - drums, ocean drums, shakers, castanets, scrapers (guiros) - tactile instruments that look interesting and have a good sound. Think about people's capacity to hold an instrument, it's useful to have a few that are smaller, lighter and easy to hold.

Pass a musical conversation around the group. Start by 'talking' with your body/percussion instrument to the person on your right. Once you've finished a short conversation, that person 'talks' to the person on their right and so on. Make sure everyone is quiet and listening as a group, respecting and not trying to interpret or analyse what is being said non-verbally.

- How did the musical conversations sound/feel?
- Did the conversations have an emotional/expressive content? (sweet, angry, questioning, humorous etc).
- Were they characteristic of our individuality/personality/diversity?
- Did we show our partner that we listened to what they were 'saying' and if we did, how did we do it? (Perhaps by echoing, repeating or extending).
- If we didn't really listen, how could we tell? (Perhaps our response didn't bear any relation to what went before it).

There's no right or wrong response to this exercise!

Listening: Although the sound quality on this film is poor, ideas around how Indian classical music and Jazz music can weave together are shared. There is an interesting musical conversation between two flute players at around 55 mins 33 seconds:

Two Dialects in Improvisation: Indian Classical & Jazz Music
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFZAXq9J0Ac>

Group activity e - Layering things up

If the whole group were making conversations with a neighbour all at the same time, how would it sound? Noisy? You could even try this with the group to experience how it sounds and feels.

Another starting point for improvisation is to layer up 'sound-sets' around the group with each person adding in a different sound-set that compliments the sound-sets that have already been added in. Sound-set is just a short group of sounds. If they fall into a particular rhythmic pattern you could call them 'riffs'. Sound sets might create an un-pulsed soundscape effect whereas riffs are more likely to draw people into the same pulse.

One person starts a 'sound-set' or 'riff' which they repeat and continue to play. Once the sound set or riff is repeated and settles, the next person adds in a complementary sound-set or riff until that settles and then the next person adds in, moving round the group and building up layers.

This can be done with body and hand-held percussion, with instruments/ voices and with sampled sounds, depending on who is in the group.

There are more prescriptive ways of layering up sounds such as inviting people to choose to play one sound on one particular beat of the bar or two sounds on two beats of the bar, sticking to that pattern and layering up round the group. However, this does mean that pulse takes priority over freedom of expression and determines the nuance and pace of response. In other words, it leaves less room for individual expression.

Group activity f - Playing together or pushing apart

It is interesting to invite people to experience playing inside an established tempo or groove followed by the experience of deliberately trying to change the tempo or groove. You can do this in a few different ways. One example is to layer up as above but starting with a simple, fixed tempo, let the fixed tempo and layers really settle and then you can demonstrate pushing apart from the tempo/groove. It's best not to overthink how to do this, simply to push apart in whatever way you feel - be it chaotic/polyrhythmic/ faster/slower/louder etc.) and see if the group follows your playing or not. It can be more immediate to experience this if the group are all playing some kind of drum to begin with, or just hands drumming on knees. If a new tempo/groove emerges, invite someone else to try to push apart. If chaos emerges invite someone to try and pull the group back into tempo.

Listening: In one *Roots to Inspire* project, Sam Hodgson and Rapper Savvy explored ways of finding a rhythmic common ground between beat-driven hip-hop and more fluid folk time signatures. Listen to This Town: <https://samh.bandcamp.com/track/this-town>

There is a fusion between a 4/4 pulse and 6/8 swing that creates a unique feel to this track. This wouldn't have happened had it not been for the open mindedness of both practitioners to share and experiment across styles. Savvy commented that he would be much more open minded in his approach to time signatures and tempo in his future work.

One of the discussions that came out of Lisa Luxx's *Roots to Inspire* project was the idea that each country has its own 'tempo'. One of the participants had spent time in Russia and on moving back to her home country Ethiopia had found the slow speed that everyone moved at almost intolerable. The activity of pushing tempos gives people the chance to move at their own speed and can help to celebrate difference as well as finding common ground.

Group Activity g - Conducting the layering

A way of encouraging different people to take a leadership role within a group is to invite them to conduct/signal the layering process if they feel comfortable. They can use eye contact or a hand/body signal to invite one person (or perhaps more) to start playing and to continue playing, then layering in the next person and the next and so on in whichever order they like.

Encourage them to find a gesture to stop people at certain points or different signals to get louder or softer, more spiky, more smooth - as simple or as sophisticated as they are willing to explore. Encourage the conductor to think about the texture and about showcasing the diverse sounds within the group: maybe offering a solo moment to someone who is usually more shy and thinking about how to encourage everyone with positive body language and eye contact. The best way of introducing this is to role-model it first so people can see you doing it, or get someone you know is comfortable to do it first.

Although this is still quite a western way of working, it is a simple way of giving people the experience of being the facilitator for improvisation.

Tuned improvisations

Supriya Nagarajan used traditional South Indian Ragas as the basis for improvisation with a group of professional musicians as part of her *Roots to Inspire* project. Supriya realised that not all the musicians were familiar with the traditional rules of improvisation within each Raga so she allowed much more freedom in the way the musicians could move from note to note. She commented on 'handing over permission' to people so they could feel their way within the Raga using their feelings and intuitions to move from note to note rather than thinking about the rules.

All the ***Roots to Inspire*** projects encouraged more experienced musicians to be more experimental in the way they approached playing their instruments. A violin could be used as a drum, a drum-kit could be played with hands rather than drumsticks, the voice could be used as a percussion instrument etc. Having the freedom to explore and play with different sound worlds and to think outside conventional modes of playing/singing can help to encourage people who have never played a musical instrument before to make sounds and music.

Group activity h - Improvising over a drone

One way of underpinning tuned improvisation is to use a drone or held pedal note(s) over which people can start to layer up sounds and melodies. If you have access to computer generated audio you might search for an Indian drone made up of the interval of a perfect fifth on C (C and G) to underpin a C pentatonic improvisation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZDDN44Zk4g&list=RD5ZDDN44Zk4g&start_radio=1&t=7&t=10

There's a lot of space within a drone of to explore different groupings of notes so if you are working with instrumentalists you might explore C, Db, E, F and Ab as a group of notes on which to improvise over the C drone. Or even start with just two or three notes.

With more experienced instrumentalists/percussionists the drone can support the use of quarter tones and the bending of notes on fretted instruments. You can also start to introduce different time signatures to layer up or solo over. Invite one person to establish a rhythmic pattern on their instrument which other group members either layer up over or solo/duet over.

These activities offer ideas as a starting point for group improvisation. They are particularly useful for people who might not already identify as musicians. They are also very useful for more experienced musicians, allowing them to take a step back, simplify and become more aware of the whole group and what other people are doing. They are also suitable for groups of mixed musical ability.

The simplicity of the activities should help to create space for collaboration. There is no exact recipe for successful collaboration as everybody is an individual and every group a different configuration of individuals. What is important is opening up a space for a shared process to take place that relies on collective empathy, responsiveness, discussion, learning and exchange.

There are some more ideas and resources around group improvisation online, including Ros Hawley's *Rhythm of Life Resource Pack (Live Music Now)*:
<https://achoirineverycarehome.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/rhythm-of-life-resource-pack.pdf>

Lyric writing as life storytelling

Some countries pass on stories and music over the generations simply by sharing them in a social context rather than writing them down and publishing them. Western culture is influencing how people in countries which had strong oral traditions now transmit their stories. The global prevalence of European languages (including English, Spanish, German, French) has led Unesco to suggest that as many as half of the world's 7,000 languages are expected to die out by the end of this century.

Using story telling as an open, improvised, shared activity can help to reduce the power imbalance between cultures, and help write better songs. Toby Martin talks about the importance of interviews and verbatim transcriptions of people's life stories as a way in to creating lyrics for songs. Lyric-writing can also serve as a form of place-making, and place-belonging. Observing surroundings and place for lyrics can help romanticise or familiarise the lyric-writer with an otherwise unremarkable space, such as a bus stop or community centre. This can help develop connections to a new place. It can also help an audience see how a new migrant might feel out of home, or at home, in new spaces.

Whose language?

People may feel more comfortable telling their story in their native language rather than in English. It's important to allow space for this and to include a diversity of languages within any new lyrics created. We should strive not to always translate people's uniquely personal cultural contributions into English lyrics.

Roots to Inspire musician Supriya talks about the human voice as a melody, as a mixture of emotions, vulnerability, tonality. She uses technology to enable a diversity of voices to be heard in the music she co-creates with people. Sampling stories and songs in different languages and with different voices of all ages and abilities can be very powerful. It is important to get written consent from anyone who you are recording and to be transparent about what the recordings will be used for.

If you are working with vulnerable groups such as older people with dementia, groups with complex needs and people experiencing severe mental health issues, they may not have capacity to consent in which case you would need to obtain the permission of their next of kin or carer. Vulnerable group members may struggle to attend any final performances or public sharing events but recording and sampling can be a great way of making sure that their voices are heard and celebrated.



Listening activity:

This is a TV interview that took place in Jordan around Toby's project working with Syrian refugees and creating songs from their life story narratives. This is an interesting exercise in listening to people talking in a language that might not be familiar to English speakers but might be familiar to people from the Arabic speaking community. If you are watching on a screen, notice how Toby uses hand gestures to articulate and emphasise his speech.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFruTnYeJAE&feature=youtu.be>

Invite people who are not familiar with the language to reflect on how it feels to listen to people speaking in a different language. Did they feel excluded in any way?

Reflect on the song performed in English by Toby and in Arabic by Marina Nicola.

Roots to Inspire artist Lisa Luxx emphasises the importance of allowing the people who share their stories to be the ones whose voices are heard in performances or recordings of new music created. Too often lead artists receive accolades without acknowledging and crediting the source of the stories they use. If people are reticent about their voices being heard then there must be sensitivity in 'carrying' their stories rather than appropriating them. In Sam Hodgson's project, some of the participants experiencing homelessness did not want their names to be mentioned. Ask participants what they are comfortable with and whether they would like to be acknowledged.

Creating lyrics

Group activity i - Creating a group poem

Using two-word phrases to create the lines of a poem is less complicated than using whole sentences and can be less intimidating for people who have not written poems or who have limited English. The two words don't need to be connected and they don't need to be in the same language or just in English.

Each individual person around the circle will have the space to add two words. After each person adds two words, the whole group will repeat those two words back to the individual person. You can choose to move around the circle clockwise or anticlockwise or you can invite people to add their two words in at any time. Try to encourage the group to just add two words otherwise one person might dominate the group. If someone doesn't want to add words, that is also fine. They could add two gestures instead or if going round the group look at the next person to indicate they are not saying anything.

If you feel it would help, you can read out or get the whole group to read a print-out of the poem below, which makes use of two-word phrases. You could try reading it out as a call and response so people repeat each two-word phrase. If everyone is reading it together encourage the group to find a shared tempo.

It Is Everywhere
by Remi Graves

Green leaves. Wind kissed.
Closed palms. Fresh hope.
Deep river. Free flow.
No signs. Open road.
Wide sky. Grow wings.
Feel light. Dream big.
No frame. New eyes.
From dark. Find light.
Hug air. Laugh loud.
Breathe deep. Dance wild.

Smile wide. Shut eyes.
Hold chest. Close mind.
Ask cloud. Ask wind.
Ask earth. Ask field.
How to live free?
Hold on. Let Go.
Give trust. Lend heart.
Fall down. Get up.
Eat fear. Drink hope.

Working with women from different cultures, Lisa Luxx experimented with getting people to develop a co-created narrative underpinned with a basic rhythmic support on drums and percussion. The momentum of having a steady pulse underneath the unfolding story seemed to help with the fluidity of people's ideas.

Group activity j - Using a simple pulse or riffs to support lyric writing and story-telling

Using the layering exercise above, establish a slow but steady groove on percussion instruments and then bring the volume right down to allow speech to be heard over the top. To keep things very simple, you could pass a single word round the group with each individual person in the group repeating the same word. They are not required to say the word on any particular beat, just in their own time.

Moving on, you could play word association or disassociation around the group. Invite people to respond in whatever language they feel comfortable with.

Lisa uses a technique to develop narratives by providing a simple opening sentence that ends with a question which the next person is invited to answer in their own time. For example, 'I once met with a stranger, she handed me a small gift... what was it...?'. Each person is encouraged to end their sentence with a question that the next person can answer and so on. If someone clearly doesn't want to add to the story or is stuck, you simply move on round the group. Having the underpinning pulse helps to avoid any discomfort that people might feel and keeps the sense of moving forward and travelling together through the story.

Supriya Nagarajan was able to mentor several female poets who were keen to evolve their work into a more performative practice. She encouraged and gave permission for the mixing of different languages within poems and she was also sensitive in demonstrating ways of adding sounds and music without compromising people's religious beliefs.

Group activity

(in groups of 2 or 3). Ask each other ‘What makes us different to each other and what makes us the same. How are you and I different and how are we the same?’. Are there any key words that come out of the discussion and can they be translated into different languages?

Lisa Luxx took the word *sister* and invited the group to translate it into various languages. Initially each version of the word was shared as a call and response which spontaneously evolved into a game of wordplay with single syllables or fusions of words forming riffs and rhythms which created a texture: ‘Uhhurt, Hafteh, Hafti, Stristran, Ukutuh, Ukuti, Sister’. Tuned percussion and instruments were then layered into the vocal texture.

Finding collaborators / participants

The internet and social media makes it much easier to identify and interface with people on a local, national and global level.

For their ***Roots to Inspire*** projects, Sam Hodgson put out an online survey for participants to share their experiences of living in Huddersfield. Lisa Luxx also made an online call for women across the world to take video footage to feed into a video for one of her projects.

Many cities or local areas have ways of connecting artists and musicians with one another or promoting collaborative opportunities, or have online databases of local community organisations. For example, artists and musicians in Kirklees can showcase their work or find collaborators through an online directory called Creative Kirklees: <https://www.creativekirklees.com/directory/>.

Membership organisations for musicians such as the Incorporated Society of Musicians and Musicians’ Union both have searchable databases of members: <https://musicdirectory.ism.org/cdirectoryadvancedsearch.aspx> and <https://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/Connect> (searchable to MU members only).

Schools and community groups could consider inviting people from different cultures who have recently moved to the UK to come in and share interviews and conversations about their culture and about their experience of living in a new culture. If the people invited are still learning English, consider if someone could come along to help with translation.

If you are thinking of working with an existing music group, you could try contacting the following organisations:

- **Music Mark** – national membership organisation representing leisure-time music groups and musicians: <https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/>
- **Music Education Hubs** – groups of music organisations with a responsibility for music education provision in a particular area. Contact details can be downloaded for all Hubs from <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/music-education/music-education-hubs#section-1>

Summary



Open ears, open minds - equal say

Hopefully the ideas outlined so far point towards the importance of being open-minded, taking enough time to listen to each other and allowing everyone the space to input and share.

Toby's research has highlighted the benefits of artistic collaborations between people from different cultures. Making new kinds of music starts from a place of open listening and a sense of sharing a safe space within which to explore different sounds, textures, rhythms, words and ideas.

Speaking about musicians working in hospitals, Didier Salmon Cohen speaks of musicians entering the space as if they were a still pool of water, open to welcome all the vibrations. Entering into a collaborative process requires open ears and open minds – being appreciative of the diversity of different musical vibrations within a group and fostering shared understanding and empathy.

Collaborative projects can be enhanced by:

- Allowing time for consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders in the project planning phase
- Using an outcomes framework where appropriate and sharing this with participants so everyone is on the same page
- Creating welcoming spaces for music sessions and making sure participants are supported with their access and other needs
- Creating an informal group agreement – whatever they feel is important for working well together
- Taking time to listen to each other – whether sharing music, stories or simply just being together. Being open minded.
- Allowing space and inviting people to try things out and explore their own sounds and music with the group before starting to layer things up and playing together. Respecting that some people may prefer not to.
- Giving everyone the chance to have a leadership role or spotlight moment in the group in some way (for example, starting the improvisation, conducting the improvisation, having a solo moment). Again, not putting anyone on the spot.
- Greeting all the sounds, music and lyrical ideas with unconditional positive regard.
- Encouraging peer-to-peer support within a group
- Exploring and celebrating diversity and individuality as well as common ground within the group
- Feeling safe to share and enjoy making music together

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Further reading & listening

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Roger Knox and Toby Martin, *Black Tear Tracks*, ABC Records, forthcoming, see: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=780734585631550>

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Songlines Magazine: <https://www.songlines.co.uk/>

Roots to Inspire musicians & artists

Supriya Nagarajan, Manasamitra: <http://www.manasamitra.com/>

Sam Hodgson: <https://samh.bandcamp.com/music>

Testament: <https://www.testamenthomecut.com/>

Lisa Luxx: <https://www.lisaluxx.com/>

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