

Friday Afternoons:

Us

Composer Resources

**Written by Ally Daubney
by Russell Hepplewhite and Michael Rosen**

Us



**Composed by Russell Hepplewhite and Michael Rosen,
'Us' is a strong statement about being, well, us!**

Let's use this song to think about all the amazing things we can do in our lives.

- Before listening to the song, talk in a small group about "being us"
- Come up with a list of four things that make us 'us' and the amazing things we can do in our lives. Think big!
- What do those things 'look' like? Work as a group to find an action for each of these four things.
- Now have a think about what these 'sound' like. Try out some ideas and settle on a sound for each action.

- Loop these together one after another and keep repeating (this is called an ostinato). Show another group and perhaps they can copy you and join in too!

If you can, video record these so that you don't forget them!

**Let's
Listen to 'Us'**

Let's listen to 'Us'



Listen to the whole piece. As you listen, think about the words being sung (lyrics).

- What phrases or words can you pick out?
- When it has finished, take a moment to think and then write down on a post-it note a word that describes the mood of the music or how it makes you feel (Remember that all ideas are valid and music can make us all feel very different!).
- Share the words and phrases (perhaps you can put them on the wall).
- Were any of these similar to your own group's initial ideas about what makes us 'us'?

Now just listen to the short piano accompaniment before the singing starts.

- Can you tap/clap/make the rhythm with different sounds? (try to get pupils to notice that it repeats twice before the singing starts). Explore different sounds in your small group to come up with a repeating pattern – this is an example of a rhythmic ostinato. You might want to talk about the 10/8 pattern as it is unusual!
- Can you put a short phrase with it using any of the words you listed at the beginning? E.g. “This is our class, we’re amazing”; “Everyone here is so friendly”.

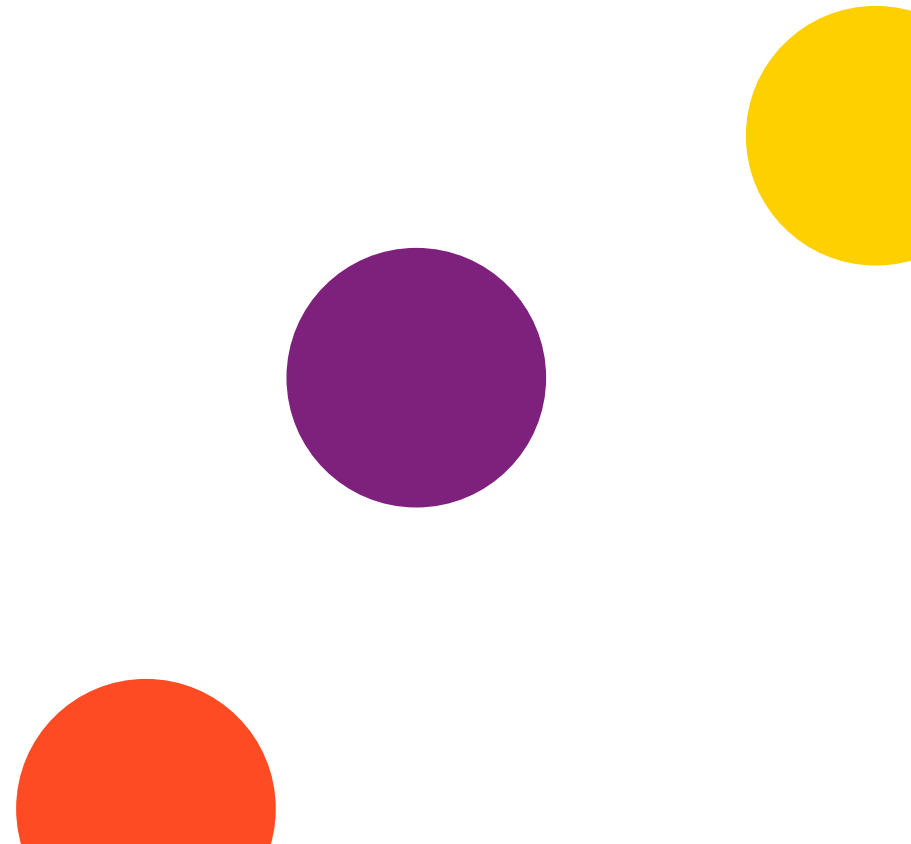
Piano

Creating your own 'Us' piece

This is something you can either do in small groups or as a whole class to create your own “Us” piece.

You already have a lot of ideas in your ‘musical sketchbook’, including:

- A way of performing the 10/8 pattern with rhythmic sounds
- A way of performing the 10/8 pattern with a word phrase
- Your own “being us” ideas from the first activity – you know what these look and sound like.



Composers have a lot of creative decisions to make!



There are many ways in which you can create, adapt, extend or blend the sounds and put it into a coherent structure. Here's just one way you might do this.

Firstly, decide on the structure of your piece. In this example, the piece is going to have the following structure. Feel free to use this as your structure:

- A rhythmic opening (4 bars of the rhythm, played on different untuned percussion instruments / using body percussion)
- "Being us" word section – 8 bars in length. Choose 2 of the word patterns from above and chant each one twice.
- Pentatonic improvisation - 8 bars.
- A rhythmic ending, the same as the opening.
- The words "We are who we are" chanted strongly in unison (together) at the end.

Composers have a lot of creative decisions to make!



Now work on each section before putting it all together.

For the pentatonic section, use tuned percussion instruments and the notes C,D,E,G,A. In this example, it will be based on the drone using the notes C and G (played at the same time).

Set up the drone to be played on the first beat of each bar. To help keep this in time, repeatedly chant the word phrase and play the drone on the first beat of each bar (this will be played 8 times in total, once in each bar).

Over the drone, improvise your own melodies using the rhythmic pattern of the chart – use any notes you like.

If sharing instruments, you might play alternate bars so you play four each instead of all 8 (and it will sound like a question and answer. Make sure you all swap over so that everyone gets an opportunity to play the drone and improvise the melodies.

Once you have developed each section, put it together into one piece.

Decide on the speed.

Make decisions about who plays / chants in each section – will it be everyone in the class at the same time, or small groups or individuals?

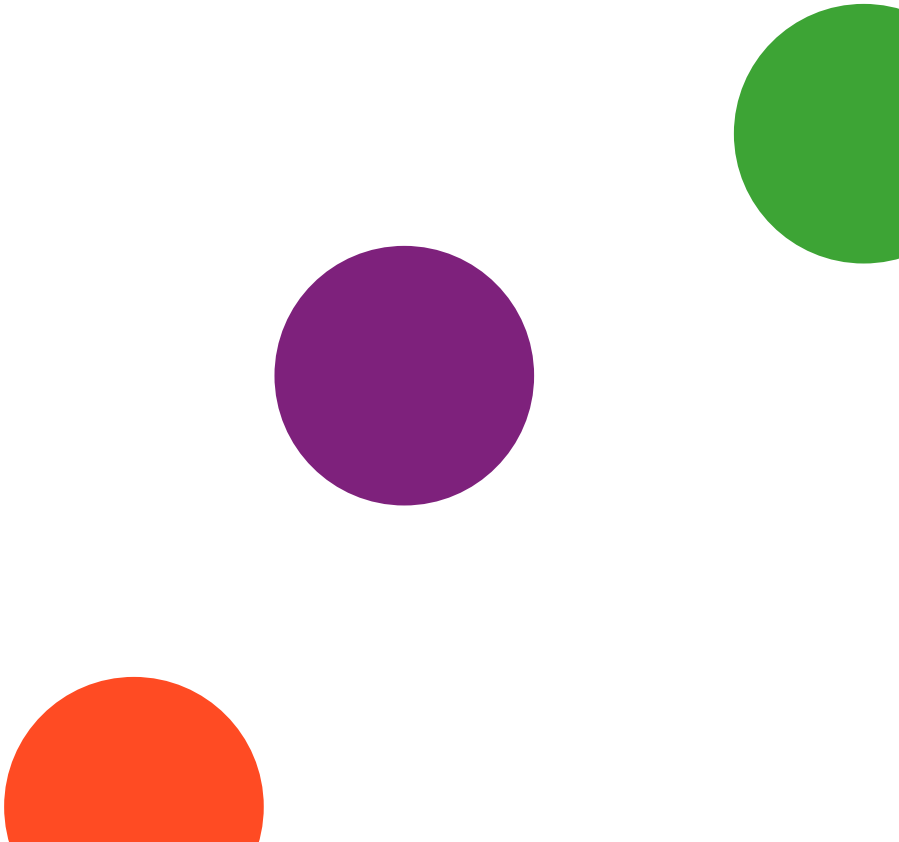
Where will the loudest parts be, when might you be quieter?

Perhaps a 'conductor' can make these decisions.

Practice it so that it is really fluent, and then perform it to an audience!

Extension

If you want to further extend the work related to the piece 'Us' you might consider the following:

- Using the original song, adapt all or part of the lyrics to reflect the ideas about 'Us' gathered in the first exercise. Use these ideas to generate your own class anthem about 'us'.
 - You will need to think about the syllables and rhyming structure to make this work effectively. Try to match the syllabic and rhyme patterns of the existing song.
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