

Collectiveness: Creating Sounds Together

Module Manual

SOUND&WEIRD
Learning Platform
for Sound Experiments

How to teach experimental improvised music to teenagers?

A DIY guide for the educational module
Collectiveness: Creating Sounds Together
by KONTEJNER

Why?

The general idea and main goals of the module *Collectiveness: Creating Sounds Together* are:

- To create the opportunity for a different music education than that of common music schools, for youngsters who show interest in a different music expression.
- To investigate and develop new or different methods of music education by implementing a different approach.
- To ensure a continuation and an expansion of experimental music education.
- To provide kids with skills for experimenting with sound, for group music creation and free improvisation.
- To teach youngsters how to listen to each other and to themselves.
- To open up youngster's perception of what music is and what it could be.



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Step 1: Define the field of work

- What is *Collectiveness*? Or how we defined it...
 - *Collectiveness* deals with and is focused on group improvisation
 - *Collectiveness* consists in knowledge, skills and experience sharing
 - *Collectiveness* is designed and led by experienced musicians
 - *Collectiveness* is imagined as joint music creation
 - *Collectiveness* is about creating sounds together with participants (and mentors)
 - *Collectiveness* avoids an ex-cathedra approach
 - *Collectiveness* experiments and investigates



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Step 2: Choose (your) mentors

- Choose musicians and composers experienced in improvised music and music education, who are active in experimental music creation and group improvisation.
- What we've learned: the importance and benefit of including different mentors who bring their own perspectives, who have different approaches, and who give different tasks to the participants.

At KONTEJNER the main mentor was a musician who is focused on the sonification of visual ideas, pictures, environments and scenes. Different approaches were brought in by the co-mentors. The first was a musician experienced in playing in bands and ensembles, as well as in teaching youngsters by improvising alongside them. The second was a musician working in a public music school who insisted on improving individual performing skills and playing techniques, and who worked on the interpretation of a graphic score. The third was a musicologist who emphasized the importance of listening, understanding and giving feedback.



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Step 3: Choose your participants

- Conditions:
 - An interest in (and passion for) improvised and experimental music and group music creation;
 - Some basic knowledge of music or a musical instrument – though this is not necessary for all participants, nor for all instruments available at the workshop.
- How we did it?
 - At KONTEJNER we saw the module as a continuation of an existing improvised music workshop for kids, the Factory of Sound. We chose to approach teenagers who previously participated in this workshop. The selection was done in direct contact with the parents and the future participants.

- What is important?
 - A similar age among participants: if you work with younger teenagers (aged 13-15), age difference can be an obstacle, so limit the age range to 2 years maximum.
 - Go for a limited number of committed youngsters. You don't need a large group, but you should ask for their commitment and free time. Feeling a personal responsibility towards the group is a step towards creating a band.
 - Build personal relations with and amongst participants and their parents, to foster mutual trust.



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Step 4: Basic requirements

- A fully equipped music studio with:
 - o stereo PA system
 - o mixer, microphones, cables
 - o basic backline, with guitar and bass amplifiers, and a drum set
- additional musicians' equipment, for instance:
 - o analogue pedal board
 - o guitar effects
 - o eBow
 - o objects for instrument preparation



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Step 5: How to structure and design the module?

- It is important that the programme has a significant duration. At KONTEJNER we have structured the programme as a five months long workshop cycle.
- It is important to have an adequate rhythm in the schedule. We organised one session per week.
- It is important to understand the attention and focus of the participants, and follow that. Our sessions have lasted two hours each.
- It is important to maintain continuity and not to skip appointments. Continuity creates a sense of belonging and a responsibility of the participants for their own contribution to the group.
- Learning by doing and doing by learning. It is important to create an open space and to give enough (creative) freedom to the participants and the process itself. Instead of defining all sessions' content before the start, follow the process carefully. Pay attention to content creation before each session, coordinate and navigate among mentors and their approaches. Follow the ideas of the teenagers and listen to their thoughts.

Step 6: Define your working methods

- Understand the importance of methods and choose your main working methods:
 - Active participation: weekly rehearsals in the studio, with group performing sessions.
 - Group listening sessions and/or movie nights with music documentaries (followed by conversation).
 - Talks and discussions: after each session let participants give feedback on their own impro session, what did they like, what not, and why?
 - Individual lessons: a useful upgrade could be to give individual lessons to each member of the band to give them the opportunity to improve their performing skills and playing techniques.



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Step 7: Content creation and implementation

Examples of tasks for participants in the group sessions:

- *Imagine that you are somewhere in the snow, deep in the wood. You are alone but can still hear each other. The atmosphere is snow, wood, night. Choose your own sounds for improvisation and give enough time to each of your sounds.*
- *Choose an animal you want to present with your instrument and communicate with others.*
- *Play one by one in a circle. Decide if you want to continue the musical idea of the previous band member or you want to oppose it with a contrast approach.*

- *Create duets: two guitarists as one duo, a synth and drums as another one. A second synth can join one of the two duets.*
- *Create a rhythmical base on an arpeggiator. The rest of the band builds a music composition upon that.*



photo: Sanja Bistričić Srića

Examples of what to practice and rehearse:

- Work on contrast in dynamics, create extreme differences.
- Work on the slow development of a musical idea: listen carefully to all of your sounds and give enough time for the development of musical material.
- Rehearse reacting fast to signs of the mentors. Be attentive, in the moment, pay attention on what happens around you.
- Work on the creation of sonic atmospheres.
- Work on rhythm and developing a groove.
- Work on sound density.
- Listen and give space to each other. This can be done conducting (by the mentor) – excluding and including band members during an impro session – and by trying to tune into an existing musical idea.
- Investigate possible sounds and sonorities by preparing an instrument, for instance through using additional objects, amplification and/or connecting it to a pedal board with analogue effects.
- Use graphic scores: explore how to read and interpret them.

Want to know more?

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