

Notating and Arranging

Music Specialist

The following process is simple and easy:

1. **Tape record every session** with the children whether or not you write down the notes they sing while they are composing them.
2. In your studio, listen to the tape recording and **enter each note exactly as it was sung.**
3. **Move sections into appropriate keys** so that the completed composition will make musical sense. It is not necessary to keep everything in the same key. In fact, it makes a more interesting product to use relative keys, modulating when necessary. **It is absolutely necessary to use the children's melodies** – but they do not have to remain exactly where the children sang them. Students will frequently sing much lower when composing than they are actually able to sing. *Be aware, during this process, of the limitation of the students' singing range. Very young children should only be expected to sing from Middle C to C above...one octave. However, for certain parts - stylistically - they may choose to sing some short passages in a very high voice that is usually possible for one or two students. They may think they want something sung very low – but remember when they are on the stage, their little voices will not carry or be heard when singing below Middle C.*
4. **Place appropriate chords above the notes.** You should follow basic “Theory” and “Harmony” practices so that the finished work makes sense to the “ear.” Do not use unusual chord progressions; that may make it difficult for the children to learn and to sing. Do not use complicated chords – except in specific spots where they are needed to give the work the depth it requires to convey the emotions being portrayed.
5. **Arrange a simple piano accompaniment** with appropriate modulations and fill measures. Notice where there is action taking place that may require some walking music - use appropriate melodies taken from their ideas to compose those parts. **Never use copyrighted material** and try not to impose your own musical ideas on the creation. If they have made up a short theme, you may expand on that for dances and for action places in the opera where there is no singing.
6. **Be certain to place the melody above the accompaniment.** Children must hear the melody clearly throughout the piece – in their range.
7. **Insert measures between parts sung by different characters if necessary.** Do not rush the action on stage, and yet, do not put in so much “fill” that the action slows down. Be sensitive to the needs of the singers.
8. **Provide appropriate cues** by using accepted practices so that the singers will know when and on what pitch to enter. You may decide to play a little of the next melody; or give the actual pitch in your “lead-in.”
9. **Remember that if the audience is listening to you rather than to the children, you**



have probably done too much. Simple accompaniment is required. If you want to do something “fancy,” be certain that it is in the places where action, but no singing, is taking place on the stage.

10. **Create a completed score for the class** that may be played by the teacher, a parent or volunteer. Keep it simple enough that in older classes a student might be able to accompany the class. **Ask the teacher to copy it for each class member.** Even if they cannot read music at this stage, it will make their opera creation a permanent record and they will value it highly.
11. **Play the score for the class. Ask them to sing along.** Allow them to make additions or changes at this point. They may want to put in some action music for a chase or dance or some other event that was not in the libretto. Listen for places in the score that may still be too high or too low.
12. **Make all the necessary changes in the score .**
13. **Record a simple tape or cd with voice and accompaniment on one track and accompaniment-only on the other.** Ask the teacher to make copies for her class to take home for rehearsal at home. Each class member must learn the entire opera. This process will make it easy and fun for them and not take precious class time. If you are willing to make the copies of the tape for the class, ask the children each to bring a blank tape for you to use.

When you are recording a rehearsal tape or cd for the class, it is best to have it sung by a female voice – medium range – that will most easily be matched by the children. If a man sings in his range, the little children will tend to want to sing on the exact pitches, which is impossible.

14. **Remind the teacher that the accompanist must not direct the children.** The children should learn to self direct. (See the chapter on staging the opera.) If the children have truly had ownership of the libretto and the music, they will not need to be “directed” either by the teacher or the accompanist. Remind the teacher of these principles and work with the accompanist yourself, if necessary.

