

Music at Home: Dice Composition

Composing a piece of music using dice is not a new thing. Musikalisches Würfelspiel (Musical Dice Game) was very popular in Germany in the 18th Century – even the most famous composer of the 18th Century, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, published a piece using the game! 200 years later it became popular again after World War II but in a slightly different way. Try the below games – each time you do it the piece you create will be slightly different!

Dice Game – Compose a piece like John Cage!

Assign different note values (rhythms) to each number on a dice – these could include crotchets (ta), quavers (ti-ti), rests and any other mix of rhythms/note values you can think of. You could even assign different body percussion movements to each number.

Roll the dice to assign a series of rhythms (write these down so you don't forget).

If you'd like you can assign different note pitches to each number on a dice, then roll the dice to assign a pitch for each rhythm.

Now you have a composition! Can you play or sing it? What is it like? How many other ways can you play this game?

Dice Game – Create a mash up like Mozart!

Pick some of your favourite songs.

Take musical phrases from each song, and assign each to a number on the dice.

Roll the dice to work out the order of the phrases.

Put the pieces together to form your own mash-up! What does it sound like? Try it again - how different is it?

Composer of the Week: John Cage

John Cage is an American composer, music theorist, artist and philosopher born in Los Angeles in 1912.

Cage is best known for his 1952 composition 4'33", which is performed without any deliberate sound. Instead, performers open their music and play nothing – with the idea being that the noise around us is a type of music we can listen to.

Cage is also known for his compositions for Prepared Piano – where you place objects like screws, plastic and rubber, on, under or between the strings of the piano to create different sounds.

Why not perform 4'33" for your family? The piece is in three movements, each a different length (30", 2'23" and 1'40") so you can take a little break in between. So get dressed up, have your instrument ready, and start your timer to enjoy the 4 minutes and 33 seconds of music from the world around you.



[Cage preparing a piano, in 1947.](#) Photograph by Irving Penn / © 1947 (Renewed 1975) Condé Nast Publications Inc.

Print out and make the dice below to help you with your compositions!

