

Composer Amanda Handel shares her composition process.

For me, writing music is a mysterious process of expression that finds its manifestation in the form of sound. My compositional process moves more or less through four phases. To begin creating an original piece of music, I seek a strong idea, which will ignite the minds and hearts of others. I believe this is the most important part of the process. My artistic starting point might be an emotion, an image, a symbol, a mythology, or a dance. I venture into the subconscious part of my mind in order to allow ideas to emerge, develop and gestate before I write anything. Sometimes I'll have a dream, which inspires me to move forward.

The second phase is like an emergence. This is when I look for the elements of sound to embody my idea. I consider aspects like the properties of light, colour, sound, texture, motion, density, shape, line and direction, which describe my concept. I do a lot of inner auditioning while making a preliminary sketch on paper listing these sensorial qualities to explore how the music might sound and I make preliminary decisions about the tonality, meter, instrumentation and form. However, at this stage I don't set anything in stone because I want to allow the flexibility for the work to bend and grow as it takes shape.

In the third phase I work on manuscript paper and experiment on the piano using my choices for the rhythm and tonal centre. My decisions on the meter are often asymmetric, and my tonalities are modal, but more often I invent my own scale and pitch set. From these points of departure, I find a few distinctive and contrasting motifs to represent my ideas and then create some material with lesser *identity*, which will act as the glue to bind and carry them. So many things all have to happen at the same time in order to make the music convincing, compelling and satisfying to hear. These elements include harmonic tension and release (I love creating curious chords), rhythmic intensity and repose, pitch ranges that expand and contract, dynamic contrasts, tempo and/or meter changes, texture (thick and thin, melody lines with chords or in parts) etc. It's important to maintain awareness of these things to ensure the balance and coherency of the music. My forms and designs (listening shapes) grow organically and are experienced through the climax areas. I also check on contrast, repetition and variation as I go while being vigilant not to get too attached to any idea, which might distract or confuse the direction of the work. This stage involves much trial and error, ruthless cutting and re-organising blocks of material.

The last phase, typesetting. I input the notes manually, and then meticulously edit the piece, checking all the instrumental articulations, dynamics and expression. Next comes the playing test. I often make improvements at this point and fine tune the editing. Finally the time has come to release the work into the world. I always hope my music carries people to magical and meaningful places in their minds and hearts!

Website www.amandahandel.com

Pieces recommended for HSC performance: ranging from grade 3 to Diploma:

Piano solos - *"Migrations in Music"* (20 pieces), *Crystal Amulet* (5 pieces), *Zardash*, *The Seduction of Andalucia*, *A Burst of Bushflowers*, *Blue Bay*, *Not Yet*, *Tiny Flower*

Flute & winds – *Shiraz*, *Driftwood*, (solo), *In the Vapours of Delphi*, (solo), *Moonlight Mirage*, *Dream Tune*, *Blinding Moon* (also alto sax), *Mockidaj* (alto sax or clar), *Kanimbla Moon* (trmb)