

## Composition Brief

Submission deadline: **Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017**  
Submissions to: **[calls@colchesternewmusic.com](mailto:calls@colchesternewmusic.com)**  
Concert date: **June 2018**

### Overview

Back by popular demand, and with support from EPTA UK, Colchester based pianist Dylan Christopher is looking for new and exciting contemporary music for students to perform and aid them in their learning.

Pieces composed for the project that meets the composition brief will be performed in a collaborative concert hosted by EPTA UK in **June 2018** by students of EPTA UK Teachers.

The selected pieces will be used as teaching and performance resources for aspirant musicians wanting to learn contemporary piano music, written by living composers.

Recordings of the music will also be made available online after the event.

### Aim

The aim of this project is to create a selection of accessible pieces from a variety of composers to help promote contemporary music in performance and education.

### Guidelines (See rationale for more information)

- All work must have an approximate grading (1-5).
- All work submitted must be original.
- **Pieces must be purposefully written for this project.**
- Music should be written for solo piano or piano duet for four-hands on a single piano.
- Duration: Not exceeding 5 minutes or 120 bars in length.
- No modifications to the instrument.
- Scores will be accepted in digital format only.
- A *Colchester New Music* entry-form and submission-fee must accompany any submission(s).
- A brief programme-note/biography ( $\leq 100$  words) must be submitted with the score (digital-format).
- An appraisal ( $\leq 400$  words) must be submitted with the score (digital-format).

### Considerations

Practical and technical considerations must be given when composing the pieces for this project. The application of the presented material into an educational setting must be considered. Though professional performers may be performing some of the material submitted, the standard of the students performing the pieces will range from ABRSM Grades 1 to 5. For examples of previously accepted music please refer to excerpted scores included below.

### A closing word on agency

In previous years the music that was received the best by students was written for them specifically. That is not to say, as a composer, you do not have the freedom to create, but we must remain mindful of any potential limitations in the technical ability of any performers. If you are stuck, please use the archetypes featured overleaf.

## Rationale

This rationale has been included for added clarity to the composition brief explaining the guidelines with examples of previously selected work in an effort to aid composers who wish to submit work to the project.

### Grade Approximation

- **Pre-grade candidate:** Can play a five-finger position, basic rhythms, usually hands separately, single note accompaniment, crotchets, minims and semibreves
- **Grade 1 candidate:** Can play within the compass of an octave in each hand with simple hands together writing; semi-quavers, crotchets, minims and semibreves.
- **Grade 2-3 candidate:** Can play within the full span of the piano, hands together.
- **Grades 4-5 candidate:** Can generally play easy 'standard' repertoire.

### Submission of original work

Plagiarism is a problem that hurts all parties involved. Most importantly, it is fraud; fraudulently claiming another person's work as one's own deprives the original author of taking credit for their efforts. It also questions the integrity of the project and all others associated. Music submitted may include quotations or derivations, but must not at length be copied directly from an existing work by another composer.

### Pieces must be purposefully written for this project

The music selected for this project is aimed at aspirant musicians with a still developing technical capability. "Purposefully for this project" does not mean written specifically for *Piano Project 2018*, but more broadly, with aspirant musicians in mind. If a submission is considered too virtuosic or clearly written for a professional performer, it will not be selected. However, pieces previously composed, intended for aspirant musicians, that meet the other criteria may be submitted for possible consideration; re-workings, arrangements and transcriptions are acceptable.

### Music should be written for solo piano or piano-duet

Many of the aspirant musicians who will potentially perform the pieces submitted will have access to a single piano in their home to practice. Performance on more than one piano is difficult to coordinate due to insufficient rehearsal time with access to more than one piano. Compositions of this nature exclude aspirant musicians and so will not be accepted.

### Duration: Not exceeding 5 minutes or 120 bars in length.

This project is a collaboration with multiple submitters. To give each composer an opportunity for an equal amount of concert time to air their work, no one submission should be longer than 5 minutes in length. For works with a quicker tempo, the total number of bars should not exceed 120 (including any introductions, interludes, cadenzas and codas). Multiple pieces may be submitted if they each meet this criterion. Please note that not all submitted compositions may be selected if the material held within is not suitable for the project or due to time constraints in the programme.

### No modifications to the instrument

Making modifications to a piano requires use of specialist equipment and significant time to set-up. For the project modification will be defined as: “any equipment used to alter the natural sound of the piano in a *live* setting”. It is not always possible for aspirant musicians to reproduce the requirements of the composition for a variety of reasons the foremost being access. It can be deemed that any modifications to the instrument would render the work submitted inaccessible.

### Scores will be accepted in digital-format only

To help with reproduction and editing, all music submitted must be in digital format. If access to music notation software is not available, written submissions will be accepted for consideration and later converted to digital format if selected. This stipulation has been included to ensure clarity of intentions and legibility for the performers.

Please send hardcopy submissions to: CALL FOR SCORES, 90 Gratian Close, Colchester, Essex, CO4 9EZ

### Colchester New Music entry-form and submission-fee

Entry-forms are available at the *Colchester New Music* website (<http://colchesternewmusic.com/>) on the ‘Call for scores: *Piano Project 2018*’ web page. Submission-fees scale with the number of scores submitted: **£3**, single item; **£5**, two items; **£7**, three items. All submission-fees must be settled and entry-forms received before the submission deadline. Works submitted after the deadline will be considered but may not be selected due to constraints on the concert programme caused by the material submitted before the deadline.

Note: Entry is **FREE** for members of *Colchester New Music*, students and under 25s (with ID).

### Programme-note/biography (up to 100 words)

Please include a date of birth and full professional name with any relevant information about the composer and composition. The submitted name, date of birth and programme-note will be used in the concert programme. This must be submitted in digital-format; it may be submitted in the email accompanying the submission or as a separate document file.

### Appraisal (up to 400 words)

In the interest of being true to the composer’s intention the appraisal gives information about the music that cannot be presented in notation. This information includes the origins of the composition; any moments of musical significance; any moments of programmatic or thematic relevance; and any other information important to the performance of the music. This must be submitted in digital-format; it may be submitted in the email accompanying the submission or as a separate document file.

**Example score from *Piano Project 2015: Ballade* by Douglas Thomas**

*Text and music copyright © 2015 Douglas Thomas*

The piano score excerpt featured below has been included as an example of a previous submission.

Appraisal

“Ballade is a joyful piece. The performer should portray himself along the Seine river, in Paris, in a warm summer afternoon.”

Excerpt from opening bars of “Ballade” [\[Listen\]](#)

**Moderato, c. ♩=95**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (D major). The bass line is marked *mp* and *con pedale*. The second system starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (D major). The bass line is marked *con pedale*. The score features a steady bass line of eighth notes and a treble line with chords and melodic fragments.

**Example score from *Piano Project 2014: Rains* by Jenni Pinnock**

Text and music copyright © 2014 Jenni Pinnock

The piano score excerpt featured below has been included as an example of a previous submission.

Appraisal

*“Rains is a short piano piece, about three minutes in length. Although designed to be viewed in an educational context due to the techniques it contains it also works effectively as a performance piece.*

*Techniques useful in an educational setting included in the piece include (but are not limited to) performing multiple voices within one hand (and bringing out one voice over another) and crossing over of the hands. It also helps develop familiarity with more complex key signatures (B flat minor), though makes use of repetition to ensure the use of this key signature isn’t too daunting for less experienced performers. The use of multiple voices and a more complex key signature is something I’ve experimented with within my own teaching practice, having written exercises in the past that contain similar concepts as are found within this piece with considerable success.*

*The articulations, dynamics and tempi found within the piece are all for guidance only. A current theme within my music is to allow performers complete freedom with regard to interpretation; however my experience has been that this can scare some students in an educational context. For this reason, quite comprehensive marks are given, but students who decide they have an alternative interpretation can also explore that. While it isn’t specified in the score, the sustain pedal can be used throughout – potentially even held for one or two bars before clearing. Again, this can be at the discretion of the student (and teachers shouldn’t feel afraid to mark in pedalling if it appeals to their student, but I’ve found strictly specified pedalling to be more of a curse than a blessing, hence the omission).*

*Bearing in mind all of the above, it is hard to specify a precise character for the piece! With the current articulation and dynamics in place it is a gentle, flowing piece, reflecting the ebb and flow of summer rain. Who knows where it could go when interpreted differently!”*

Excerpt from opening bars of “Rains” [\[Listen\]](#)

**Andante rubato**

Musical score excerpt for the first four bars of "Rains". The score is in B-flat minor (three flats) and 12/8 time. The first two bars feature a right hand with sustained chords and a left hand with a simple bass line. Dynamics are marked *pp* and *p*.

Musical score excerpt for bars 5 and 6 of "Rains". Bar 5 is marked "Gentle pattering rain" and features a right hand with a rapid sixteenth-note pattern and a left hand with a simple bass line. Dynamics are marked *p* and *mp*.

**Example score from *Piano Project 2014: Fives and Fifths* by Sarah Cattley**

Text and music copyright © 2014 Sarah Cattley

The piano score excerpt featured below has been included as an example of a previous submission.

Appraisal

*“This piece, as the title suggests, is built entirely around the number five; there are five quaver beats to each bar, and bare open fifths are frequently used in the left hand. These drone-like open fifths in combination with the lively irregular time signature and the flattened seventh which appears in bars 4, 11 and 31, are intended to evoke a sense of folk music. (I wrote this piece for a friend with Scottish ancestry who was learning the piano.)*

*The simple melody and accompaniment of the first 14 bars give way to a slightly more brooding antiphonal section, but it should still seem lively and dance-like. In contrast, the music from bar 27 onwards should seem calmer and wistful – more like a dance remembered than one currently happening. The right hand notes in bar 34 should be played very lightly and sonorously, like bells heard from far-off. The final four right hand notes should be played similarly, and the ending itself should seem to fade into nothing. The sustaining pedal should be used whenever it is deemed appropriate in order to achieve a nice flowing line.”*

Excerpt from opening bars of “*Fives and Fifths*” [[Listen](#)]

**Moderato**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 1-8) is marked *mp* and features a melody in the right hand and a bass line of open fifths in the left hand. The second system (bars 9-16) continues the melody and accompaniment, with a *p* dynamic marking in bar 14. The score is in 5/8 time, key of B-flat major, and marked *Moderato*.

**Example score from *Piano Project 2014: Andalusian Dance* by Elspeth Manders**

Text and music copyright © 2014 Elspeth Manders

The piano score excerpt featured below has been included as an example of a previous submission.

Appraisal

*“This a lively Spanish flamenco piece makes use of the Andalusian Cadence as a harmonic basis, rhythmic syncopation and extensive articulation, it introduces players to a musical style which is enjoyable to play and to listen to.*

*Passionate playing is essential to evoke the warmth and moodiness of Spanish flamenco. To achieve this, the player must adhere to the articulation and dynamics as instructed and play with a degree of rhythmic flair. Ideally, pedal should not be used at all, although if needed it may be used to emphasise legato phrasing. The tempo must maintain a steady speed throughout. Energy must be maintained till the end to form the climax of the piece.”*

Excerpt from opening bars of “*Andalusian Dance*” [\[Listen\]](#)

Presto, c. ♩=140  
*con fervore*

*p*

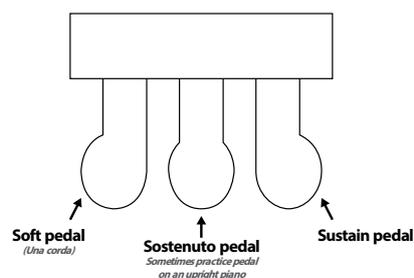
*mf Cantabile*

## Composing for Piano

The piano is a self-accompanying keyboard instrument that can be used in a variety of applications. Writing music idiomatically for this instrument can be challenging. Please find below some information to help compose music for the instrument:

### About the piano:

- A standard piano has 88 keys spanning 7 octaves.
- The strings in the lower octaves of the piano are thicker (3-4mm); naturally louder tone.
  - One string at the very bottom, two strings at the most, wound in thick copper wire.
  - Each hammer strikes one string per note.
  - Longest strings.
  - Longest resonant time over 5-/+ minutes (10-/+ minutes or longer on a Steinway D).
  - Loudest tones are created here.
- The strings in the middle of the piano are 1mm thick creating the medium tonal qualities.
  - Two or three strings, not wound in copper.
  - Each hammer strikes a group of strings tuned to the same note.
  - Moderate resonant time, ca. 1-/+ minute.
  - A large amount of compositions utilise this area.
  - Beginners are familiar with notes written in this position first.
- The strings in the higher octaves of the piano are thinnest (<1mm); naturally quieter.
  - Three strings, not wound in copper.
  - Each hammer strikes a group of strings tuned to the same note.
  - Shortest resonant time (<20-/+ seconds).
  - Bright tonal quality.
  - Quietest tones.
- A standard piano usually has two pedals but can have three pedals, they differ between upright-piano and grand-piano:
  - Upright-piano.
    - Una-corda (Soft pedal): Moves the hammers closer to the strings.
    - Practice Pedal: Moves a sheet of velvet/felt in-between the hammers and strings deadening the sound.
    - Sustain Pedal: Releases the dampers allowing the strings to resonate.
  - Grand piano.
    - Una-corda (Soft pedal): Moves the hammers to the right striking only one string.
    - Sostenuto Pedal: Releases the damper on one note.
    - Sustain Pedal: Releases the dampers allowing the strings to resonate.

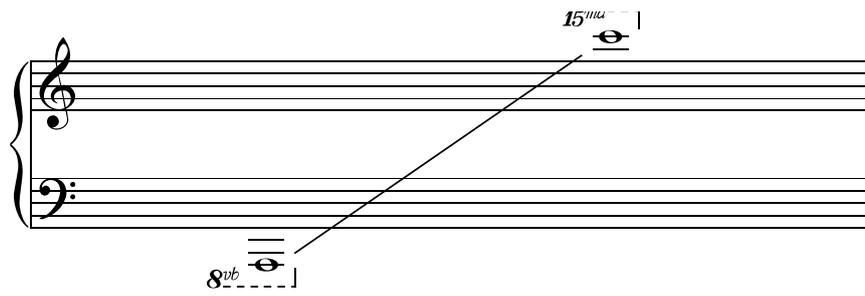


### Pedals featured on the modern piano

Christopher, D. (2017) COLCHESTER NEW MUSIC: Call for scores - Piano Project 2018.

[online] Available at: <[http://dylanchristopher.com/research/christopher\\_2017\\_-\\_piano\\_project\\_2018.pdf](http://dylanchristopher.com/research/christopher_2017_-_piano_project_2018.pdf)>

[Updated 12 August 2017]

Notation

The standard range of a modern piano

- Standard notation is written on two staves; top, right-hand; bottom, left-hand.
- Key signatures can create problems (esp. for beginners):
  - Everyone: Atonal.
  - Beginners: 0-2 sharps/flats.
  - Intermediate: 0-4 sharps/flats.
  - Advanced: 0-6 sharps/flats.
- Writing in more than 6 sharps/flats is impractical and can be problematic (esp. for beginners).
- Performance directions can be written in English to aid beginners or awkward terminology.
  - **NEVER** use a translator to translate English to Italian; write directions in English if unsure.
- The human brain cannot focus on more than one event at a time and cannot multitask; this problem is addressed in piano writing for two hands by:
  - a) Similar shapes or patterns applied in both hands.
  - b) Repeating an ostinato in one hand while the other is used for an action.
  - c) Sustained notes in one hand while the other is used for an action.
  - d) Alternating hands sharing attention and focus equally.
- Chordal writing is a valid technique to make thick textures but consider:
  - More than 5 notes in a chord in one hand can result in accuracy issues (esp. in quick succession).
  - Broken chords and arpeggiations can be used to play chords with more than 5 notes.
    - Hand alternation can be used to spread the chord.
  - Soprano, alto, tenor and bass (SATB) writing can be used as a guide for basic chordal writing; two voices per hand or three voices and one in the other.
- Tremolos can be used in either hand to thicken textures and generate excitement.
- Alberti base is a widely used device; generally considered a classical writing device:
  - Archaic in new music, but can be effective if used unconventionally.
- Keep scores clutter free:
  - Minimize arbitrary markings on your scores.
  - The notes generally speak for themselves.
  - Too many markings can sometimes confuse intentions.
- Cross staff notes are generally only used when following a pattern or sequence.

Follow a logical process to notate the composition; the performers will have to follow your path. Remember the score will often be used without your presence.