

COMPOSING WITH KEYBOARDS

by Jean Allison

DECIDING WHERE TO BEGIN

Perhaps the most difficult part of composing a piece of music is finding a way to "make the music happen". This whole sense of *creativity* is inseparably tied up with feelings, emotions and moods. Some composers produce great music when they are happy. Some, on the other hand, have produced great works of art from days of deep sorrow and unhappiness for one reason or another, and these states of mind can have a direct bearing on a composer's output.

Regardless of feelings, however, where to begin can be a problem! Some composers will suddenly get a tune inside their head, which can be played at a piano or a keyboard or a guitar. Some songwriters will set words to music, some will start with the tune and later add the words, some will develop the two together.

In this approach to composition, we are working with *three main elements*. These are:

1. Rhythm (beat)
2. Harmony (chords)
3. Melody (tune)

These three elements have been put in this order deliberately, because often the third element, Melody, comes as a result of the first or second, Rhythm and Harmony. *Very often indeed*, the best melodies are sung by the composer, as the melody unfolds from his mind's ear. Now that's all very well, if you happened to be Mozart or Cole Porter or Paul McCartney, whose unique musical minds produced not just a tune, but everything else to back it up as well! Sometimes, in fact, Mozart had to write at an incredible rate, while the whole symphony materialised in his head at once!

Very few of us may be gifted with this degree of talent and skill, but that does not mean that we cannot create a very nice piece of music once we know where to start. Indeed, we may be amazed at our own ability once we actually do begin!

If we choose to use an electric keyboard, then the wonders of technology are on our side to work for and with us. Using a keyboard, it is possible to create a *rhythm* which can inspire us and a *chord framework* to help us in coming up with a *melody* which is attractive and interesting, and which it is possible to develop into a keyboard, vocal or band composition or arrangement, as the imagination takes us.

The following projects will give a base from which to begin creating keyboard compositions in a variety of styles using patterns or progressions of chords which are all well-known and widely used.