



MEET THE COMPOSER:

Ruth Crawford Seeger

Age Range: Elementary, Middle School, High School

Introduction: Composers write music, just like authors write books. In the Class Notes “Meet the Composer” series, we will learn a little bit about the achievements, backstory, and influences of a variety of composers. Get ready to learn about these influential composers and listen to some of their music.

Total Video Time: 7:13

Total Lesson Time: Approximately 15–20 minutes

BACKGROUND on Ruth Crawford Seeger

Ruth Crawford was born in Ohio in 1901. As a child, she moved to Florida and began playing piano, composing, and eventually teaching piano. She moved to Chicago to find more opportunities for studying composition. Through her studies, she met musical scholar Charles Seeger and they eventually got married. She began to develop an interest in music originating from the United States, as opposed to a lot of traditional Western classical music that came from Europe, and she shifted her focus to collecting, recording, and arranging American folk music. She died in 1953.

MUSIC of Ruth Crawford Seeger

1. Ruth Crawford Seeger began her musical career as a pianist, then a piano teacher. Many of her first compositions were composed for the piano. Here is a piece called *Study in Mixed Accents*. In music, an “accent” is a note that gets special emphasis. As you listen, see if you notice the accented notes.

[Study in Mixed Accents](#). Composed 1930. Video approx. 1 minute.

2. In her vocal composition called *Chant*, Ruth Crawford Seeger wanted the audience to pay attention to the shape of the vocal melody so she chose not to use any words. Instead the soloist sings a *vocalise*, which simply means a vocal melody without words.

[Chant](#). Composed 1930. Video approx. 3.5 minutes.

3. Later in her career, Ruth Crawford took a special interest in folk music. We can see a glimpse of her interest in folk traditions in her piece for narrator and piano called *The Adventures of Tom Thumb*. Listen to just one small section of that piece here.

[Adventures of Tom Thumb: Tom Sets Out](#). Composed 1925. Video approx. 1.5 minutes.



MEET THE COMPOSER:

Ruth Crawford Seeger, cont.

CREATE, CONNECT, & RESPOND to Seeger's music

1. In *Chant*, the vocalise piece listed above, Ruth Crawford Seeger places the focus on a vocal melody. Learn about or review the fundamental concept of melody in the Class Notes lesson [What is MELODY?](#)
2. In her piece *The Adventures of Tom Thumb*, Ruth Crawford Seeger blends storytelling and music. Think more about the connection between music and storytelling in the Class Notes lesson [Music & Literacy: Create a Musical Story](#).

Ruth Crawford Seeger

FAST FACTS

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