

# PSC Hamlet – Music

## Lesson 1, Act 1: Ghost!

**Key stage 2 National Curriculum Objectives featured:**

*Pupils will*

- listen with attention to detail (and recall sounds with increasing aural memory)
- appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
- develop an understanding of the history of music.

The ghost of Hamlet's father is a major character in this play. He is first seen in Act 1 and then at various other points throughout. Back in 1809 **Beethoven** wrote his 5th Piano Trio. Trios were usually light, happy pieces designed to be played at parties but the middle movement of Beethoven's was so spooky sounding that it is now known as 'The Ghost'. (Its real name is **Trio No 5, op 70 in D.**)

For this task you will need:

- Paper and art materials
- Recording of Beethoven Trio No 5 'Ghost' Mvt 2 (If it feels too long, stop the recording after 4 minutes)

1. Play this music for your class and ask them if they can work out what it might be describing. Use the following questions as prompts:

- Is it loud or soft?
- Is it fast or slow?
- Is it happy or sad?

If they know the story of Hamlet, tell them that the music could represent one of the characters.

***Listening with eyes closed or in a darkened room, might help your children to concentrate.***

2. Explain that it is describing a ghost and remind them of the ghost in the play. He is the ghost of Hamlet's father, the former king, and he was killed whilst sleeping. Discuss what he might look like. How is he dressed? How does he move?

3. Give out paper and art materials and ask your children to draw the ghost as they listen again to Beethoven's music. As they listen and draw, keep asking 'what's happening now?' and encourage your children to add their answers onto their work.

4. Here are some facts about the ghost that might come in useful –

- He first appears at the start of the play. Horatio and the guards are scared of him. He is wearing battle clothes
- Ghosts are often said to be in a state of unrest or agitation, upset at the way they died. This one says he had poison poured into his ear whilst he was napping
- The ghost only appears at nighttime
- The ghost only speaks to Hamlet – is he just in Hamlet's imagination? Should Hamlet be represented on the drawings?

5. Listen as many times as you need to and add more instructions as you do so. For example you might like your children to colour their pictures, add in other characters or even text.

6. When the artwork is finished, challenge your children to make a display of it alongside facts about the play.

## Lesson 2, Act 2: Ophelia

### Key stage 2 National Curriculum Objectives featured:

#### Pupils will

- listen with attention to detail (and recall sounds with increasing aural memory)
- appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
- develop an understanding of the history of music.
- play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the inter-related dimensions of music
- use and understand staff and other notations

Hamlet and Ophelia is one of the greatest twisted love stories in literature. Hamlet is described as 'mad with love' for her and 'lovesick'. But he is unkind and causes her so much distress that she drowns herself. An eerily similar love affair happened in real life between French composer Hector Berlioz and actress Harriet Smithson in the 1830s. Berlioz begged Harriet to marry him and after 5 years of refusals she said yes. The marriage was unhappy and Harriet's life ended in an institution. This composing activity is inspired by both stories.

1. Remind your class about Hamlet and Ophelia and tell them the parallel story of Hector Berlioz and Harriet Smithson. (Hector and Harriet were real people and you can see pictures of them online). Berlioz wrote his epic '**Symphonie Fantastique**' for Harriet and placed the same simple tune in every movement to represent her.
2. Here is Harriet's tune: Symphonie Fantastique Mvt 1 (The tune arrives about 6'30 into the movement and ends at 7'03)

Listen to this with your class. Point out the jumping chords underneath the tune, they represent Berlioz' heartbeat skipping as he sees his love for the first time. This music could also represent Hamlet's feelings for Ophelia. During the symphony we hear this tune in many different disguises representing Harriet/ Ophelia in different places doing different things (e.g. riding a horse, in church etc)

3. Begin by teaching the tune to your children. Here it is simplified and with words –

G G C G E E F E E D C C B

O - phe - li - a I love you I love you I love you!

***If this tune is too complicated, ask the children to invent their own tune!***

Create a class version of this tune. It can be played on classroom percussion (xylophones etc), or you might like to just sing it. Can you add a simple heartbeat rhythm to represent love?

4. When your children are confident with the tune, encourage them to experiment with different ways of playing it. Split them into small composing teams and ask each team to decide where Ophelia is (i.e. at the swimming pool) and what she is doing (i.e. swimming). Their next job is to adapt her tune to describe this (for example they might add splashes and sing the tune in a fast, excited way, perhaps even with new words).
5. When this is achieved, hear each piece separately and give feedback. Then ask the class to put their pieces into an order that makes sense and play through them as one continuous piece.

### **Taking it further –**

Can you use the tune to portray moments from the play. For example – Ophelia's first meeting with Hamlet, Ophelia excited about marriage, Ophelia alone and very sad?

## **Lesson 3, Act 3: Prayer**

**Key stage 2 National Curriculum Objectives featured:**

*Pupils will*

- *listen with attention to detail (and recall sounds with increasing aural memory)*
- *appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians*
- *develop an understanding of the history of music.*

In Act 3, Scene 3, Claudius prays. During his prayer he confesses a dark secret, he killed King Hamlet. Regardless of your religion or spirituality, prayer or quiet contemplation can be a wonderful way of calming down and sorting out your troubles and there certainly is a lot of music to help with this! This listening task features one of the best prayer-inspired pieces of music ever written, **Charles Ives' Unanswered Question**

1. Have a class discussion about this moment in the play. Explain that Claudius is praying to try and get some help with what's on his mind. Ask your class if they ever have troubles. Are they ever worried, distracted or unable to sleep? Explain that sometimes just having a quiet moment to think can help solve such issues.
2. Explain that American composer Charles Ives wrote a piece of music called 'The Unanswered Question'. In this wonderful, quiet and calm piece a solo trumpet asks a musical question over and over again. The question is answered by the flute section who get angrier and angrier with each response. The string section play a gentle hymn underneath throughout.
3. Give each child a small piece of paper and ask them to write a question on it. This should be about something that is troubling them, a worry or a concern. Reassure them that no one will ever read this so they can write whatever they like.
4. In the largest space you have, perhaps the school hall, ask your children to spread out and find a comfortable position, perhaps even lying on the floor. Ask for silence and then encourage everyone to empty their minds and slow down their breathing.
5. When you have complete calm, play them Charles Ives' piece. You can find a recording of it [here](#). Encourage your children to think of their question every time they hear the trumpet. When the flutes play, they must shake their head and shake the question away.
6. When the music is finished, have another discussion. Does anyone feel better? Does anyone feel calmer? Hopefully the mood of the music has calmed their minds a little. Finally, destroy all the written down questions but do tell your children that if they have a serious problem to discuss, they should talk to someone they trust.

## Lesson 4, Act 4: Riddles

### Key stage 2 National Curriculum Objectives featured:

#### Pupils will

- listen with attention to detail (and recall sounds with increasing aural memory)
- play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the inter-related dimensions of music

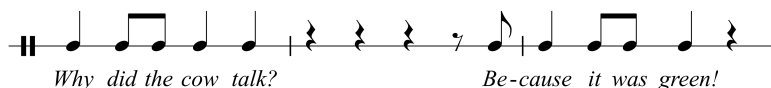
As Hamlet and Ophelia descend into madness they start to talk in riddles. Ophelia even sings her riddles as strange songs. This task explains how to write riddles with your children and transform them into chants and simple songs.

1. Discuss this part of the play and make sure your children know what a riddle is. A riddle is a sentence or question with a double meaning within it or a puzzle to be solved. Often, at first hearing, riddles don't make any sense.
2. Split your class into four groups and give each group two pieces of paper and a pencil. Ask each group to invent two short sentences and write them down on the separate pieces of paper. They should follow these rules –

Sentence 1: A question beginning with this structure:  
**Why is/ does/ did \_\_\_\_\_?**  
*This question should have no clear answer. For example: 'Why did the cow talk?'*

Sentence 2: A statement, an answer to a different question. Beginning with -  
**Because \_\_\_\_\_!**  
*For example: 'Because it was green!'*  
*The two sentences should be totally unconnected and the weirder they are the better.*

3. Collect in the answers and then redistribute them so that each group has their own question but with a different answer. Ask each group to read their question and new answer aloud and write these on the board. *Each group now has a riddle!*
4. Play a steady pulse on a hand drum and encourage your children to softly tap along. Then try speaking one of the sentences to the pulse so that it fits. For example:

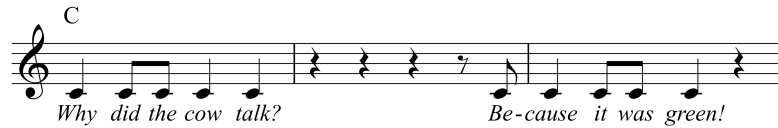


5. Give each group a drum or similar unpitched instrument (woodblock, tambourine etc) and challenge them to fit their two sentences to their own pulse in their own way. Everyone in the group should speak the words at the same time so that it is loud and confident.
6. Hear each group one by one and give feedback

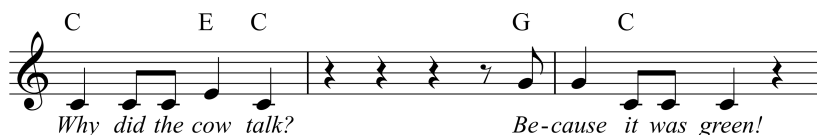
*Each group has now created a chant. You could end the task here. Simply put the riddles into an order and practise performing them one after the other without a pause.*

If you want to turn this into a song, read on!

7. The next challenge is to use three pitches to create a tune for their chant. Demonstrate how to use just **C, E, G** to create a tune. Start by playing your chant rhythm on just one of these pitches. So you have this:



Then ask 'which is the most important word?' Perhaps they will say 'cow'. Ask 'should the melody go up or down on that word?' Perhaps they will say 'up'. Continue in this way until you have something like this –



8. Give each group a xylophone or glockenspiel and ask them to use this method to come up with their own tune
9. Again, hear each group separately before deciding on an order that works well. Challenge the class to perform their tunes this order keeping the pulse going between the groups. *Now you have a simple song!*

## Lesson 5, Act 5: Hamlet

**Key stage 2 National Curriculum Objectives featured:**

*Pupils will*

- listen with attention to detail (and recall sounds with increasing aural memory)
- appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
- develop an understanding of the history of music.

Hamlet goes through a lot of moods during the 5 acts of the play. 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic composers were fond of describing similar huge emotions in their symphonies. Tchaikovsky's 5<sup>th</sup> symphony features a recurring melody that represents 'fate' or 'doom'. He then changes this melody to represent different emotions and moods. We're going to try and match his music with Hamlet's story.

1. Ask your class to help you make a list of Hamlet's moods on the board. Do this as a long list, include all their suggestions and try to match the moods to the acts of the play. You might end up with something that looks similar to this:

- Act 1 Sad about father's death
- Act 2 In love with Ophelia
- Act 3 Angry with Claudius
- Act 4 Acts strangely, talks in riddles
- Act 5 Dies, murdered

2. Give out A4 paper and ask your children to fold their page to make five roughly even columns. At the top of each column they should write Act 1, 2, 3 etc, like this:

Act 1	Act 2	Act 3	Act 4	Act 5

***It might save time to do this for everyone ahead of the lesson!***

3. Explain that you are going to listen to a melody by a Russian composer called Tchaikovsky. You are going to play five different versions of it and the task is to match each version with one of the acts of the play. Pay particular attention to the mood of the music to do this. Then during a second listen, quickly draw Hamlet in the appropriate column with the appropriate expression on his face.
4. Now, play these five extracts:

- Tchaikovsky 5 beginning
- Tchaikovsky 5 Mvt 2 (11'00 into 2<sup>nd</sup> mvt)
- Tchaikovsky 5 Mvt 3 (5'00 into 3<sup>rd</sup> mvt)
- Tchaikovsky 5 Mvt 4 (9'30 into 4<sup>th</sup> mvt)

You may have to listen to each one a few times to allow enough time for the drawings to be created and finished. Note that the order of these doesn't necessarily correspond with the order of the acts.

5. Discuss your findings. As ever, there is no wrong answer here because music is very subjective. What is happy to one person might be sad to another. Can you come up with an answer that everyone is happy with?

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