PSC Twelfth Night – Music activities by Rachel Leach

Lesson 1, Act 1: Shipwreck!

***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 whole plot of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night happens because of a shipwreck off the coast of Illyria at the beginning. Many composers have been inspired by the sea and several have even used the orchestra to depict dangerous storms or shipwrecks. English composer Benjamin Britten perhaps did it best in his Four Sea Interludes from 1945. This listening task will help your children to understand his music by comparing and contrasting the seascapes that are being described

For this task you will need:

* Paper and art materials
* Recording of [Britten's Sea Interludes](https://youtu.be/BXUX1MlVdmg) (also available on Spotify)

1. Begin by telling your children a little about Benjamin Britten. Here are some useful facts:

* Born in Lowestoft, Suffolk in 1913
* One of England’s most important composers
* Wrote ‘Four Sea Interludes’ in 1945 originally as linking music for an opera
* Three of them depict the sea at different times of the day, the second one ‘Sunday Morning’ depicts the small town next to the sea
* Inspired by his favourite place – Aldeburgh

1. Fold a sheet of paper into four even sections. Open it out again and place it on your desk with the long side top and bottom (landscape), like this:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 |

Ask your children to copy, and to number the sections as above

1. Explain that you are going to play the first of Britten’s Sea Interludes - ‘Dawn’. It features three musical ideas, perhaps these represent the beach, the waves and something lurking under the sea. Your children’s task is to draw the scene in box 1 as they listen. Listen to the whole movement, it lasts less than 4 minutes
2. Britten’s second interlude describes ‘Sunday Morning’ in the town next to the sea. Ask your children to draw the town in box 2 as they listen. Perhaps they will draw many people rushing around, or maybe they will be inspired to draw a church and church bells or something completely different. There is no wrong answer! Again, listen to the whole piece, it lasts about 4 minutes
3. Interlude 3 is next and is called ‘Moonlight’. This is the sea at night. Ask your children to draw it in box 3
4. Finally, box 4 is for Interlude 4 - ‘Storm’. There is a lot happening in this movement. As well as the frightening waves perhaps the children can hear things lurking in the water? There is a calm moment – the eye of the storm perhaps - and if you listen to the very end, you might hear a shipwreck!
5. Ask your children to hold up their drawings and have a class discussion. Which was the best interlude? What was lurking under the sea? Did they hear the shipwreck? Encourage the class to refer to their pictures and the music in their answers. Perhaps Sebastian and Viola encountered all of these things on their journey to Illyria.

Taking it further

Encourage your class to add words to their pictures or write a short poem to describe their favourite one.

Lesson 2, Act 2: Drinking and partying!

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

*Pupils will*

*- 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*

*- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory*

Act 2, Scene 3 features a small party. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste are drinking and singing. Many operas feature ‘drinking songs’ that have now become quite famous outside of the original opera. One of the best was by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi. Its known as ‘brindisi’ which just means ‘toast’ or ‘cheers!’.

Here is a slightly simplified version of Verdi’s famous tune -

A picture containing shape

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1. Teach this to your class and encourage them to sing along using just sounds like ‘la la’. You could try singing along with this version - [Brindisi](https://youtu.be/SK-NUuTCras)
2. Challenge your children to write new words to fit this tune. If you want to be like Verdi, the words should be about drinking but you might prefer to write about foods or celebrating. (You could even borrow some words from Twelfth Night Act 2, Scene 3.) Start by making a brainstorm of words on the board about your chosen topic. You could start with a question like ‘What happens at a party?’

Think carefully about the stresses of the words and how they fit to the tune i.e., the strong syllables of your lyrics must fall on the strong beats of the song

You might end up with something like this:

Diagram

Description automatically generated with low confidence

1. When you have your words and can sing them with confidence, it’s time to make an accompaniment. Verdi’s Brindisi has three beats in every bar so a waltz (um-pa-pa) pattern fits with it.

Explain to your class that a waltz is a type of dance made up of three beats, one strong and two weak:

A picture containing rectangle

Description automatically generated

*The ‘UM’ is a strong, loud beat. The ‘pa pa’ is weaker or quieter.*

1. Try out this pattern with your class. Begin by simply asking them to say ‘Um pa pa Um pa pa’ over and over. You could do this along with a recording of the song or use a woodblock or drum on the ‘um’ sound to keep everyone together.
2. Now try performing the rhythm like this:

Rectangle

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

When this is good, steady and strong it’s time to move onto instruments. Place a selection of unpitched percussion in front of the class and ask them to decide which instruments could play the strong ‘um’ beat and which could play the weaker ‘pa pa’. They might come up with a drum for the ‘um’ and a shaker for the ‘pa-pa’ for example

1. Now try performing your um-pa-pa accompaniment with your singing. It should fit perfectly. Note that the singing should start on the second ‘pa’ like this:

A sheet of music

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

1. Make your song longer by performing the accompaniment without the singing or by adding different words to the tune. You could even alternate back and forth between singing and not singing. End the session by performing your finished song.

Taking it further

Add an exciting introduction and a flashy ending perhaps using some of the more ‘glamourous’ percussion instruments like cymbals, bells and gongs. If you want to add pitched instruments stick to these notes:

A picture containing bubble chart

Description automatically generated

You could even try writing a contrasting verse and inventing a new tune!

Lesson 3, Act 3: Dueling Xylos!

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Sir Andrew challenges Cesario to a duel for the love of Olivia in Act 3. Here’s how to have a musical one! *This is a great activity for children new to instruments as it subtly teaches some key rules about respecting the instruments, taking turns and sharing*

1. Tell your class about the duel in Twelfth Night and explain that a duel is really just a contest between two people.
2. Ask your class to sit on the floor in a large circle and place an instrument in the middle of the circle – ideally a large xylophone with two beaters, or failing that two identical instruments such as two glockenspiels, two shakers, two drums
3. Invite two children to come forward and play. If using a xylophone, ask them to sit either side of it and share. If using two instruments, ask them to sit opposite each other. The rules are simple -
   1. The players must take turns
   2. They must never play at the same time
   3. They can play whatever they like and for as long as they like
4. After a short while, replace one of the children with a new player. You can do this without talking, just signal to someone to come forward and swap them in whilst the other player is performing
5. Keep going like this until as many children as possible have had a go. To keep the task interesting, add in more challenges as you go through. For example –
   1. Switch the instrument/s to something new
   2. Try two contrasting instruments
   3. Allow the children to choose their instrument
   4. Challenge each player to just play a certain number of times (i.e. four each)
   5. Give the players a mood to depict i.e. ‘have an argument’, ‘be silly’, ‘play angrily’

The only rule that must stay constant is that the players must take turns and never play at the same time

1. When you have heard from everyone, stop, and have a discussion about the music that has been created. Did your players stick to the rules? Did they enjoy it?
2. Next split the class into pairs and ask the children to label themselves player ‘A’ and player ‘B’. Give each pair an instrument to share. If you don’t have enough instruments, encourage some pairs to use body percussion and voice. Your pairs are now going to have a real competitive duel by following these rules -

* Player A plays something
* Player B tries to copy it exactly
* Player B plays something new
* Player A tries to copy it exactly.
* Keep going like this until one player makes a mistake. The other player is instantly the winner

Challenge you class to do this with no talking and no argument. In a real Shakespearian duel there were no second chances!

1. Finally explain that these duels or duets, are actually musical conversations. When we talk, we can only be understood if we take turns and listen to each other. Musical conversations work in the same way.

Taking it further

Listen to some real musical conversations (below) and discuss what the composer and performers might be ‘talking’ about i.e. what is the mood of the music, what are the musicians ‘saying’?

* Beethoven’s [5th Symphony Mvt 1](https://youtu.be/yKl4T5BnhOA) – features one idea moving across the orchestra and musical conversations between different instrument groups (especially around 3’30 - [here](https://youtu.be/yKl4T5BnhOA?t=210))
* Berlioz [Symphonie Fantastique Mvt 3](https://youtu.be/BtzCUJRgiFc?t=11) – oboe and cor anglais have a conversation across a large space as they portray shepherds calling to each other across the fields
* [Duelling Banjos](https://youtu.be/J6UG1Jlwiow) – the ultimate musical duel!

Lesson 4, Act 4: Disguise!

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There is a lot of disguise in this play! Viola is often in disguise as Cesario, Malvolio dresses up to try and win Olivia and in Act 4, Scene 2 Feste visits Malvolio disguised as a curate. Composers often take a tune and make many different versions of it. Sometimes they change a theme so much that it is almost in disguise. This is officially called Theme (tune) and Variation (versions). Here’s how to disguise a tune in class.

1. Have a class discussion about the disguised characters in Twelfth Night and perhaps make a list of them on the board. They are:
   * Viola is disguised as a man (Cesario)
   * Malvolio is disguised as a noble man (he wears yellow stockings)
   * Feste is disguised as a priest or curate.
2. Explain that composers often take a theme and then disguise it. This is called Theme and Variations. One of the most famous sets of Theme and Variations was written by English composer Edward Elgar. He wrote a simple tune and then disguised it 14 times. Each disguise (or variation) described one of his friends.
3. Teach the following rhythm -

Chart, box and whisker chart

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Take some time to explain this shape a little - your children might spot that it is symmetrical. It may help to use words -

A picture containing text, clock

Description automatically generated

1. Play the tune on a xylophone and encourage volunteers to come forward and have a go -

A picture containing chart

Description automatically generated

Others can join on unpitched percussion or continue to clap along

1. Now its time to disguise the tune. Split your class into three groups and name them Viola, Malvolio and Feste. Their task is to make a short piece of music to describe their character with Elgar’s theme hidden within it.

Here are some tips for disguising a tune -

* + Use the rhythm but not the notes
  + Use the notes but not the rhythm
  + Play it backwards
  + Choose one small section and repeat it over and over

Demonstrate some of these methods to your class

Here’s how to make the tune resemble a character -

* + Describe the character using one simple statement

*i.e. Malvolio…. dances around in silly stockings*

Change the tune to represent this statement

*i.e. add a dance rhythm such as um-pa-pa to the tune*

* You could also create some sound effects to describe the character further

*i.e. Malvolio… is in love (add a downward ‘swoon’ on a xylophone)*

*…wants to be a nobleman (add a spiky fanfare)*

1. When this is achieved, bring the class back together, hear their pieces one by one and give a bit of gentle feedback
2. Finally, try performing all of your variations (or disguises) back-to-back without a pause perhaps in the order the characters appear in the play

Taking it further

Listen to Elgar’s piece: [here](https://youtu.be/Zkklz0Vird4). Choose one of the variations and try to work out what kind of person Elgar is describing. Write about them or draw them and then find out all about the real inspiration here: [Enigma Variations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enigma_Variations)

Lesson 5, Act 5: Wedding Day

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At the very end of the play there are three happy couples – Olivia and Sebastian, Orsino and Viola and Sir Toby and Maria. These three couples marry so in this lesson we will explore wedding music.

For this task you will need:

* Paper and art materials
* Recordings of [Mendelssohn Wedding March](https://youtu.be/4tDYMayp6Dk) (from Midsummer Night’s Dream)

[Wagner Wedding March](https://youtu.be/HUpineaywOI) (from Lohengrin)

[Widor Toccata](https://youtu.be/jtj300j129k)

*All three are also available on Spotify*

1. Remind your children about the three weddings at the end of Twelfth Night and make a list of them on the board. Have a discussion about who these characters are. Ask questions such as ‘How old are they?’ ‘What is their status – are the noble or normal?’ ‘What do they look like?’
2. Give out paper and art materials. Ask your class to fold their paper into three columns like this:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |

Their task is to draw the three weddings in response to three pieces of music, one happy couple in each column

1. Play [Mendelssohn Wedding March](https://youtu.be/4tDYMayp6Dk) perhaps stopping after a few minutes to discuss which couple this might represent. There is no correct answer for this so allow for multiple interpretations and much discussion. As you play the rest of the track, challenge your children to complete their picture of the first couple in the first column of their page.
2. Repeat this activity with [Wagner Wedding March](https://youtu.be/HUpineaywOI) and then with [Widor Toccata](https://youtu.be/jtj300j129k)
3. When this is achieved, have a look at everyone’s artwork and discuss their choices.
4. Finally, have a class vote to decide everyone’s favourite piece and as you play it again, allow the children to complete their pictures perhaps colouring them in or adding decorations, words, other characters etc.

Taking it further

Now you have decided on your favourite wedding march, why not stage a real wedding. Choose children to play the roles of the happy couple, the celebrant, the best man, bridesmaids, family, congregation etc. Can you time the walk down the aisle to exactly fit your chosen wedding march?

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