

This unit is based on Benjamin Britten's piece 'This Little Babe' from 'A Ceremony of Carols'. Britten was one of the most important British composers of the last century. He was born in Lowestoft in Suffolk. As a teenager he would travel to London at the weekend to have lessons at the Royal College of Music. Britten wrote all kinds of music but was especially known for his operas which were often performed in a church hall near his home in the seaside town, Aldeburgh. He also wrote a lot of music for children. His 'Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra' explores and explains each instrument one by one.

The children start by learning how 'This Little Babe' is a carol and an example of choral music written to celebrate Christmas. It uses a canon, where a melody is played and then imitated shortly afterwards by another part. It is an example of how a layered texture can be created in music. Throughout the course of the unit the children learn to sing two 3-part canons, 'Christmas is Coming' and 'I Am But A Melancholy Flower'. They go on to learn to play 'I am But A Melancholy Flower' in a 2-part round on tuned percussion instruments following dot notation on the staff using the treble clef. This builds on their knowledge of dot notation representing pitch developed in year 3 and 4.

Lesson Sequencing

In lesson 1 the children listen to 'This Little Babe' and learn how it is a carol (a Christian song associated with Christmas and often sung in church), taken from a group of carols called 'A Ceremony of Carols' written for boys' voices with harp accompaniment. 'A Ceremony of Carols' sets old English and Latin poetry to tell the Christmas story. Some of the music has one melody with an accompaniment played by the harp and other parts of the music is sung in parts using a canon. At the end of the lesson the children learn a Christmas song, 'Christmas is Coming' which they will sing as a round (which is a simple form of canon) in lesson 2.

In lesson 2 the children explore how 'This Little Babe' uses a canon. A canon is where a melody is played and then imitated shortly afterwards by another part. The children learnt about canons in Autumn B of year 2 in the unit *Pachelbel's Canon*. They go on to learn about Anna Meredith's use of a canon in her rhythmic piece, 'Connect It' in year 6 in the Autumn A unit *Voice and Body Percussion*. In this lesson, the children sing 'I Am But a Melancholy Flower' and 'Christmas is Coming' in a 3-part canon.

In lesson 3 the children learn that 'A Ceremony of Carols' is written for boys to sing, accompanied by a harp. It is traditional in

England for boys to sing in church choirs while their voices are high. A young singer who is a boy is known as a 'treble'. The version of 'This Little Babe' that the children listen to in this lesson is sung by boys of the famous choir of King's College at Cambridge University. The choir was founded by Henry VI (who the children studied in history, year 3, summer B in the unit on The War of the Roses) in 1441 to provide music every day for church services in the college chapel. The choir is one of the world's best-known choral groups. Every year the choir sings a service called *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* on Christmas Eve. The service is very famous and has been broadcast on the radio since 1928. In this lesson the children practise singing 'I am but a melancholy flower' in a 3-part round before reading dot notation in a grid form, to play the tune of the song on tuned percussion.

In lesson 4 the children continue to practise playing 'I Am But A Melancholy Flower' on their glockenspiels/xylophones. They read the melody for the song on the staff (which they were first introduced to in year 3 in Autumn B in the unit on Pachelbel's Canon). They are then introduced to the 'treble clef'. This symbol tells the person reading the music what pitch the dots on the staff represent. They read dots on the staff in the treble clef to play the melody for 'I Am But A Melancholy Flower'.

In lesson 5 the children listen to another famous canon, Pachelbel's 'Canon' and compare this with Britten's canon in 'This Little Babe'. Pachelbel, who was German wrote his very famous and popular Canon sometime between 1680 and 1706. It is written for three violins and one 'cello. The children should have some degree of familiarity with the piece as they studied it in year 3 (Autumn B. Although it uses the same musical structure as Britten's piece the mood of it is extremely different. The children investigate this by considering the ways in which the pieces are the same and different, before practising the canons 'Christmas is Coming' and 'I Am But A Melancholy Flower' which they sing and play on tuned percussion.

In lesson 6 the children practise, perform and evaluate the canons which they have learnt to sing/play in lessons 1-5. In doing this they learn that we can evaluate a performance to make it better next time. By practising the piece so it is ready for performance they develop their skills in playing together in a group, following the directions of the teacher/a child who acts as the conductor.

Musical Focus

Texture

- Three-part canon
- Singing in rounds

Pitch

- High pitch of treble voices

Notation

- Dot notation on stave in treble clef showing do-la range
- Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims, semibreves and rests

Links to Prior/Following Units

Year 4

Autumn A—*Working Songs* (Texture—Solo/Chorus)

Autumn B—*Take the 'A' Train* (Texture—Melody and accompaniment, solo sections; Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests)

Spring A—*Beethoven's 5th* (Texture—Unison v layered; Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests, dot notation on stave in do-so range)

Spring B—*Going Solo* (Texture—music for a solo instrument)

Summer A—*Stories in Sound III* (Texture—Building layers of texture; Dot notation on stave to show do-so range)

Summer B—*Announcing an Entrance* (Texture—Building layers of texture; Stick notation to show crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests, time signature and bar lines)

Year 5

Autumn A—*The Lark Ascending* (Texture—Solo and accompaniment)

Spring A—*Jin-Go-La-Ba* (Rhythm—Layering of rhythmic patterns; Texture—Drums and chanting)

Spring B—*Beethoven's Eroica* (Dot notation on stave in treble clef showing do-do' range; Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests, notation showing time signatures and bar lines, combining notation for pitch and for rhythm)

Summer A—*African-American Spirituals* (Texture—Singing in parts)

Summer B—*English Folk Songs* (Texture—A cappella singing in unison and in parts)

Year 6

Autumn A—*Voice and Body Percussion* (Texture/Structure and Form—Canon, combining rhythmic motifs in layers, ternary form; Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims, semibreves, semiquavers and rests, time signatures and bar lines, markings for tempo and dynamics.)
Autumn B—*Halleluiah Chorus* (Texture/Structure and Form-building a piece around different motifs, layering motifs to create texture; Dot notation showing do-do' range using stave and treble clef, stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests.)
Spring A—*Blues and the Groove* (Texture—Layering of parts over a walking bass, use of the groove.)
Spring B—*Minimalism* (Texture—Layering of repeated rhythmic patterns)

Outcomes

Practise and perform singing and playing rounds on tuned percussions instruments, reading dot notation to represent pitch in treble clef in do-la range.

Key Learning Points

- A carol is a Christian song associated with Christmas and often sung in church. Lots of choral music (music for a choir) has been written to celebrate Christmas
- Benjamin Britten wrote 'A Ceremony of Carols' which includes 'This Little Babe' which is for boys (trebles) to sing at a high pitch with accompanying harp.
- 'This Little Babe' uses a canon.
- A canon is where a melody is played and then imitated shortly afterwards by another part. A round is a simple canon.
- A part in music is a line which can be played by one or more players. Music can have lots of parts layered on top of each other. This is called texture.
- We can use symbols to represent pitch. The stave is like a frame which we can put dots on to show pitch. The treble clef tells us what pitch the dots represent on the stave.

Progression: Technical, Constructive, Expressive

Singing

Children learn and sing call and response and action songs, to warm up at the beginning of each lesson. This develops their technical singing skills which include posture hold, breath control, singing with a pulse, imitating rhythms, varying speed, holding a particular pitch and singing together in an ensemble. Practising songs over the course of six lessons ensures familiarity and increasing sophistication of musical expression. The children use the warm-up songs and other songs sung as rounds to develop their skills singing in parts and working as an ensemble.

Listening

Children practise 'active' listening, developing their skills of recognising how music is constructed by answering focussed questions relating to the different dimensions of music. By listening to 'This Little Babe' and Pachelbel's 'Canon' they begin to have conscious understanding of how music is constructed, focussing on the dimensions of texture and pitch. By studying these pieces, they begin to develop an increasing understanding of the expressive qualities of music from a particular culture/genre.

Practising

Practising singing and playing songs on tuned percussion instruments in canon to create a layered texture of different parts develops technical motor skills and singing/playing in an ensemble. Creating a piece which layers different parts together develops knowledge of handling texture and pitch as component dimensions of making music. Practising the skills required for singing/playing the songs gradually over the course of the unit, ensures increasing confidence and sophistication in the expressive quality of musical outcomes.

Performing

Working towards performance of songs sung/played as rounds over the course of six lessons ensures increased technical accuracy, confidence, fluency, expression and the ability to sing/play securely in an ensemble, following a conductor.