

‘Dies Irae’ & ‘Tuba Mirum’ by Giuseppe Verdi

PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

Written by Rachel Leach

Background

The composer: Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901)

- Italian composer
- One of the most popular opera composers of all time
- Wrote 29 operas, many feature hummable tunes that were instant ‘hits’ with the Italian people

The music: ‘Dies Irae’ & ‘Tuba Mirum’ from “Requiem”

- A “Requiem” is a setting of the Catholic ‘Mass for the dead’
- Requiems are usually written for huge orchestra, soloists and feature a large chorus singing in Latin
- Verdi’s Requiem was written in 1874 in memory of a friend
- ‘Dies Irae’ is a scary section otherwise known as ‘The Day of Judgement’
- In the Latin text, ‘Tuba Mirum’ is a section that calls for the trumpets to ‘cast a wondrous sound’. Verdi uses many trumpets playing a huge fanfare

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- invent their own musical motifs and structure them into a piece
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

Curriculum checklist

- Play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments

- Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
- Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

Glossary of music terms used

Antiphonal	two sections that alternate
Chant	words spoken in rhythm to a pulse
Dies Irae	a scary section within the Requiem called 'Day of Judgement'
Off-beat	weak beats placed in between the stronger main beats
Orchestrate	choose which instruments take which roles
Ostinato	a repeating pattern
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
Pulse	the steady 'beat' under much music made up of notes of the same length (like a ticking clock)
Requiem	a large-scale musical setting of the Catholic 'Mass for the Dead'
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers woodblocks, tambourine etc.

Resources required

- Paper and art materials
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments that your children might be learning

This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.

The six lessons at a glance

Lesson 1:

Activities:	Listen and describe a piece of music Watch the orchestral performance and discuss Create artwork inspired by the music
Curriculum link:	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

Lesson 2:

Activities:	Learn motifs from the 'Dies Irae' and orchestrate them
Curriculum link:	Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 3:

Activities:	Learn to sing antiphonally Write words and melody
Curriculum link:	Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 4:

Activities:	Structure ideas together using the idea of antiphony
Curriculum link:	Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 5:

Activities: Orchestrate sung ideas to create a fanfare

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

Lesson 6:

Activities: Structure sections together to make a big piece
Perform in front of an audience

Curriculum link: 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 interrelated dimensions of music

LESSON 1

Watching and listening

1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on rather scary music by a composer called Giuseppe Verdi and **watch** the introductory film with Vikki Stone.

2. **Have a class discussion** about what you have just seen. Explain that the concept of 'day of judgement' is an idea that is present in lots of different religions and philosophies but, of course, it might not be true at all. Gather your class in the middle of your (empty) classroom or large space. Ask them to imagine that today is the 'day of judgement'. They must think back over the last week – have they behaved well or have they been naughty? Name one side of the room 'good' and the other side 'bad'. As you play the **beginning of the full orchestral recording** (just the opening 30 seconds or so), ask your children to move to the side of the room that sums up their behaviour.

You can do this several times asking more specific questions each time – for example 'Did you tidy your desk?', 'Did you finish your homework?' 'Yes' is good. 'No' is bad. It doesn't have to be just about behaviour!

3. **Ask your children to imagine the reward or penalty they should get.** Explain that this music is truly epic so the reward must be the nicest thing they can imagine. The penalty should be something really horrible (steer them in the direction of fantastical things like a swarm of bees descending or a monster chasing them rather than physical punishments). Have a discussion about this and put a list of their ideas on the board.

4. Listening task

Give out A4 paper and art materials to your class. Ask them to divide the page in half and draw a border all around, so you have this –

You might want to prepare the pages yourself before the lesson to save time!

5. **Watch and listen to the full orchestral performance of 'Dies Irae'** a few times – stop at 2'18 when the 'Tuba Mirum' (trumpets) starts. Ask your children to write big comic book (bubble) words in the left column listing their ideal rewards (i.e. 'endless chocolate!', 'parties!') and in the right column a list of the worst things they can imagine (i.e. 'thick, gooey mud!', 'one-eyed monsters!').

6. When this is achieved, **watch and listen to the rest of the performance** – from 2'18 to the end. As your children listen to this, encourage them to draw trumpets in the border around their page – as many as they can fit. It might help them if you show a still picture of a trumpet first (or pause the recording), so that they know roughly what one looks like.

7. **Spread the resulting artwork out on the floor or tables and end this lesson** by listening to Verdi's music in full one more time as you and the children wander around looking at the pictures. Keep this artwork safe, you'll need it later in the project.

LESSON 2

‘Dies Irae’ - intro

1. **Warm-up.** Begin with your class sitting in a large circle. Pass a clap around and then ask everyone to remember one of their words from last lesson. Go around the circle with every child in turn saying their word. If it’s a ‘good’ word the rest of the circle must respond with a loud cheer. If, however, it’s a ‘bad’ word, they must respond with a quiet shudder.

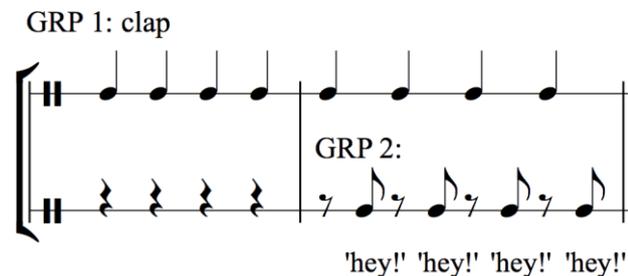
2. **Remind your children** about Verdi’s music. The ‘story’ behind the requiem and the ‘Dies Irae’. Divide your circle into two groups and call them groups 1 and 2.

3. **Ask group 1 to clap eight times with you like this:**



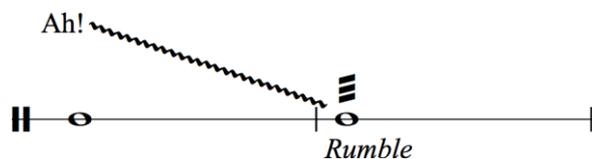
Keep this quite slow and steady but as loud and neat as possible

4. **Ask group two to join in with this:**



So they start shouting after the 5th clap from group 1 and then carry on in between their claps – these are called off-beats

5. **Ask everyone** to sing a long ‘ah’ note falling downwards and a rumble, like this:



The ‘ah’ can start on any pitch or even different pitches. It would be great if it could last just 4 beats and then the rumble also last 4 beats

6. **Challenge the full class** to switch from an 'ah' sound to 'DI-ES I-RAE'. Can they figure out a way to make it fit four beats? There are loads of ways to do this and it really is up to your students. Here are a few options:



7. **Put these ideas together like this:**

GRP 1: clap

GRP 2:
'hey!' 'hey!' 'hey!' 'hey!'

Both grps:
Di-es Ir-ae Di-es Ir-ae

Rumble

Rumble

8. **When this is achieved**, ask your children to 'orchestrate' it – i.e. choose which instruments play which part. Group 1 and 2 need to contrast as much as possible, one team should be unpitched (including some drums, like in Verdi's piece), the other team should perhaps be pitched instruments, If you have xylophones use just D, F and A. If you have orchestral players, use these notes or ask the players to choose their favourite notes for a lovely, 'crunchy' chord!

Everyone also needs to work out how to make a rumbling, shimmering sound too

You might end up with something like this:

LESSON 3

‘Dies Irae’ - singing

1. **Warm up.** Begin in a circle again and recap your body percussion version of the ‘Dies Irae’ Intro from last lesson. Make sure that your two groups are stood together and everyone knows what they are doing. You don’t need to get the instruments out at this point.

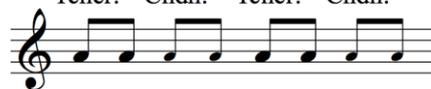
2. **Today’s lesson** is going to have a lot of singing in it so lead this simple vocal warm-up:

- TEACHER: **r t p k r t p k**
 - Children copy
- TEACHER: **shhh! shhh! shhh! shhh!**
 - Children copy
- TEACHER: **sssss! sssss! sssss! sssss!**
 - Children copy
- TEACHER: **f-t! f-t! f-t! f-t!**
 - Children copy
- TEACHER: **mmm, aahh, oohh, eeee**
 - Children copy

*Put energetic actions with all of these sounds – i.e. ‘throw’ the consonants, ‘flick’ the ‘f-ts’ etc.
Making it super silly will help your children to perform with enthusiasm*

3. **Continue the singing by leading this ‘copy me’ game:**

Teacher:	Children:	Teacher:	Children:
			
Di - es - Ir - ae	Di - es - Ir - ae	Di - es - Ir - ae	Di - es - Ir - ae

Tcher:	Chdn:	Tcher:	Chdn:
			
Di - es! Di - es! Ir - ae! Ir - ae!	Di - es! Di - es! Ir - ae! Ir - ae!	Di - es! Di - es! Ir - ae! Ir - ae!	Di - es! Di - es! Ir - ae! Ir - ae!

4. When this is confident, challenge your children to perform it without you leading. Group 1 may take your role and group 2 continue to copy. Switch the groups so that everyone has a go at leading. Explain that this technique of alternating between groups is called antiphony and Verdi uses it throughout his Requiem.

5. **Give out the** (comic words) artwork from lesson 1 and a big sheet of paper to each team. Challenge your children to choose some, not all, of their words and write them down on a big sheet of paper.

6. **When this is achieved** give each team a drum and choose one child to keep a steady pulse. Challenge your teams to fit their words to the pulse so that they create a rhythmic 'chant'.

7. **Give out at least one xylophone** to each team with the notes D, F & A on it. Challenge each team to sing their chant using these notes, rather than just speak it. Ask them to think carefully about which pitches they use so that the resulting 'song' is exciting but also easy to sing and remember.

8. **When this is achieved**, hear each group and give feedback. Finish this lesson by encouraging each group to write down carefully what they have done, particularly the order of the words and the pitches they have used (it might be easiest to simply record them!).

LESSON 4

'Dies Irae' - antiphony

1. **Warm up.** Begin once again in a circle with a quick 'Dies Irae' recap. Remind the children of the 'intro' they made in lesson 2 and then ask them to remind themselves of the chants they made last lesson – do this without instruments or singing at this point.
2. **Moving onto singing,** after a quick vocal warm-up (perhaps a repeat of the one from last lesson), re-teach the 'Dies Irae' antiphonal piece you covered and ask the children if they can remember what antiphonal means (alternating between two groups).
3. **End your recapping** by asking each group to get out a drum and a xylophone and put their sung chant back together.
4. **Hear these and check** that they are the same (or similar) to last lesson.
5. **The next challenge is to put the two pieces together to make one piece.** Can your children suggest how to do this and add in some antiphony?

To create antiphony out of their pieces they need to break up what they have created and allow the other group into the gaps. For example, group 1 sing their first 4 words, group 2 answer with their first 4 words etc. This may take some time to do and will need carefully writing up on the board as you go along.

6. **When this is achieved** and you have a structure you are all happy with, practise until it is neat and confident. **Next, ask your children** to add in the 'Dies Irae Intro' somewhere, should it come at the beginning, or end, or both?
7. **When this is decided,** practise your full 'Dies Irae' singing section until it is neat and **finish the lesson** by writing it down carefully

LESSON 5

'Tuba Mirum'

- 1. Warm-up.** Sitting in a circle again, remind your children of everything they have worked on so far and make a list on the board. It should look like this –
 - 'Dies Irae' Intro on instruments (lesson 2)
 - 'Dies Irae' sung (lessons 3 & 4 – including their own words)
- 2. Get the instruments out,** split into groups and ask each group to put their piece back together. Then, put the two pieces back together with everyone
- 3. Structure.** Ask your class to come up with an order for these two sections. You could remind them of Verdi's order by playing his piece one more time (instruments then singing), or just let the children create their own unique version.
- 4. Try out a few suggestions** until you have a structure that everyone is happy with and can play. Practise this structure and write it up on the board.
- 5. Remind the class of the 'Tuba Mirum'** by playing the recording from 2'18 to the end. This is a huge fanfare section that simply talks about 'trumpets casting wondrous sounds... before the throne'.
- 6. Split back into your two groups** and ask each group to transfer their 'Dies Irae' singing section onto the instruments they are playing in the other sections (no instrument swapping at this stage!). So, the patterns they were singing or chanting are now played on Ds, Fs & As and unpitched instruments.
- 7. When this is achieved,** hear each group and check that they have stuck to the rules. **Finish the session** by putting these two 'chants' together in the same way as you put the singing together (i.e. with antiphony). This should sound pretty similar to the 'Tuba Mirum'!
- 8. Finally, write down what you have done** and ask your children how this section could fit in with their other music. Verdi put his 'Tuba Mirum' last, but your children don't have to!

LESSON 6

Performance time!

1. **Warm up.** Begin the lesson with a quick focusing warm-up like 'pass-the-clap' and then talk through the piece you made last lesson. You have three big sections:
 - 'Dies Irae' Intro on instruments (lesson 2)
 - 'Dies Irae' sung (lessons 3 & 4 – including their own words)
 - 'Tuba Mirum' (the 'Dies Irae' singing moved onto? instruments, lesson 5)

You also have an order for these sections, or if you don't ask your children to decide on it now!

2. **Get the instruments out** and put your piece back together. Work slowly and carefully and make sure that everyone understands what they are doing in each section.
3. **Run the whole piece** and check that you have a good beginning and ending. You might need to add something spectacular on the end like one big rhythm played by everyone, a huge bang or even a repeat of something from earlier on. Ask the children 'is your piece as epic as Verdi's?'
4. **Practise your full piece making any tweaks you need** and then arrange your new 'orchestra' in a large semi-circle so that they can be seen by an audience. **End this lesson** with a performance of your finished piece to an invited audience. You could even display your artwork from lesson 1 on the wall behind you!

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **LISTENING:** Lots of composers have written Requiems and many more have used the idea of the 'Dies Irae' in their music. Listen to Berlioz' Requiem and compare his 'Tuba Mirum' with Verdi's. Berlioz also wrote an amazing 'Dies Irae' in the final movement of his Symphonie Fantastique. It describes witches dancing and is the link between Verdi and another Ten Pieces piece: Mussorgsky's Night on a Bare Mountain.
- **LITERACY:** The day of judgement is really a look back on your whole life. Ask your children to imagine they are old and looking back on their life from a great age. Challenge them to write their autobiography.

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