

Carmina Burana – ‘O fortuna’ by Carl Orff SECONDARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 3 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Third and Fourth Level, S1-S3 in Scotland

Written by Rachel Leach

Background

The composer: Carl ORFF (1895 - 1982)

- German composer
- Invented a new approach to music education which is still followed in many parts of Europe

The music: Carmina Burana – ‘O fortuna’

- Written in 1937
- ‘Carmina Burana’ is a huge piece for orchestra, three choirs and about nine soloists based on 24 medieval poems and sung in a mixture of German and Latin text. The full piece takes over an hour to perform. ‘O fortuna’ is its very famous opening section

Pronunciation: KAR-min-uh boor-AA-nuh

- oor as in poor (not pour)
- aa as in father
- note stress

Learning outcomes

Learners will

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- create their own pieces of music using instruments and voice
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language/ notation appropriate to the task

Curriculum checklist

- play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
- improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas
- use staff and other relevant notations appropriately and accurately
- identify and use the interrelated dimensions of music including use of tonalities, different types of scales

Glossary of music terms used

Crescendo	gradually getting louder (opposite: decrescendo or diminuendo)
Melody	another word for 'tune'. A sequence of notes, like a musical sentence
Ostinato	a repeating (often rhythmic) pattern
Pulse	the steady 'beat' under much music made up of notes of the same length (like a ticking clock)
Tempo	another word for speed

Resources required

- A large, open space
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments your students might be learning
- Recording equipment (not essential)

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

The six lessons at a glance

Lesson 1:

Activities: Watch the film and discuss
Listen and create new lyrics in response to the music
Create words inspired by the music

Curriculum link: Identify and use the interrelated dimensions of music expressively and with increasing sophistication, including use of tonalities, different types of scales and other musical devices
Listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
Develop a deeper understanding of the music that they perform and to which they listen and its history

Lesson 2:

Activities: Learn and perform complex minor chords
Invent bassline and structure

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions
Identify and use the interrelated dimensions of music expressively and with increasing sophistication, including use of tonalities, different types of scales and other musical devices

Lesson 3:

Activities: Invent, orchestrate and perform pulse
Learn about and perform a crescendo

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

Lesson 4:

Activities: Invent and perform ostinatos

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

Lesson 5:

Activities: Invent lyrics and melody
Begin to structure ideas into a piece

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

Lesson 6:

Activities: Structure all ideas into a piece
Perform on pitched and unpitched instruments and voice to an audience
Use technical terminology where appropriate

Curriculum link: Play and perform in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using their voice, playing instruments musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions

LESSON I

Watching and listening

1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on an important piece of music by a composer called Carl Orff

Explain further that Orff was a German composer whose life spanned the 20th century. His most famous piece is 'O fortuna'. Warn your students that it might already be strangely familiar to them!

2. Watch the film & discuss

Watch the [Orff Ten Pieces film](#) and afterwards invite your class to discuss its themes

You might like to have a further discussion about the concept of 'fate' and the idea that life is mapped out before us and there is little we can do to change it. This might be something your students haven't thought about before. Quickly split them into small discussion groups and ask them: 'do you believe in fate?' Pick up also on the idea of a 'Goddess of Fate and Fortune' called "Fortuna" who has the power to decide everyone's fate and her 'wheel of fortune' constantly spinning out good and bad luck

3. Listening task.

Listen to the opening 25 seconds of 'O fortuna' again. You can either watch the [video clip of the full performance](#) of the piece or listen to the [audio by downloading the mp3](#).

Orff makes three big musical statements. The first is, of course, 'O fortuna'. Ask your students, working individually, to create new words for these three musical statements. Explain that this should be a cry to the Goddess of Fortune and Luck. You might like to challenge them further to make these lines rhyme.

4. Choose some of these lines and have fun trying to sing them along with the beginning of the recording – loudly!

5. **Give out A4 paper** and ask your students to create two columns on their page and head them 'good luck' and 'bad luck', like this;

GOOD LUCK	BAD LUCK

As you listen to 'O fortuna' again (in full), challenge your class to fill up the columns with suggestions for good and bad luck. You might like to ask for these suggestions to be fun/ serious/ surrealist/ poetic etc. because later in the project these ideas will form lyrics

6. **FINALLY** - end your suggestion with another discussion. Ask your students to share their ideas and perhaps create a class list. Save these ideas for future use.

LESSON 2

Introduction

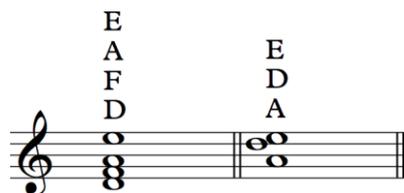
1. **Being with a quick reminder of the last lesson** before explaining that you are going to begin work on recreating Orff's piece on instruments. Don't play the recording at this point, this lesson is all about recreating, not copying, the **introduction**

Orff's introduction is simply a move between two chords – D minor and A minor (or major - Orff leaves this ambiguous)

2. **Everyone needs an instrument for this.** Work as a full class in a big circle if possible. Ask your students to find a D minor chord and an A minor chord. To do this, simply ask them to choose one note from each of the following:



3. **When this is achieved** ask them to 'blur' the chords by swapping in a couple of extra (clashing) notes. For example, Orff adds an E to his D minor chord, and takes out the 3rd of A minor replacing it with the 4th (so C becomes D)



Again, the best way to do this is to ask students to choose the notes for themselves without too much discussion, hear what you've got and tweak it if you need to

4. Take a moment to focus on the **bassline**. Orff's D minor chord is underpinned by a dramatic falling bassline. Can you add this to your class piece? His A chord is underpinned by an octave leap – experiment with this too

5. **Split** the class into small composing teams and ask them to make three big musical gestures that are as follows:
 - **Gesture 1 & 2: D minor chord, with added notes and falling bassline**
 - **Gesture 3: An ambiguous A chord (no 3rd but added notes) and an octave leap in bass**

6. **Bring the groups back together**, hear what they have created and give some feedback. Can they work out a way to make one big introduction by joining their group pieces together? Do they want to include some of the words from last lesson sung over the top?

7. **FINALLY** - end this session with the groups writing down what they have done. They might want to jot this down as a list of events, or make a diagram or a graphic score

LESSON 3

Pulse

1. **Remind your students of their work last lesson.** Give your composing teams a few minutes to remember what they did because you are not going to revisit the introduction this week, you are going to move on to the main body of the piece.
2. Orff has a steady, slow 'um-pa' rhythm going throughout his piece which sounds like an army marching endlessly forward. Clap a steady pulse and encourage your students to join in.

If you notice one or more students can't do this and keep rushing ahead or are going at a completely different speed, simply ignore them. We all find our sense of rhythm at a different stage - maybe they just haven't found theirs yet!

3. **Explain** that you need two slightly contrasting sounds for your pulse. Can they suggest two different sounds on their bodies. *They might suggest a knee-hit and a clap*

Practise your pulse by alternating between these two sounds. For example -



4. **Instruments** - ask the students to find two slightly contrasting sounds for this 'um-pa' pulse using their instruments. Pitched instruments should use just two pitches - D and A.



5. **Gradually add in more ideas and instruments** until everyone has something. If you don't have enough instruments to go around keep one group on body percussion or give them leadership roles such as starting and stopping others.
6. **Split** into groups and challenge each team to create a pulse piece with a **crescendo**, they must gradually get louder but the **tempo** (speed) must remain constant, just like in Orff's version.

7. **Bring the groups back together and hear each piece.** Who has the most effective crescendo?

8. **Structure.** Ask the students to structure their group pieces together to make one big piece with a crescendo. They must also work out how to start and stop, how to begin and come in. Maybe they need to appoint a conductor...

9. **FINALLY** – have a go at putting this big crescendo after the introduction made last week and again, ask your students to keep a record of what they have done, who played what and the order. (They could add this on to the graphic they created last week)

LESSON 4

Ostinato (repeating patterns)

1. **Warm-up** – quickly recap your pulse piece from last week. If it was wonky at the end of the last session or kept speeding up now is a good time to straighten it out
2. **Explain** that you are going to make some **repeating rhythmic patterns** to go on top of your pulse. The ‘posh’ word for repeating rhythmic pattern is **ostinato**.

One of the best ways to create **ostinatos** with students is to use words. Here is a simple method which you can use as a warm-up for your session –

- a. Ask your class a simple question such as ‘what’s the luckiest thing that ever happened to you?’
 - b. Choose one student, or a small group, to play the pulse
 - c. Ask your class to speak their ‘good luck sentence’ on top of the pulse trying to make the words fit and repeating them round and around.
 - d. Ask your students to perform their ostinatos on body percussion rather than speaking them (i.e. one sound for each syllable)
3. **Split your class into small composing teams** and, using the same instruments as last lesson, set the following task –
 - Make a short SLOW piece that includes:
 - i. The steady pulse from last session (pitched on D & A, or unpitched, or both)
 - ii. ONE ostinato that is played by everyone else
The pitches for the ostinato are:



These are the same pitches Orff uses in his piece - all the way through! If they are problematic for your students, ask them to choose their own pitches but limit them to just 3 or 4

4. **Bring your class back together and hear each piece.** Give feedback: did they stick to the rules? Are they keeping a slow, steady **tempo** (speed)? Can you hear the ostinato and the pulse?

5. **Challenge** your students to put all their pieces together to make one big piece. To do this they must work out a way to add the ostinatos to their pulse piece from last week so students are going to have to decide which role they perform. They must also and keep the crescendo

6. **FINALLY** – end your session with a performance of your piece so far and as usual leave a moment for notation

LESSON 5

Words and melody

1. **Prepare the class.** Encourage your students to get back into their composing teams and get their instruments out. Give out the 'good luck/ bad luck' sheets from the listening task in lesson 1. These are going to be the inspiration for lyrics.
2. **Ask each group** to select ideas from their lists and create up to 8 lyric lines. Here are some tips for creating lyrics:
 - Short lines and words work best (avoid unnecessary words and words with multiple syllables)
 - Lyrics don't have to rhyme but if you start a rhyming scheme, you should continue it throughout
 - Go for an even number of 'good' and 'bad' luck lines (i.e. four of each)
3. **Pulse** – challenge each group to speak their lines to the D & A pulse.
4. **When this is done**, hear some of the lyrics and give feedback. Make sure that the groups aren't all using the same or similar ideas. Also check that the stresses of the lines and words line up correctly with the pulse.
I.e. you don't say 'Slip **ON** a **BA**-nana skin', you say '**SLIP** on a ba-**NA**-na skin'
5. **Pitch** – using the following pitches (borrowed from Orff), ask them to work out a melody for their lyric and practice singing it



You can use these pitches or others that suit your students' ability better. It might make singing easier to add D as well.

6. **Bring the groups back together** and hear each piece. As you do so, write up the words (and notes) on the board.

7. **As a full class** decide on an order for the groups and the lyrics – remember that you are heading towards one full class piece. As you debate, encourage your students to think about the meaning of the words and the effectiveness of the overall melody. This melody should fit with the crescendo pulse so it's worth thinking about the crescendo too. Also, decide who is going to sing this melody and practice singing it straight through with the D & A pulse

8. **FINALLY** – finish this lesson with a final performance of your 'song': lyrics, D&A pulse, ostinatos and crescendo! As usual, write down what you have achieved keeping a careful note of the pitches used for the melody. (It might be easiest and safest to just record this final run-through)

LESSON 6

Put it all together

1. **Recap.** If space permits, sit the students in a circle and remind them of all the elements you have worked with so far:
 - a. The 3-gesture introduction
 - b. The steady D & A pulse and ostinatos with crescendo
 - c. The sung melody and words

You may have already successfully run through from introduction to crescendo

2. **Get out the instruments** and encourage your students to practise each element in their composing groups. Work through this quite quickly
3. **Bring everyone back together** and practise together. You are aiming for a piece with the same structure as Orff –

INTRO	Big Crescendo
3 'gestures' Dm – Dm – A (major/ minor?)	Steady pulse on D & A Ostinatos (D, B, C) Melody, with words (D, E, F, G)

4. **Ending** – how are you going to end your piece? Orff suddenly speeds everything up and crashes towards a massive **D MAJOR** chord but you don't have to do this. Your students might have a different (better?!) solution
5. **FINALLY** – practice your finished piece and record it or perform it to another class.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **MUSIC:** Make a massive graphic score of the whole piece
- **LITERACY:** Create stories or poetry based on the character of Fortuna and the effect her Wheel of Fortune has on people's lives.
- **HISTORY:** research this Roman Goddess' life and the lives of other Roman or Greek Gods and Goddesses
- **MUSIC:** listen to more of Carmina Burana ('O fortuna' is just the tiny beginning of a much bigger, epic piece) and create another section.

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