Holst: Mars from the Planets

The facts: Holst’s Planets Suite depicts the mystical side of each planet rather than describing its shape or physical properties, so Mars is also known as ‘The Bringer of War’.

Warm-up: Clap the following iconic rhythm with your class, using the words to help keep your clapping as neat as possible

Now practice counting to 8, 2 and 10 and clapping on number 1 of each count

Finally demonstrate this uneven rhythm, again using the words to help keep things together

Split your circle into three quick groups, start each group on one of the above ideas and try to get all three rhythms going at once!

Demonstrate: how these patterns work on instruments and encourage your children to choose a different sound for each one. If using pitched percussion or orchestra instruments stick to just white notes

Again quickly split into three groups and try putting these patterns together on instruments to make your introduction. Discuss how you might order the ideas (Holst creates a crescendo – gradually getting louder), and how you will signal the ending

The March
Holst then creates a march using a steady pulse and repeating rhythms. Begin by clapping a steady pulse with class and then explain that you need some rhythms to fit on top.

To create rhythms with your class, ask them a question such as ‘What happens in space?’ Ask for full sentence answers and then demonstrate how these can be spoken over and over on top of your pulse thus creating rhythms. By clapping each syllable and taking out the words, you have created an interesting OSTINATO (repeated rhythmic pattern) that can be remembered easily by referring back to the words.

Split into small working groups. Ask each group to make their own march using a steady pulse and at least one ‘space’ rhythm. There are no rules about instruments for this task but do encourage your children to stick to the white notes only if using pitch.

Share and Join
Ask each group to perform to the class and discuss how you could join these different versions together to make one piece. Holst’s march also features a crescendo

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