GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL (1685 - 1759)

Zadok the Priest

Focus of Lesson

- Introduction to the piece
- Understanding of period instrumentation
- Identification of dynamics, in context
- Creation of new work using a graphic score
- Active feedback on pupils’ work

Key Vocabulary

- Tempo: the speed at which a piece of music is played
- Crescendo: getting louder
- Dynamics: the volume of the sound

Try to introduce the above terms and their meanings to pupils during the lesson.

LESSON

Introduction

The composer Handel was born in Germany, but moved to England when he was 27 years old, and lived and worked in London. He was well known to the royal family, and when King George I died, Handel was asked to write a piece of music for the coronation of the next King, George II. He wrote Zadok the Priest.

Zadok the Priest has been performed at every coronation since, including that of our current queen.

This music is written for a chamber orchestra, often used in music of the Baroque era, as well as a large choir. It is majestic, celebratory and triumphant – perfect music for a coronation.

Listen to the beginning of the piece of music, and pause the music just before the singers enter (make sure you’ve listened to it beforehand, so that you know when to press pause!). Ask the pupils to guess what happens next in the music? Ask them to explain the reasons for their guesses – especially if they guess the right answer!

Explain why this piece of music was written, for what occasion, and when. The fact that it has been used for every single coronation since 1727 (eight coronations), shows how popular it was, and still is. If you have access to them, play the pupils other significant works written by Handel for the royal family, e.g. Music for the Royal Fireworks or The Water Music.

Identify ways in which Zadok the Priest is suitable for a coronation. If the pupils were asked to write a piece of music for the coronation of the next king or queen, what would that piece of music be? What instruments would they use? Would it be happy or sad? Fast or slow? If they want to include voices, then what words would the singers be singing?
Ask the pupils to listen carefully to the instruments which play before the singing starts. The instruments they are hearing are stringed instruments, as well as the harpsichord – a keyboard instrument primarily used in Baroque music (it was superseded by the piano in the early 19th century). Help the pupils to recognise the use of crescendo (cre-shen-doe) to help build up the atmosphere and tension before the choir enters. At the very beginning it is quiet (piano = quiet), and it gets louder and louder until the singing starts, when it is very loud (fortissimo = very loud).

Create a piece of music, in a big group (you could work with the whole group together) for a coronation. Create a graphic score (i.e. represent the sounds with symbols or marks on paper or a board) to show which instruments are involved, when they come in, and how loudly they play. Illustrate the difference in dynamics from the start of the piece to the end, and show how this changes.

Extension work
Work with instrumentalists in the group to build a melody, and accompaniment, following the graphic score created by the group. Ensure that the pupils identify places in the score where they need to play quietly or more loudly.

Perform the finished work to the rest of the group, and ask them to follow the graphic score while they are listening to it. Does it sound like music for a coronation? Where is it the loudest? How could it be improved?

Learning Outcomes
- Understanding the historical context of the music
- Understanding the use of dynamics to create musical effect
- Experimentation with a graphic score, to help create a new work
- Active involvement in offering feedback on composition and performance