

Anthology of Fantastic Zoology – Sprite; A Bao A Qu By Mason Bates

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: Mason BATES (born 1977)

- American composer
- Is becoming famous for mixing different styles of music together, for example – DJ-ing and orchestral music, jazz mixed with techno

The music: ‘A Bao A Qu’ and ‘Sprite’ from ‘Anthology of Fantastic Zoology’

- Written in 2015
- Inspired by Jorge Luis Borges’s *‘Book of Imaginary Beings’* (1957)
- ‘A Bao A Qu’ is an imaginary breed of snake that slithers up and down the staircase of a famous tower in India
- A ‘sprite’ is a fairy-like creature or elf that flies and flickers across water. This one jumps across the orchestra too!

Pronunciation:

A Bao a Qu (referring to Mason Bates’ piece)

aa BOW aa KOO

-aa as in father

-ow as in now

-k as in king

-suggestion, this reflects the original Spanish pronunciation

Learning outcomes

Learners will

- Create music inspired by a piece of orchestral music
- Listen and reflect on a work for orchestra
- perform as an ensemble

Curriculum checklist

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

Glossary of music terms used

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Motif | a very short musical 'idea' – often just a small group of notes or a rhythm. |
| Ostinato | a repeating (often rhythmic) pattern |
| Palindrome | something that is the same forwards and backwards |
| Retrograde | a 'posh' word for backwards, often used in music |
| Unison | two or more instruments playing the same material completely together so that it sounds like one |

Resources required

- Art materials such as big paper and pens
- Musical instruments of any (every!) kind

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: Listen to a piece of music and describe it
Watch the film and discuss

Curriculum link: 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: Analyse a piece of music
Create musical motifs

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: Structure musical ideas into a piece with retrograde motion

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: Manipulate words
Create musical motifs for an imaginary animal
Select appropriate instruments
Structure ideas into a piece

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 5:

Activities: Structure ideas to create a musical palindrome

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory
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 6:

Activities: Structure pieces into a concert
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 a fantastic music by a living American composer called Mason Bates but at this stage, don't tell them anything else!

2. **Listen**

[Listen to a recording of 'A Bao A Qu'](#) without images and ask your students to close their eyes as they listen. Afterwards, ask them 'what was that music describing?'

After taking a few of their suggestions, tell them that it described an imaginary animal.

3. **As you listen again**, ask your students to describe or draw the animal they think is being portrayed by the music. Remind them that it is an imaginary animal so they are free to invent something new however, the 'A Bao A Qu' is based on a real animal...can they guess which one?

4. **Discuss their ideas.** Nothing is right or wrong here and you might encounter some wildly conflicting ideas!

If you have time, you might like to repeat this activity with the ['Sprite' recording](#). The Sprite is like a small fairy flying across the orchestra

5. **FINALLY** – end your lesson by watching the [Mason Bates Ten Pieces film](#) which reveals what the animal is and its actions. Afterwards have a quick class discussion about what you have just seen and maybe listen to the music one last time

LESSON 2

Recreating the 'A Bao A Qu' I

1. **Prepare your class** by listening to Bates' piece again. Before doing so, remind them that it describes a snake-like creature that climbs up and then down a tower. Bates uses three elements to tell his story:
 - i. Sound effects
 - ii. Melodic ideas
 - iii. Repeating rhythms

2. **Listen to the first half of the piece again**, stopping at the 'wind machine' sound at 1'40. Ask your students to describe these three elements. Which instruments are involved and what part of the story do they represent? They might like to jot down their ideas under the following headings –

| | Instruments used? | Musical motif? | Part of story? |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Sound effects | | | |
| Melodic ideas | | | |
| Repeating rhythms | | | |

3. **Discuss their findings.** Perhaps they will have identified some of the following –

| | Instruments used? | Musical motif? | Part of story? |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Sound effects | Tam-tam Woodblock Cymbals/ ratchet | Big bang Random notes Shimmers | Snake arrives Snake moves Sheds skin |
| Melodic ideas | WW & strings (pizzicato) | Short upward phrases | Snake climbing? |
| Repeating rhythms | Pizzicato strings Castanets? | Dance rhythms Waltz? | Snake dancing? |

4. **Listen to the second half of the recording** (1'40 – end). Can they spot what happens to the musical ideas? The piece is a **palindrome** - the material unravels backwards; upward phrases go downwards, rhythms are played backwards and even the unpitched percussion sounds like it is in reverse.

5. **Split your students into three groups as follows –**
 - i. **Unpitched percussionists**
 - ii. **Melody players** (orchestral instruments/ singers or pitched percussion)
 - iii. **Waltzers** (a mixture of instruments, could include body percussion)

.... and set the following tasks –

- i. **Unpitched percussionists:**
create at least three sound effects for the snake's story such as 'shakes head', 'sheds skin', 'looks around'
- ii. **Melody players:**
*create a short climbing melody featuring ascending pitches that everyone in the group can play in **unison***
- iii. **Waltzers:**
create a short (um-pa-pa) waltz pattern with unexpected gaps

You might like to demonstrate some of these ideas before beginning

6. **FINALLY** – give your students the rest of the session to achieve this task. Check in on them from time to time to see how it's going and make sure they make notes of what they are doing for the next lesson.

LESSON 3

Recreating the 'A Bao A Qu' 2

1. **Warm-up** – begin in a large circle with a quick focusing activity and reminder of what happened during the last session.
2. **Split** back into groups and get the instruments out. Allow the students to have a few minutes to remember their piece so far.
3. **Hear each group** and challenge them, as a full class, to structure their ideas into one big piece which tells the story of the 'A Bao A Qu' climbing the tower
4. **When this is achieved**, remind your students that Bates' piece is a **palindrome**. Their next challenge is to unravel their music backwards. To do this encourage them to split back into groups to work out how each element goes backwards. Here are some tips –
 - i. **Unpitched percussionists:**
Can they make their sound effects sound backwards by perhaps finding new ways to create the sound? Changes in volume will really help here too
 - ii. **Melody players:**
Play the melody line in reverse so that it falls in pitch
 - iii. **Waltzers:**
Pa-pa-um? With gaps?
5. **Bring the groups back together** and spend the rest of the session creating a perfect palindrome. It will really help to list the order of events on the board first.
6. **FINALLY – end the session** with a performance of the finished piece. Again, keep track of the structure, who's playing what and when. You might want to revisit this piece at the end of the project

LESSON 4

Imaginary animals – three ideas

1. **Prepare your class.** Give out paper and pens to everyone. You may want to work in groups from now on - this activity works well with as little as three students in each group.

Today is all about inventing imaginary animals.

2. **Demonstrate the following method to your class –**

- Ask them to think of a real animal. Take the first suggestion and write it on the board

E.g.: 'Tarantula'

- Ask them for a second, contrasting animal, write this on the board too

E.g.: 'Elephant'

- Divide these words up so that you can see the syllables –

TU-RAN-TU-LA EL-E-PHANT

- Ask your students to choose syllables from both words and put them together to make a new word

E.g.: 'TU-LA-PHANT'

- You have created a new animal - a cross between a tarantula and an elephant. Have a quick chat about what the tulaphant does and eats. Where does she live etc.?

3. **Challenge** your students to make their own imaginary animals using the same method and then to describe them. Ask them to make a list of:

- What the animal does
- What the animal sounds like*
- What the animal feels
- Things in the animal's world* (i.e. his home, food, view)

*These could be inspired by the 'real' animals used to make up the imaginary one -
i.e. a tarantula creeps, an elephant 'trumpets'

4. **Explain** that you are going to turn the imaginary animals into music. Ask each group to select three things from their list of descriptions

5. **Demonstrate** the following method to the class using your own invented animal – e.g. the tulaphant
- i. Choose three things that the tulaphant does -
 1. *He blasts a trumpety sound*
 2. *He creeps*
 3. *He shakes his head*
 - ii. Invent a short musical sound (**motif**) for each of these things (choose three students to help you) -
 1. *A blast from a real trumpet*
 2. *Very soft footsteps on a drum*
 3. *A loud shake on a tambourine*
 - iii. Put these short sounds together to make a short piece that describes your animal, thinking carefully about the order

*You might want to encourage them to use three different musical elements like Mason Bates' piece i.e. a repeating rhythm (**ostinato**), a melody, unpitched sound effects*

6. **Splitting back into groups**, ask your students to spend the rest of the lesson creating their three motifs and thinking about the structure of their overall piece.
7. **FINALLY – check in on how everyone is progressing** and make sure that they are keeping a good written record of their work

LESSON 5

Musical palindromes

1. **Warm-up** – begin with a quick focusing activity*

**If you have listened to Bates' other piece 'Sprite', you can quickly recreate it by passing a clap around the circle, then a short burst of claps and then other ideas suggested by your children - just as Bates passes musical ideas across the orchestra.*

Remind your students of what happened during the last session.

2. **Split** back into groups and allow the students to have a few minutes remembering their piece so far.
3. **Hear each group** one by one and give a bit of feedback. Remind your students about musical palindromes and ask them to spend the rest of the session turning their pieces backwards. To do this they must make sure the order of events is clear (they should write this down), where the middle point is, and then figure out how to perform the ideas in reverse order. The musical term for 'going backwards' is **retrograde**

There are several ways of going backwards in music. You can faithfully play everything backwards - rhythms, melodies and rests all therefore in a different order (as in Bates' piece). Or, much easier, you can just run the order of events backwards but leave the content of each event the same (so rhythms and melodies remain the same, it is just the order that they appear that is different).

4. **FINALLY** – again, finish the session with a performance from all the groups and allow the rest of the class to give feedback, especially on the palindrome shapes. Also, begin to discuss the order of these pieces paying particular attention to the first one (who has a good beginning?) and the end (who has the best ending?)

LESSON 6

Create a musical zoo!

This session is all about making a performance out of your pieces. You may like to work in a large space for this such as the hall and do remember invite an audience!

1. **Prepare your class.** Tell them that you are going to create a concert from their pieces. It will feature all of their music - the group pieces and their recreation of 'A Bao A Qu'
2. **Split back into groups** and give each team a short amount of time to remember and practice their piece from last lesson. They also need to find a way of introducing their musical animal - should this be announced by one person or shared amongst the team? Should it come before, after or during the music? Do they want to include anything about the animal in their presentation?
3. **Hear all the pieces one by one** and decide on an order. Appoint team members to take charge of signaling the end of their piece to the following team (i.e. by pointing or nodding). Also ask your class to organize themselves into an audience friendly shape.
4. **FINALLY - end this project** with a performance of your musical zoo of imaginary creatures to an invited audience.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **ART:** Draw re-imaginings of your imaginary animals and/or design a programme for your concert
- **MUSIC:** listen to the other sections of Bates' piece – there are 11 movements/ animals in total. Or listen to some other musical animals – Malcolm Arnold and Camille Saint-Saëns both wrote 'Carnival of the Animals' pieces describing (mostly) real animals
- **RESEARCH:** Jorge Luis Borges's book features 250 creatures for you to make into music

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