

## Carmina Burana – ‘O fortuna’ by Carl Orff 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:**     **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 appropriate to the task

## *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
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

## *Glossary of music terms used*

<b>Crescendo</b>	gradually getting louder (opposite: decrescendo or diminuendo)
<b>Melody</b>	another word for 'tune'. A sequence of notes, like a musical sentence
<b>Ostinato</b>	a repeating (often rhythmic) pattern
<b>Pitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can play different pitches ('notes') – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
<b>Pulse</b>	the steady 'beat' under much music made up of notes of the same length (like a ticking clock)
<b>Unpitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that don't have a specific pitch ('note')– drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine etc.

## *Resources required*

- A large, open space
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments your children might be learning
- Card, pens, sharp pencils!

*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: Watch the film and discuss  
Listen and create gestures in response to the music  
Draw characters in response to 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  
Develop an understanding of the history of music

### **Lesson 2:**

Activities: Learn and perform a pulse  
Select appropriate instruments and begin to follow music notation

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

### **Lesson 3:**

Activities: Invent repeating rhythmic patterns (ostinatos)  
Select instruments to play these patterns  
Learn about and perform a crescendo

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 4:**

Activities: Create a spinning wheel  
Create words for this wheel which will be used later as lyrics

Curriculum link: N/A This session is not a musical one but may cover curriculum links to literacy and general creativity and/or art

## **Lesson 5:**

Activities: Invent lyrics and melody  
Sing to a pulse  
Structure ideas into a bigger piece

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

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 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 20<sup>th</sup> century. His most famous piece is 'O fortuna'. Warn your children that it might already be strangely familiar to them!

### 2. Watch the film & discuss

Watch the [Orff Ten Pieces film](#) and afterwards have a class discussion about what you have just seen. Ask the following questions –

- Did you like the film?
- What was your favourite part?
- Did you find any of it scary?

You might like to have a further little discussion about the concept of 'fate'. This might be something your children haven't encountered before. Explain that fate is the idea that your life is already mapped out ahead of you no matter what you do and that you can't change it. 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 very opening of 'O fortuna' – just the first 25 seconds or so. You can either watch the [video clip of the full performance](#) of the piece or listen to the [audio by downloading the mp3](#). You'll hear three short sections of very powerful music. This is a call to the goddess of fate. The words here are:

O fortuna	<i>O fortune</i>
Velut luna	<i>Like the moon</i>
Statu variabilis	<i>You are changeable</i>

Ask your children to stand up. They can do this next to their tables or better still make some space in the centre of the classroom. Play the beginning again and ask them to pretend to be the 'Goddess of Fate and Fortune' and make three powerful statues with their bodies to fit with the opening lines of Orff's piece.

4. **Give out paper and pens** and ask them to **draw** Fortuna. Remind them that she is all powerful so she probably has a very powerful look. Ask them to think about her clothing, her size, her facial expression and her stance. You might even get some children to come out and model their powerful poses again for the rest of the class to copy.

As your children work, keep Orff's music playing in the background for extra inspiration.

5. **FINALLY** – remind your class about the 'wheel of fortune'. Ask them to add it to their picture.

## LESSON 2

### Pulse!

1. **Warm-up** - clear the classroom and ask your children to stand in a circle. To wake them up, pass a quick clap around the circle.
2. **Remind** them about Fortuna and her 'Wheel of Fortune'. **Explain** that you are going to make your own piece of music based on what they heard in the last lesson

Orff has a steady, slow 'um-pa' rhythm going throughout his piece which sounds like an army marching endlessly forward. Explain this to your children and ask them to join in marching **slowly** on the spot with you (you could even march around the room in time with the music). This is the **pulse** of your piece

*If you notice one or more children 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 for instance*

**Practise** your pulse by alternating between these two sounds. If it were written down, it would look like this:



4. **Instruments.** Begin by looking at your school's collection of **unpitched** instrument. Again, ask the children to find two slightly contrasting sounds for this 'um-pa' pulse.

5. Add in some **pitched** instruments next (xylophones etc.). If your children are learning instruments, the notes you need, ideally, are D and A.



F will work with either the D or the A as well.

*D and A are good notes for beginner string players as they are two open strings. Flute players might like to replace the D with an F or stick on A throughout. Clarinets and trumpets will be using E and B (they are transposing instruments)– just one of these is fine if either is causing problems.*

6. **Give out instruments** to children who make suggestions and gradually add more until everyone has something. If you don't have enough to go around keep one group on body percussion or give them leadership roles such as starting and stopping others.
7. **Structure.** Work out how to start and stop. Should everyone come in at once or should you gradually build up one by one? Do you stop altogether or fade away? Do you need to appoint a conductor?
8. **FINALLY** – end the session with a performance of your piece so far. Remember to write down what you did and who played what. If you came up with a shape for your music, encourage the children to draw it and make a simple 'score'

## LESSON 3

### Ostinato (repeating patterns)

1. **Warm-up** – begin your session in a circle again. Pass the clap around and then practice your body percussion pulse 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, but at this stage, try not to worry too much about it
2. **Explain** that you are going to make some **repeating rhythmic patterns** to go on top of your pulse today. The ‘posh’ word for repeating rhythmic pattern is **ostinato**.

One of the best ways to create **ostinatos** with children 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?’. Encourage your children to think their answer or whisper it to a friend.
  - b. Play a steady pulse on a drum or woodblock or ask a confident child to do so
  - 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. *This may sound messy but you will probably spot someone with a good pattern within the noise*
  - d. Stop, and demonstrate your own pattern and show the children how you can move it from words to body percussion by clapping every syllable.
  - e. Encourage your class to try clapping their patterns on top of the pulse.
3. **Give out the instruments you used last lesson.** Demonstrate your own ‘good luck’ pattern on an **unpitched** instrument by playing your clapped pattern on it. Ask a volunteer to perform their pattern on an unpitched instrument to the class too.

Now demonstrate your pattern on a **pitched** instrument such as a xylophone. **Explain** that Orff uses very few pitches for his ostinato, just D, A, C\*. His ostinato, which you can hear throughout his piece, uses just these notes and sounds like this -



*\*These are also pretty good notes for beginner players but do adapt them to suit your children. If they want to add or take away a note to make it easier, that's fine. Anything and everything will work and nothing is 'wrong'!*

4. **Split** your class into four groups with a mix of instruments in each group. Set them the following task:

Make a short SLOW piece that includes:

- i. The 'um-pa' pulse from last session (pitched or unpitched or both)
- ii. ONE ostinato that is played by everyone else

*Give your children a short amount of time to work on this. Remember if time is short, there is less opportunity to fuss!*

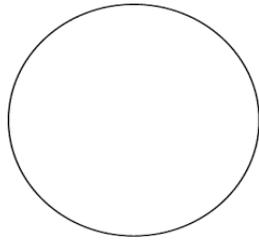
5. **Bring your class back together and hear each piece.** Give feedback: did they stick to the rules? Are they keeping a slow, steady **tempo** (speed)? Can you hear the ostinato and the pulse?
6. **Challenge** your children to put all their pieces together to make one big piece. Remind them that Orff's piece begins very, very softly and gradually gets louder and louder. The posh word for this is **crescendo**. Can they structure their piece to make a **crescendo** too?
7. **FINALLY** – end your session with a performance of your piece so far (don't worry if it's still a bit messy) and if there's time, write down on the board what you've achieved this lesson.

## LESSON 4

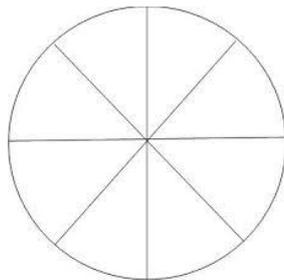
### Words and wheels

*This lesson is a rest from the instruments and can be done with children sat at their desks. They can work individually on this or in groups, with each group requiring a large sheet of stiff paper and pens. If working individually, use card*

1. **Remind** your children of the inspiration behind Orff's piece. You might want to [watch the film again](#) at this point. Talk about the Goddess of Luck and her spinning wheel.
2. **Give out paper or cards.** Ask the children to draw a large circle in the middle of the page that almost fills the page, like this:



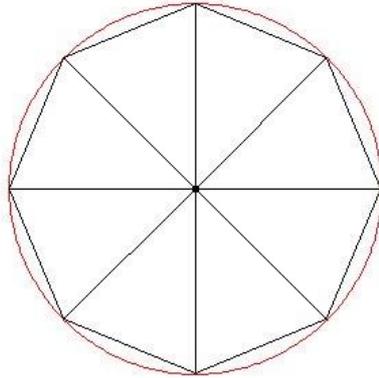
**Fold the page** in half one way and then the other, and then corner to corner so that you have 8\* creases in the circle, like this:



*If working in groups stick to the same groups you used for the ostinato task in lesson 3. Each child is responsible for one segment of the circle. Fold the circle so that you have enough segments for the group (i.e. 4, 6, 8 etc.).*

*You might like to prepare these octagons ahead of time*

Draw a flat line at the end of every segment and cut along this line to turn the circle into an octagon. Like this:



### Cut out this octagon

3. **The task** is as follows:
  - a. Write a sentence in each segment that is either good luck (i.e. 'The sun shines all day') or bad luck (i.e. 'I slip on a banana skin'). It would be great if there were roughly an even number of good luck and bad luck segments on each 'wheel'.
  - b. Decorate each segment to match the sentence (i.e. A picture of a big golden sun, or lots of bananas!)
  
4. **When this is achieved**, take a look at the finished wheels. The next challenge is getting them to spin! You might like to help with this – pierce the middle of the wheel with a sharp pencil to make an axis. You can now spin the wheel on this axis and it should land slanting towards one of the segments.
  
5. **FINALLY** - Ask your children to spin their wheel and see what luck they will have for the rest of the day.  
Keep these wheels somewhere safe, you will need them in the next lesson

## LESSON 5

### Words and melody

*This lesson is back on instruments so you'll need a large, empty space again. You'll also need the spinning wheels from last lesson and big paper and pens*

1. **Warm-up** - in a large circle, ask your children to remind you of the 'um-pa' pattern (lesson 2) and their ostinatos from (lesson 3). You can do this on body percussion to save a bit of time.
2. **Tell your class** that you are going to make a **melody** (tune) today using the good and bad luck sentences on their spinning wheels.
3. **Split** the class back into the four groups and give out the wheels. **Ask** each group to choose their favourite 'good luck' sentence and their favourite 'bad luck' sentence and practice saying the words to an 'um-pa' pulse.
4. **Give out the instruments as they do this.** Explain that they are going to make a melody for their words. Orff uses just three few notes for this melody - E, F, G.

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

5. **Ask** each group to come up with a melody using these pitches and practise singing it.
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 your lyric lines. Think about the meaning of the words and the effectiveness of the melody. Play the 'um-pa' pulse, or choose a few confident children for this task, and cycle through the groups in order aiming to go from one to the next without too much of a gap. If there is a gap make it the same every time.
8. **When this is getting good and strong** encourage everyone to join in with the melodies that they know until eventually everyone is singing all of the time

9. **FINALLY** – finish this lesson with a final performance of your ‘song’ and, 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. **Warm-up.** As usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. Sit the children in a circle and remind them of all the elements you have worked with so far:
  - a. The slow, steady 'um-pa' pulse
  - b. The ostinatos
  - c. The melody and words

Work quite quickly on this. Sit children in their groups and use body percussion rather than instruments.

2. **Recap** – get out the instruments and encourage your children to practise each element in their composing groups. Again, work through this quite quickly
3. **Bring everyone back together** and practise the two full group pieces (i.e. the **crescendo** piece and the **'song'**)
4. **Structure.** There are a couple of ways forward here. Either –
  - i. Join your song onto your crescendo piece as an extra section at the end or at the beginning, or...
  - ii. Try to sing your song **at the same time** as your crescendo piece (like Orff). It should fit, but this is a much harder thing to do than simply add it on the end
5. **FINALLY** – practice your finished piece until it is good and strong and then invite another class to come in to listen.

## TAKING IT FURTHER

### Cross-curricular activities

- **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
- **ART:** Invent a board game inspired by Fortuna and using your wheel of fortune in some way.
- **ART:** Make a giant wheel of fortune with one segment for each member of the class

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