

Symphony No. 1 in G major – Allegro (1st mvt)
By Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges

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: Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de SAINT-GEORGES
(1745 - 1799)**

- Born in Guadeloupe, moved to Paris aged 7
- Father was a trader, mother was a slave (of African origin)
- First (only?) black classical composer working at the same time as Mozart
- Was equally famous as a violinist, composer and sword fighter!

Pronunciation:

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges

**zhoh-ZEFF bol-ONY(-uh),
shuh-val-YAY duh sa(ng) ZHORZH**

-zh as 's' in measure

-ol as in olive

-o as in pond

-ny as in manual

-sh as in ship

-ay as in day

-a(ng) as in Fr. vin

-zh as 's' in measure

The music: **Symphony No. 1 in G major – Allegro (1st mvt)**

- Written in 1779
- Allegro just means ‘fast’. This is the first movement (section) of his 1st symphony (large piece for orchestra)

Learning outcomes

Learners will

- Listen and reflect on a work for orchestra
- Create songs, movement and drama inspired by the life of Saint-Georges
- perform as an ensemble

Curriculum checklist

- 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

Aria	a song within an opera that is (usually) sung by one character expressing their feelings
Beat	the steady ‘pulse’ under much music made up of notes of the same length (like a ticking clock)
Chord	more than one note played/heard at the same time
Opera	a work that combines solo voices, orchestra and acting to tell a story
Operatic ensemble	a section within an opera when several characters sing different music and words at the same time
Pulse	another (better) word for beat
Recitative	a sung section that has a narrative purpose (moves the action along); often sung quickly over very light accompaniment

Resources required

- Big paper and pens
- Musical instruments of any (every!) kind
- A large, empty space
- Recording equipment (audio and visual)

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 to a piece of music and create art-work inspired by it

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: Create stories and words based on the composer's life
Invent an accompaniment using two contrasting chords

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 3:

Activities: Create lyrics for a song
Speak the lyrics to a pulse
Invent a poem based on a stimulus

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 4:

Activities: Create and sing melodies and accompaniment

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: Invent words for an operatic ensemble
Set these words to a pulse or invent melodies

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 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 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 amazing composer called Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges. It might be useful spending a bit of time getting used to that amazing name. Ask your children to repeat it back several times. From now on we will simply refer to him as Saint-Georges (pronounced san-zhorzh).

2. Watch the film

Watch the [Saint-Georges Ten Pieces film](#) and afterwards have a class discussion about what you have just seen. You might like to ask the following questions –

- Did you like the film?
- What was your favourite part?
- If you could time travel, where would you go?

3. Listening task

Saint-Georges was very, very good at several things. He was -

- a brilliant violinist
- a champion sword fighter (fencer)
- a brave soldier
- an excellent sportsman
- a daring horseman (he was very fast on horseback!)
- a fashion icon, with lots of admirers
- an imaginative composer, opera director and orchestra leader
- a prisoner of war

List these achievements on the board and have a quick discussion about them. Ask everyone to choose their favourite but keep it a secret.

4. Give out paper and pens and ask your children to draw Saint-Georges doing their favourite thing from the list.

OR

Ask your children to fold their page into 8 segments, open it and write 'JOSEPH BOLOGNE, CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES' in the middle. Their task is to draw all 8 versions of this incredible man – one in each segment

5. As your children create their pictures, listen to Saint-Georges' Symphony No 1, Allegro (movement 1) in full and encourage your artists to use the shape and speed of the music as extra inspiration. You can either [watch the video clip of the full performance](#) of the piece or listen to the [audio by downloading the mp3](#).

6. **FINALLY** - Have a look at the finished artwork and encourage a few volunteers to come forward and share their pictures and ideas with the class

LESSON 2

Saint-Georges Opera I: Narration (recitative)

The following 5 lessons will work towards making an 'opera'. Try to work in the biggest space you have available and have lots of pens and paper nearby to keep track of all the lyrics etc. that are invented.

1. **Prepare your class.** Remind them about Saint-Georges and his incredible life. Alongside the huge list of accomplishments from last lesson, Saint-Georges was also a famous **opera** composer.

Ask your children if they know what an opera is – it is simply a story told through music and usually involving singing, movement, acting and an orchestra.

Saint-Georges had such an amazing life that it would make a great plot for an opera so, explain to your children, that they are going to create the first ever opera about him! They are going to begin by narrating his life story. The technical term for narration in an opera is **recitative**.

2. **Split your children into 4 groups** and give each group one of the following aspects of Saint-Georges's life
 - i. Violinist/composer
 - ii. Fencer/fashionista
 - iii. Soldier/prisoner
 - iv. Sportsman/horseman

3. **Set the following task –**

- Invent a short story about Saint-Georges' featuring your given subject
i.e. Saint-Georges wears an amazing multi-coloured coat whilst fencing and suddenly all of Paris want one
- Create 4 short lines of text to tell this story and write them out on big paper
 - i. *It's the world fencing championships*
 - ii. *Saint-Georges appears in a magnificent coat*
 - iii. *His opponent is dazzled by it and drops his sword*
 - iv. *Saint-Georges wins but all anyone wants to talk about is his coat*

4. **When this is achieved**, ask each group to select someone to read them out to the class and give feedback

5. **Explain** that in Saint-Georges' day, opera narration (recitative) was performed over a series of simple **chords**. The chords usually come in pairs – a nervous, long sound (let's call it 1) followed by a calmer, short sound (2).

6. **Using whatever instruments you have available**, challenge each group to invent these two sounds –
 - 1: a nervous, long, unresolved sound (e.g. tambourine shimmer, flute trill)
 - 2: a calmer, short, resolved sound (e.g. loud drum hit, low note on piano)

7. **When this is achieved**, hear a few of their ideas and demonstrate how they might fit with the narration –
 - i. *It's the world fencing championships (1)*
 - ii. *Saint-Georges appears in a magnificent coat (1)*
 - iii. *His opponent is dazzled by it and drops his sword (1)*
 - iv. *Saint-Georges wins but all anyone wants to talk about is his coat (2)*

The resolved sound is only heard when the story is 'resolved'

8. **Encourage** each group to perform their block of narration with these sounds added. Traditional recitative is sung, but for this task speaking the words naturally over the chords will work just as well. They could appoint one person to speak the whole thing or they could take turns. It needs to be fixed and the same every time, it would be fun if it were acted out too. So, each group should have:
 - The words
 - The 2 sounds
 - The story acted out as a series of tableaux (still pictures)

9. **FINALLY** – decide on an order for these blocks of narration that tells Saint-Georges life story and have a go at performing in order seamlessly moving from group to group. Remember to keep a record of the work in progress, the easiest way to do this might be to record or film it.

LESSON 3

Saint-Georges Opera 2: Song lyrics (aria)

1. **Remind your class** about last lesson and quiz them on what they remember about Saint-Georges.
2. **Explain** that songs are one of the most important elements of an opera. Opera songs are often called **arias** and are usually used to allow one character to express their feelings about the situation they find themselves in.
3. **Explain further** that today you are going to write a song for Saint-Georges and all sing it together pretending to be him.
4. **Plot** – Despite all of Saint-Georges accomplishments, money and fame, he had a difficult struggle to be accepted. He was the only black man in a society dominated by white people and his mother had been a slave. He must have often felt like he didn't fit in anywhere! Ask your children to imagine how they would feel in the same circumstances. This could be the topic for your song (or you might like to focus on something that was invented during the last lesson)
5. **Lyrics** - create lyrics for your song. Do this as a full class activity writing up ideas on the board. Here are some pointers:
 - Words don't have to rhyme but lyric lines should be short and simple. Rhyme does help with rhythm, but if you start with a rhyming scheme you have to stick to it and this can cause problems further along.
 - Discuss with your class what you are trying to say in your song, and the easiest way of saying it.
 - A good starting point if stuck, is to make your first line a question. For example, "How do I feel?" The next lines can simply be a list of answers to that.
 - Repetition is good, it means there's less work to do musically and the song will hang together better if it includes lines that keep returning.
 - Try to say what you need to in the most direct and simple way. Keep to the point and keep it short – the more words you have the more notes you have to invent and remember later!
6. **Mindmap lots of ideas** and slowly shape them into about 6 – 8 lines. Read the lines out-loud several times with the class to get a feel for them and make any changes that are suggested.

7. **Beat (or Pulse)** – add a pulse to your words. This could be played by one child on a drum. Try to keep it steady and strong.
 - Encourage the class to speak each line over the beat fitting the rhythm of the words on top.
 - Encourage your class to stretch out the more unusual words and think about which words are important and need emphasising.

8. **FINALLY** – end this session by writing down your words and marking on them any repeats or words that are stretched out or stressed. Record your children saying the words to the pulse.

LESSON 4

Saint-Georges Opera 3: Song melody

1. **Begin with a recap of what you've done so far.** Look at the words again, listen to your recording and have another go at saying them to the pulse.
2. This lesson involves singing so here is a fun vocal warm-up:

Most children know the nursery rhyme 'The Grand Old Duke of York'. If your children don't, simply adapt this task using a song that they do know

- Remind your class of 'The Grand Old Duke of York' and lead them singing it loud and proud!
- Add some simple gestures such as a salute at the beginning, pointing up on 'up' and down on 'down' etc. The gestures will be more fun if they come from the children rather than being suggested by you.
- Sing the song again, loud and proud and with gestures!
- Now challenge the children to sing again taking out the words 'up' and 'down' but leaving in the actions.
- What should they do next? Take their suggestions as to how to perform the song for a 4th time and do them. (i.e. switch 'up' for 'down' but keep the gestures the same, only sing 'up' and 'down').

Singing is one of the best ways to warm up the voice and by singing the same song over and over with fun challenges, this makes for an easy to remember warm up!

3. It's time to make a melody for your words:

One chord, five notes - By limiting the number of notes you use and sticking to just one chord you can create simple melodies even if you don't have a great deal of musical experience.

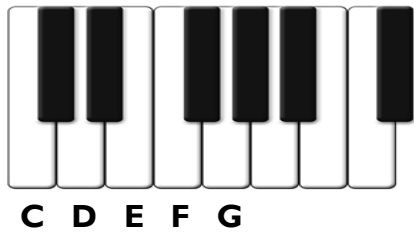
For starters, use the following 5 'white' notes –

for 'happy' songs –



for 'sad' songs –





...and the following three note chord –

for ‘happy’ songs, C major –

for ‘sad’ songs, D minor –



- Play each note to your class and ask them to sing it back to an ‘ah’ sound. When your class are confident with your choice of notes they’ll be more willing to produce melodies and sing them out.
- Next, play the chord over and over at the same speed as your pulse and encourage your class to speak the words, in rhythm over the top, just as they did previously to the drumbeat.
- Now, encourage your class to have a go at singing their words in rhythm on top of your ‘chord-pulse’.
- Use open questions to help the class - i.e. should a melody line go up (usually sounds surprised or happy), or down (usually sounds sadder)?
- The first line is always the trickiest. Be patient and if the ideas don’t come suggest singing the first line all on one note. When this is achieved, ask them which word or syllable should be stressed more by moving to a higher or lower pitch.

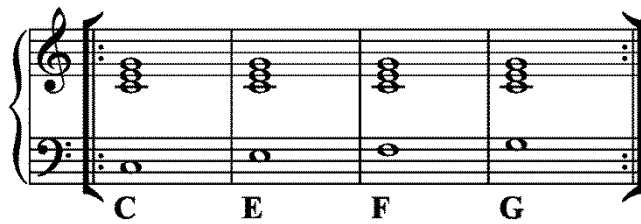
There are no wrong answers when writing a song but you can tell instantly if something fits well and works.

4. As you work slowly through your lines, keep recapping and returning to the beginning so you don’t forget it. If you have some reluctant singers, ask them to join you on the pulse or chord (this chord be played on xylophones).
5. **When your melody is complete**, ask your children to think of some simple gestures for each line. These will help with memory and give the children extra confidence when performed enthusiastically alongside the singing.

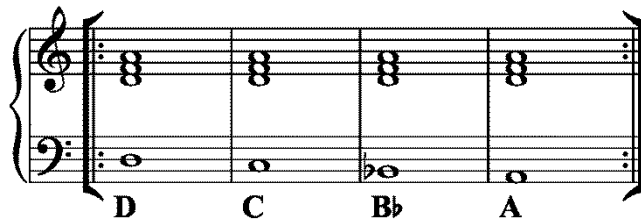
6. **Accompaniment** – if you have time and beginner musicians in your class, you might like to create a simple accompaniment for your song. Remember that this will mean less voices are singing/ acting the melody.

Using just one chord can become a little boring so vary the left-hand/ bassline. Here are some classic basslines to help disguise your single chord

for 'happy' songs –



for 'sad' songs –



7. **FINALLY** – end this session with a performance of your finished song with actions and record it; this will speed up the next session enormously.

LESSON 5

Saint-Georges Opera 4: The operatic ensemble

1. **Again, begin with a quick focusing warm-up** and talk through what you have done so far.
2. **Explain that** the most complex operatic structure is the **ensemble**. This is a song performed by several different characters at the same time, each singing different text. All the text can be heard and understood because of the way it is set musically.
3. **Split your class back into the four groups from lesson 2.** Each group will be playing Saint-Georges doing the activity you gave out during that lesson:
 - i. Violinist/ composer
 - ii. Fencer/ Fashionista
 - iii. Soldier/ Prisoner
 - iv. Sportsman/ Horse rider
4. **Give each group a few minutes** to discuss the character of Saint-Georges and their activity - how does he stand, walk, feel? Ask each group to invent two lines that their version of Saint-Georges would say. For an extra challenge, it might be fun to ask for these two lines to rhyme.
5. **Clap or play a steady pulse** on a drum and demonstrate how they might fit their words on top. Explain that they can use repetition or stretch the words out but that the whole group must do the same thing at the same time and be able to repeat their phrase round and round. It is a good idea to keep the pulse going as they work.
6. **Ask each group** to share their ideas with the class and make sure the words are clearly spoken and can be heard above the pulse. Next, ask them to come up with **actions** or **gestures** and to turn their lines into a moving piece of rhythmic text.

You can leave the task as just a spoken ensemble, or move on to creating short melodies. If you want to skip this part, go to 11. (below)

7. **Chose one chord on the piano.** C major (made up of C, E, G) will work really well. This chord is now going to be the pulse.

8. **Challenge** each group to try and sing their rhythmic pattern of words to the chord pulse. It is important that each group sings out confidently, there are no wrong answers here but they'll soon spot if their tune doesn't fit! Encourage them to keep their rhythms and gestures as they were and to sing the same tune every time. It may help to record their tunes at the end of the session to help when you return to the task.

9. **Ask each group** to share their work with the class - melody and gestures. Ask the other members of the class to comment on each one. Can you hear the text? Is it loud enough? Is it neat?

10. **Try hearing two groups** at the same time. Count eight beats in and ask the rest of the class to watch and listen to the results. When this is achieved **try all of the groups together**.

11. **FINALLY - Putting it together...** Ask the children how they want to order their work into one final piece. The best order is usually achieved by hearing each group in turn, with a count of eight in between, and then all groups together a few times round to finish, like this:

Grp 1	8 bts	Grp 2	8 bts	Grp 3	8 bts	Grp 4	8 bts	Everyone	CRASH!
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Consider adding a loud crash on the end (a cymbal or drum) to ensure that everyone stops together!

Record your final attempt at this, ready for recapping next time

LESSON 6

Put your Opera together

1. **Warm-up** - as usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. This can be as simple as a clap around the circle or a quick sing through of your song/s
2. **Recap**
Ask the children to remind you of the three sections of music that they have created* and write these up on the board

**If you don't manage to create all three, don't worry, you can still make a piece using any combination of the lessons above*

Hopefully they will say the following:

- i. The narration (recitative) – Saint-Georges's life story
- ii. The song (aria) – Saint-Georges's sadness
- iii. The ensemble – Saint-Georges doing his many activities

3. **Decide on an order for these elements** and slowly work through them, stopping when you need to tweak things, help with memory or fix a problem. Establish where in the room your audience might be and make sure all the actions and singing are directed towards them
4. **Practise** your opera until everyone knows what they are doing. Add a title and someone to announce this at the beginning.
5. **FINALLY** – invite an audience to watch the premier of your new opera and ask them for feedback at the end. You might also like to film this so your performers can watch it back

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **ART/DESIGN:** staging, design, props, costumes are all present in real operas. Add them to your piece
- **MUSIC:** use Saint-Georges's Symphony No. 1 as the basis for a new piece. It features two spiky ideas that you could steal and recreate (you can add this to your opera as an overture)
- **HISTORY/RESEARCH:** Find out about other composers from this time or other pioneering black artists throughout history

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