



IN THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING (GRIEG)

Create music for a chase scene

Creative response lesson plan designed by Andrew Smith

Introduction

'In the Hall of the Mountain King' is from the *incidental music* that Grieg wrote for the play, 'Peer Gynt' by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. At the point in the play when this music is played the protagonist, Peer Gynt, has been captured by some trolls in the mountain. In a dream-like fantasy, he tries to escape, at first by tip-toeing so as not to wake the sleeping trolls. But when they wake he is chased around the hall of the mountain troll king. One of the interesting features of this composition is the way Grieg starts with a simple opening theme and then cleverly modifies and orchestrates it, changing *dynamics* and *tempo* along the way, to conjure up the image of frenetic trolls chasing Peer Gynt!

Analysing the 'Peer Gynt' Story

Before beginning to compose, listen to the recording of In the Hall of the Mountain King with pupils. Discuss what you hear.

Initially, Peer Gynt sneaks away from the troll King, Ask pupils to describe why they think the music sounds like someone creeping! (E.g. quiet, gentle, slow etc.)

Some trolls hidden in the crooks and cracks of the old hall wake up as Peer Gynt tries to find his way out. Ask pupils to describe how the music changes to demonstrate this (Grieg uses brass instruments joining in on the last note of the motif to represent this idea). Ask pupils to think about which available instruments they could use to show their story has changed. The trolls don't want Peer Gynt to know they're on to his escape!

Peer Gynt keeps turning corners, shifting from the first and modified motifs while more and more trolls begin to wake up and join in the chase. Ask pupils to describe what happens to the *tempo*, *dynamics* and *orchestration* to illustrate this.

Peer Gynt realises the frenetic trolls are right behind him and as he turns one way he finds a door, but it is locked! He turns another way to find another door, but that is locked too! He turns around one final time to find the King looking down on him. This is where Grieg's piece of music ends. Ask pupils to think about what might happen next.

Compose a motif

You may wish to use the story of Peer Gynt as the basis for a composition, or you could ask pupils to make up their own chase story to orchestrate.

Ask pupils to compose a short *motif* for their chase, using notes from a D minor scale: D, E, F, G, A, Bb and C. Remind pupils to compose something that is not too fast at the beginning as the chase is only just beginning!

- If pupils want to tell a full story, ask them to identify the parts of the story or the characters in it
- Ask pupils to create a motif for each action, character or idea in their story
- Pupils can modify their motifs by:
 - Playing their motif higher or lower than their original motif (transposition)
 - Changing the speed of the motif (tempo)
 - Making the motif louder or quieter (dynamics)
 - Using different combinations of instruments (orchestration)

Perform

Once pupils have had the opportunity to rehearse their chase music, they can be encouraged to perform in their groups to the class.

Vocabulary

Term	Meaning
<i>incidental music</i>	music that is performed as part of a spoken drama
<i>motif</i>	a short musical idea, melodic, rhythmic or harmonic or any combination of these.
<i>tempo</i>	speed or pace
<i>dynamics</i>	volume
<i>orchestration</i>	choice of instruments
<i>transposition</i>	changing the pitch of some music, either higher or lower