

DIES IRAE
GIUSEPPE VERDI

WORD SETTING OVER A CHROMATIC CHORD SEQUENCE



WRITTEN BY RICHARD MAINWARING

Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Learn to play a chromatic chord sequence
- Compose and perform their own chromatic chord sequence
- Write a short rap and develop it into a melodic line over their chord sequence
- Review, refine and perform their song

Curriculum checklist

The following aspects of the KS3 and 3rd Level music curriculum (for England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland) are encountered in this project:

- Listen and evaluate/appraise
- Performing/playing/rehearsing and reviewing
- Composing/improvising
- Singing
- Technology
- How music is created (i.e. pitch, tempo, timbre etc.)
- Notation (staff or other relevant notations)
- Identifying musical devices and concepts
- Aural skills (imitating, understanding pitch)

Required kit/space

This project can work with or without music technology resources. However, if available, digital audio workstations (DAW) would be of great use for recording and editing work.

Kit required if using technology:

- DAW (with headphones and splitters for paired working)
- Microphones to record voices

Kit required if non-technology based:

- Keyboards or other pitched instruments

In both instances, playback and speakers are required to play audio examples plus a recording of Monty Norman's famous James Bond theme.

Time needed

This project can be developed over a few lessons, although elements of it can be separated and completed within one lesson.

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Listen and discuss

As a starting point, students should listen to [Verdi's Dies Irae](#) and watch the clip from the Ten Pieces film introduced by comedian Vikki Stone (.mp3 included in this Word Setting zip and the Dies Irae film available at bbc.co.uk/tenpieces).

Possible homework or independent work before beginning the creative process:

- Ask students to find Verdi's profile on the Ten Pieces website and familiarise themselves with his life and background to this piece (or provide the profile as a handout)
- Ask students to write a poem or rap based on the concept of 'Day of Judgement'

As a group, discuss students' emotional response as well as key features of piece –e.g. pace, dynamics and instrumentation. Students should be encouraged to listen out for the chromatic chord sequence at the opening which creates tension.

Play Verdi's chromatic chord sequence

Using melodic instruments students can experiment playing some basic triads – play-one-miss-one-play-one. Using the hand-outs quoted below, students can rehearse Verdi's opening chord sequence, extending the top note of the triad chromatically.

If students are working in pairs, chords can be split, so lower parts play same notes, whilst more advanced players move up through chromatic scale.

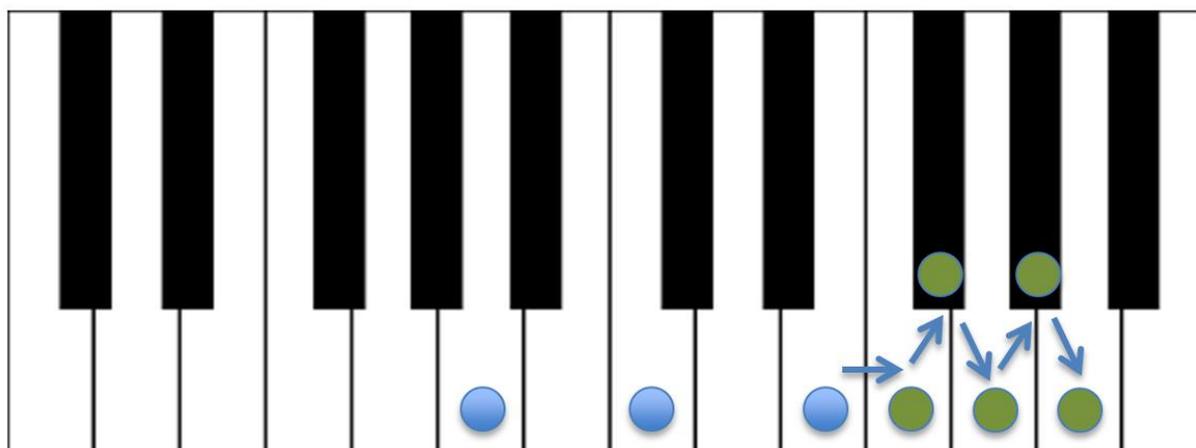
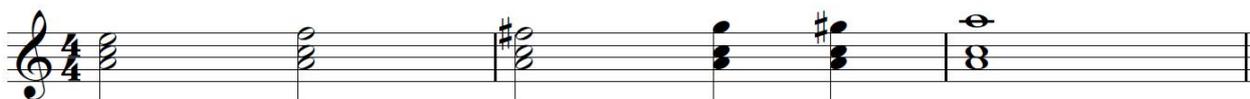
The following notation and keyboard images are provided as A4 hand-outs and can be distributed to students.



Dies Irae Sequence

(bars 3-5 in Verdi score)

Verdi



WORD SETTING OVER A CHROMATIC CHORD SEQUENCE

Compare and play

Students are likely to be familiar with Monty Norman's famous James Bond theme. Ask them to play and compare the two extracts - Verdi's rising chromaticism with Norman's rising and falling pattern.

Discuss the emotional context of Norman's theme – perhaps mysterious, spooky, foreboding etc.



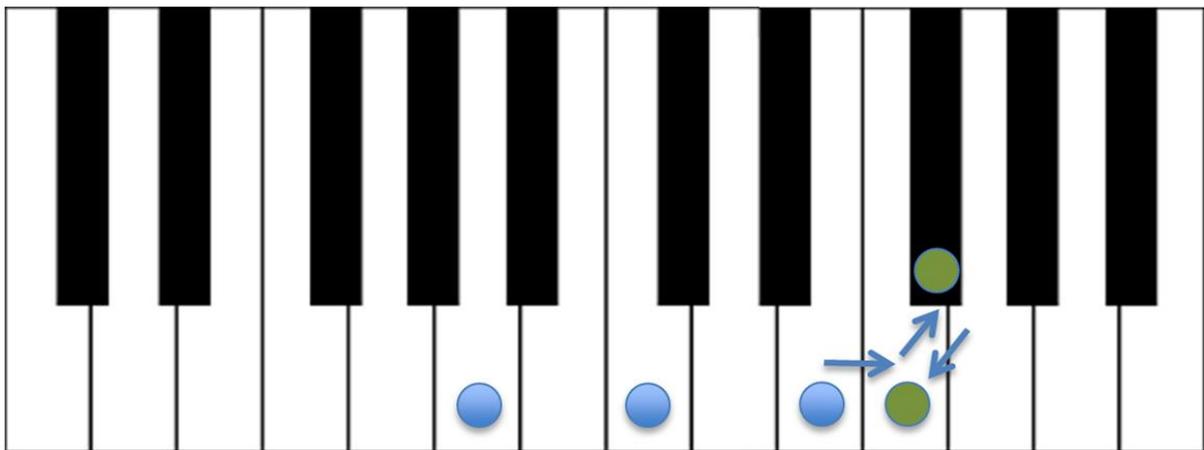
James Bond Chords

Monty Norman



The James Bond Theme, Music by Monty Norman

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Compose a chord sequence

Students should now compose their own a short chromatic-extension chord sequence. This composing exercise should be done using an A minor triad as the basis, with a maximum of 4 chromatic changes.

Students can use variables such as:

- How often the chromatic note moves (every minim as in original pieces, or every bar, or even every crotchet)
- How many chromatic steps are taken
- Whether to rise to the tonic as in the Verdi, or rise and fall as in the Norman

Composing on keyboards (perhaps in pairs) would be practical, but other instruments can be used. Students should either notate their sequence on paper or record the audio electronically.

Differentiation possibilities:

- The addition of syncopation to the chromatic movement
- Introducing broken chords to make more of a riff “feel” to the sequence
- Compose a new chord sequence in a different key
- Combine the A minor chord sequence with the newly composed one to create a longer sequence

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Write some lyrics

Students will need one stanza of words to add to their chord sequence. There are a few options available. Students can:

- use the English translation of the Dies Irae text (provided as handout)
- write their own rap lyrics during a lesson
- complete a homework task before beginning the project in which students write a poem or rap based on the concept of 'Day of Judgement'
- use their piece of performance poetry if the class has already completed the Ten Pieces Performance Poetry project

Morph words into a melodic line

Encourage students to create a melodic line for their words by repeating the words out loud over their chord sequence and slowly 'vocalising' key moments. Their chord sequence can be looped (either on a computer or by performers) and the vocal line performed over the top.

Structure into a cohesive verse-chorus form

Using the chromatic-extension chord sequence repeatedly throughout the piece and the completed rap/poem line (which is now a melody), students can combine these elements to make a song structure.

For example, the form might be:

Chord sequence intro (which continues throughout piece)

Rap/poem verse

Chord sequence

Chord sequence outro

Key vocabulary

Requiem	A mass for the dead – in this case a musical setting of a mass for the dead. Many composers have written Requiem masses including Mozart, Brahms and Fauré
Dies Irae	Latin for 'Day of Wrath' or Day of Judgement', part of the Requiem mass which depicts the judgement of the deceased: will they ascend to heaven or descend to hell?
Chromatic	The chromatic scale with twelve pitches, each a semitone apart. The word stems from the Greek word 'chroma' meaning 'colour'
Semitone	A half-step note (in Western tonal music) and the smallest interval between notes.
Triad	A 3-note chord with a 'root' and the 3 rd and 5 th note about above it.
Word painting	Music that reflects that literal meaning of the words e.g. words relating to an ascent (rise, up etc) accompanied by notes that ascend.

Applying the word setting approach to other pieces

Using other harmonic devices, this approach can be applied to other pieces. Harmonic devices include:

- parallel chords (for example at the beginning of Walton's *Crown Imperial*)
- pedal/drone/ground bass (for example Pachelbel's *Canon in D major* - ground bass), Purcell's *Dido's Lament* (ground bass)