

MSO FOR SCHOOLS

THE PEASANT PRINCE Education Resource Pack



Katy Abbott: The Peasant Prince

The Peasant Prince tells the tale of a small boy growing up in a remote village in northern China who through hard work and a dash of fortune, becomes one of the world's most celebrated ballet dancers. Li Cunxin's incredible story is told with the words from his storybook set to music by Melbourne based composer Dr Katy Abbott (our 2024 Composer in Residence at the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra).

ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE FROG THEME

Learning Intentions

- Securing simple rhythmic and melodic vocabulary.
- Developing ensemble skills.
- Introduction to programmatic music and using language to respond to musical excerpts.

Resources

- Audio playback & projection.
- Musical instruments (if available).

About Program Music

- When music is used to represent something real it is called Program Music.

Fun Fact: Did you know you can be a Doctor of Music!?



- Program music can be used to tell a story or propel a narrative through music.
- There are many great examples in the The Peasant Prince where the music sets the scene by emulating sounds from an environment or making you feel a certain way:
 - When the young dancer arrives in the USA (VII from 1'18") = trumpet dissonance sounding like car horns and a busy texture representing the hustle and bustle of a big city.
 - With his parents in the audience, he dances the dance of his life (VIII from 1'30") = ascending melodies from the emboldened brass creating an uplifting heroic feeling.



Introducing the Frog Theme – Rhythm

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Ta Ta Ta Ti-ti zyn-co-pa Ta za

NB - 'z' has replaced 'T' to indicate a rest

- Learn the Frog Theme rhythm by verbalising time names or counting and clapping (or body percussion).
 - Call and response – teacher then tutti (all together)
 - Call and response – student soloist then tutti
 - 1-bar canon – split class in half geographically. 2nd group starts one bar after 1st group
 - 1-bar canon – number off the students (1, 2, 1, 2 etc.) to promote independence.

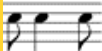
Introducing the Frog Theme – Pitch

mi do mi do mi do fa mi

NB - excerpts have been transposed into digestible keys

- Ask the students to paint the contour of the pitch with their finger in the air, following the notation above or the sound of the teacher performing the Frog Theme.
- Using solfège or the syllable 'lu', learn to sing the melody (again adjust the pace as needed).
 - Call and response - Teacher then tutti (all together)
 - Call and response - Student soloist then tutti
 - 1-bar canon - Split class in half
 - 1-bar canon - number off the students (1, 2, 1, 2 etc.) to promote independence.

Extension ideas when learning rhythmic and melodic vocab:

- ❖ Use crescendo &/or diminuendo to create shape in the phrase and structure or to bring out one part over the other
- ❖ Repeat above steps with instruments
- ❖ Try a 1-beat canon in 4 - 8 groups
- ❖ Tutti ostinato with improvising soloist, duo or trio - encourage the use of syn-co-pa rhythm  and leaping melodic shapes

Responding to the Frog Theme

- Our Frog Theme appears in the story when the boy's father is telling him a story about a determined little frog living in a deep dark well.
- What in the music sounds frog-like? Sample answers may include:
 - It's only a short bit of music because frogs are small (phrase length)
 - It sounds more like a frog when it is quiet because frogs are small and quiet (dynamics)
 - The notes are jumpy like a frog (melodic contour)
 - It bouncing between the same notes because frogs are a bit bouncy (melodic contour)
 - The notes sound happy and frogs are happy (tonality)
 - The rhythm sounds quirky... (syncopation)
 - It's not fast because frogs don't run around crazy (tempo)
 - There are rests because frogs sit around a lot (rhythm and silences).
- Now listen to the Frog Theme musical excerpt – the boy's father telling him a story...

*Once upon a time a little frog lived in a deep dark well.
it was his home.*

One day, he met a frog from the world above.

*Come down and play with me begged the frog from in
the well.*

The frog from the world above laughed.

My world up here is much bigger.

The frog in the well was very annoyed, so he told his father what he'd heard.

'My Son' his father said with a sad heart,

'I have heard there is a bigger and better world up there.

But our life is down here in the well.

There is no way we can get out'.

'I want to see what is out there!' cried the little frog.

But even though he jumped and hopped,

The well was just too deep.



Katy Abbott takes the Frog Theme and uses the compositional device called variation, making small changes to the music to match the narrative. What changes did you notice?





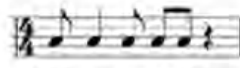



Sample answers may include things like:

- The theme is played a lot but gets more angry like the frog is getting frustrated by trying to jump out of the well (tone colour, dynamics or dissonance)
- The notes get higher when the second frog starts talking (modulation)
- The second frog is mean, and the notes sound clashy (dissonance)
- The rhythm sounds wonky and unsettled (hemiola)
- The ending has long notes which makes it sound like the frog is sad (rhythm).

Compose your own frog theme

- Using call and response, introduce students to the rhythm set below.
- Once familiar, shuffle the order, clap it and ask the students to identify the new order
 - e.g: A, C, D, B
- Ask a student shuffle the order, clap it to the class and have their classmates clap the new order back.
- Continue using call and response to add pitch to the rhythms.
 - Rhythm A with Pitch 1
 - Rhythm A with Pitch 2
 - Shuffle as needed to secure vocabulary
 - Be sure to use repetition and bouncing between the same notes like Katy Abbott's Frog Theme does.... Invite stronger students to lead the class in call and response
 - All students devise their own rhythm and pitch sets to improvise and compose their own frog theme (refer back to earlier class discussion to reinforce what makes the music sound frog-like)
 - Use the rhythm and pitch sets below as scaffolding
 - A xylophone (or similar) with three notes and a simple rhythm can be liberating for students overwhelmed by the vastness of choice
 - Equally, encourage more experienced creators to explore a wider range of complex rhythms and involved scales (perhaps an Ab major pentatonic or a G lydian mode?)
 - Ask students to write down their composition in some way. This could be:
 - *Conventional notation*
 - *Stick notation (rhythm + solfa or note names)*
 - *Time names + solfa or note names*
 - *Rhythm set letters e.g: Rhythms C&A + Pitch set 4*
 - Perform or show a recording of their own Frog Motif for the class to enjoy.



Rhythm Set	Pitch Set
A)  Ta Ta Syn-co-pa	1)  do mi fa so
B)  Ti-ti za Ti-ti za	2)  do fa so
C)  Syn-co-pa Ti-ti za	3)  do so la
D)  Ta Ti-ti Ta za	4)  do mi fa so ti

ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE KITE THEME

Learning Intentions

- Development and reinforcement of music specific terminology.
- Ensemble skills (especially maintaining steady tempo whilst changing rhythmic groupings).

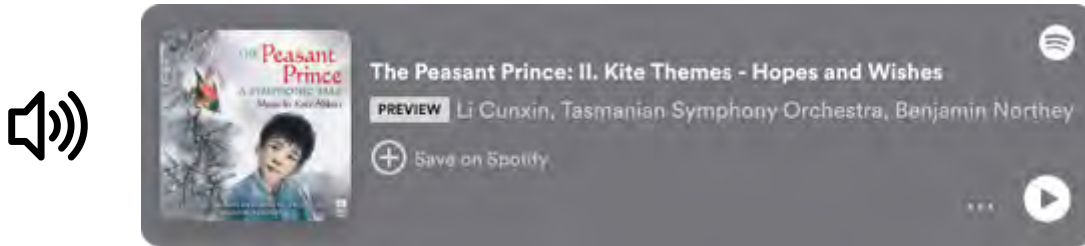
Resources

- Audio playback & projection.
- Notation and rhythm grids provided below.
- Musical instruments (if available).

Introducing the Kite Theme

- In the story The Peasant Prince, the young boy loves to fly a kite.
- Have the students move around the room pretending they are moving in the wind like a kite. Ask them to imagine that there is music playing that reflects how the kite moves. What does the music it sound like?
 - Fast or slow? (Tempo)
 - Loud or soft? (Dynamics)
 - Lots of short notes or more long notes? (Rhythm)
 - Do the notes flow into each other smoothly or are they separated? Do some notes stand out more than others? (Articulation)
 - Pretty sounding notes or more clashing crunchy sounds? (Harmony)
 - Which instruments are playing and what kind of sound do they have? (Instrumentation and Tone Colour)
 - How many instruments are playing? (Texture).

- Listen to Katy Abbott’s Kite Theme (Hopes and Wishes) from The Peasant Prince and discuss the similarities and differences with the music they just imagined....



Learning the Kite Theme

- Using call and response have the students sing the Kite Theme.
- There are three versions of the melody provided with Level 1 being the simplest.
 - Call and response – teacher then tutti (all together)
 - Call and response – student soloist then tutti
 - 2-bar bar canon – split class in half. 2nd groups starts two bars after the 1st group
 - See above for extension ideas.

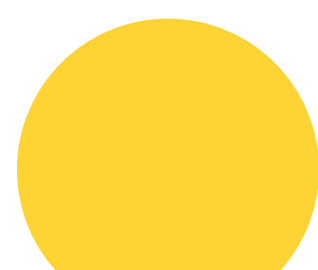
Kite Theme Level 1) Transposed key, solfège provided and modified into common time:



Kite Theme Level 2) Transposed key and original time signature:



Kite Theme Level 3) Original key using accidentals (Ab Major) and original time signature:



Learn the Kite Theme accompaniment

Melody Line

Accompaniment

- Looking at the notation of the accompaniment, how many notes are played across the two-bar repeating **ostinato** shown in blue?
- How many different pitches or note names are used across the two bars in the blue box?
- Using the rhythm grid below have the students perform the ostinato with high, medium, low body percussion sounds.



Kite Theme Accompaniment Original Statement

	1	2	3	1	2	1	2	3	1	2
High										
Middle										
Low										

- Notice how the rhythm is grouped in 3s and 2s. In this case we have 3 + 2
- Have the students count the groupings (3 + 2) whilst performing the rhythm again on high, medium and low body percussion sounds.

Kite Theme Accompaniment – Notated

- Let's add pitch to the ostinato...

Accompaniment

Performing the Kite Theme

- Split the class into two teams. Team A sings ostinato and on cue Team B sings the melody. (See notation below)
- Switch parts – Accompaniment becomes Melody (and vice versa).
- Extension possibilities:
 - Introduce instruments or body percussion for students requiring extension or diversification
 - Perform the two parts as a duet, quartet or even as a soloist (body percussion the ostinato and sing the melody over the top)
 - Use dynamics to shape the performance and begin discussions regarding balance.

Melody Line

Accompaniment

Variation of the rhythmic motif











- Having established the Kite Theme accompanying motif, Katy Abbott uses a number of variations (subtle musical changes) throughout the work.
- Use the rhythm grids and notation below to learn each of the variations of the Kite accompaniment with body percussion.
- Be sure to:
 - Set an achievable tempo
 - Reinforce musical vocabulary with call and response as needed
 - Practise counting the groupings whilst playing the rhythm on body percussion.

Variation 1 – Rhythm Grid

	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	1	2
High										
Middle										
Low										

Variation 1 – Notation









Variation 2 – Rhythm Grid

	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	1	2
High										
Low										

Variation 2 – Notation











Variation 3 – Rhythm Grid

	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2
High								
Low								

Variation 3 – Notation



Variation 4 – Rhythm Grid

	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2
High								
Low								
Silence								

Variation 4 – Notation



- Now try this:
 - Practise repeating the original ostinato then switching between the variations
 - Use dynamics to create further variation
 - Have the students devise their own variation of the theme
 - Have some fun performing the ostinato and variations on instruments
 - Make up your own melody to go with one of the ostinato.

ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE LONELY AND HOPE THEMES

Learning Intentions

- Identify and articulate with increasingly sophisticated language, treatment of the musical elements in two contrasting excerpts.

Resources

- Audio playback & projection.
- Pencil and paper.

Exploring the Lonely and Hope Themes

Listen to the opening of The Peasant Prince and ask the students to describe the feeling of the music. What are the musicians doing to make it sound that way?



- Possible answers may include:
 - Use of clashing notes in the melody = dissonance/ harmony
 - Clashing notes in the strings & crotales accompaniment = dissonance/ harmony
 - High register, piercing, cold and strident violins = tone colour/ timbre
 - Bowed crotales sound resonant and haunting = tone colour
 - Repetition of the dissonant theme (see notation below)
 - Staggered entries playing the theme = canonic entries/ texture
 - Notes are all flowing and connected = legato/ articulation
 - Strings slide between notes sometimes = glissandi/ articulation
 - Use of tremolo in the strings = articulation
 - Begins quiet and grows louder (especially the suspended cymbal) = dynamics
 - Only a few instruments playing at the start = thin texture
 - Mostly long notes = rhythm.



- The eerie opening melodic theme (see notation below) has been called the Lonely Theme by the composer. Can you spot the differences between the two versions of the Lonely Theme shown below?

Lonely Theme – Original



Lonely Theme – Variation



- Have another listen to the opening of The Peasant Prince and the [Lonely Theme](#).
- Then listen to the [Hope Theme](#), a variation of the Kite theme we learned earlier.
- With a partner, list as many musical differences as you can.

Lonely Theme – Original



Hope Theme



What I noticed about the Lonely Theme	What I noticed about the Hope Theme

These questions might help guide

- Loud or Soft = Dynamics
- Fast or Slow = Tempo
- Lots of short notes or more sparse with long notes = Rhythm
- Do the notes flow into each other smoothly or are they separated a little. Do some notes stand out more than others? = Articulation
- Pretty sounding notes or more clashing crunchy sounds = Harmony
- Does the instrument play high or low sounds = register
- Describe the tone of the instrument playing = tone colour/ timbre

ACTIVITIES EXPLORING THE INSTRUMENTS OF THE ORCHESTRA

Learning Intentions

- Notice differences in timbre/tone colour of orchestral instruments and begin using vocabulary to articulate observations.
- Visually identify instruments of the orchestra.

Resources

- Audio playback & projection.
- Any instruments or voices available.

Introduction to Timbre

- Berklee Online - [What is Timbre?](#) (2 mins).




- Voice Recognition Game (optional)
 - Everyone closes their eyes and when the teacher taps an individual student on the shoulder the selected student tells the class “my favourite instrument is.....” (or favourite type of music, animal or ice cream etc.) The class then guesses who was speaking and explains how they knew (EG: high pitch or low pitch voice, how close the sound was, how loud the sound was, how fast they spoke, the way they said certain words).
 - Repeat the game but allow students to change the timbre of their voice to try and throw the class off.
- Activity
 - Great musicians are able to manipulate and control the tone quality of their instrument. Using call and response, demonstrate different vocal tones by singing a descending major scale from the dominant to the tonic.
 - ‘G’day, G’day, G’day, G’day, G’day’ with a nasal tone
 - ‘Hello, hello, hello, hello, hello’ with a rounded sound
 - Invite a student to sing the same pattern in their own silly voice and have the class copy.
 - Encourage a short discussion using words to describe the sounds of each voice.
- Instruments of the Orchestra
 - Instruments sound different based on their size, shape, construction material, method of playing and other aspects.
 - Larger instruments tend to sound more mellow, resonant or warm.
 - Smaller instruments can often sound bright, piercing or shrill. Some other words to describe tone could be pure, harsh, buzzy or smooth. * A vocabulary list may be useful...


Instrument	High Register	Middle Register	Low Register
Flute and Piccolo	Very bright, harsh, shrill, penetrating, shimmering	Smooth, bright, clear, romantic, rich, warm	Haunting, mysterious, mellow, airy
Oboe	Penetrating, Piercing	Expressive, rich, humorous, nasal	Nasal, harsh, dramatic, mellow
Cor Anglais (English Horn)	Penetrating, thin	Strong, warm, rich	Dark, mellow
Bassoon	Squeaky, nasal, reedy	Warm, dramatic, smooth, comical, nasal	Reedy, strong, penetrating
Contra Bassoon	Thin, reedy	Reedy, nasal	Dark, mysterious, reedy
Clarinet	Shrill, thin, bright, warm, piercing	Smooth, mellow, romantic, rich, warm	Mellow, warm
Bass Clarinet	Rich, warm, reedy	Romantic, smooth, warm	Strong, dark, reedy, dramatic
French Horn	Harsh, haunting, bright, brassy	Warm, mellow	Strong, dark, mellow
Trumpet	Noble, bright, brassy, majestic, shrill, clear	Warm, clear, brassy, bright	Strong, warm
Trombone	Powerful, brassy	Warm, muffled, mellow	Blasting, majestic, mellow
Tuba	Sweet, Warm	Deep, mellow, rich, brassy	Deep, airy, gruff

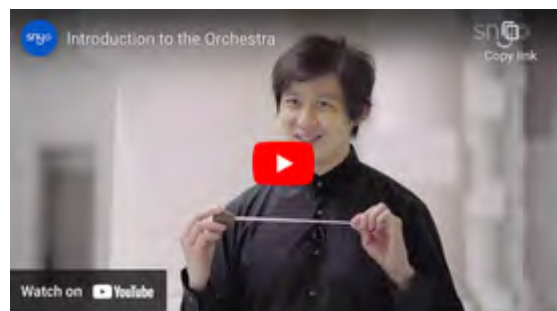
Cornet	Sweet, bright	Smooth, bright, warm	regimental
Euphonium	Sweet, mellow	Noble, brassy, warm	Warm, powerful, dark
Violins	Scratchy, bright, rich, eerie	Warm, mellow, bright, scratchy	Rich, mellow, dramatic, somber
Viola	Thin, warm	Warm, smooth	Dull, sonorous, dark
Cello	Warm, smooth, bright	Rich, warm, romantic	Dramatic, strong, dark
Double Bass	Rich, bright	Warm, mellow	Dark, rumbling
Soprano Sax	Reedy, bright, piercing	Reedy, penetrating, warm, bright	Warm, mellow
Alto Sax	Reedy, bright, piercing	Reedy, penetrating, warm, bright	Warm, mellow
Bass Guitar	Warm, bright	Warm, mellow	Rumbling, dark,
Electric Guitar	Scratchy, piercing, metallic, thin	Warm, strong, aggressive, bright	Buzzing, harsh, scratchy, distorted
Piano	Bright, sparkling, warm	Rich, warm, bright	Dark, muddy, harsh
Drum Kit	Hollow, metallic, rumbling, scratchy, strong		

- Play the below video and pause after each instrument to discuss the timbre of each instrument and why it might sound that way. Refer back to the singing activity by asking does the instrument sound nasal or rounded as a starting point?

 Lower Primary use Introduction to Orchestra Instruments (9 mins)



 Upper Primary use Introduction to the Orchestra with SNYO (8 mins)



- Identifying instruments of the orchestra games:

 Lower Primary (6 mins)



 Upper Primary (7 mins)



[Instruments of the Orchestra Kahoot](#) (do it as a class if one-to-one devices are not possible).


Additional Resources

- Explore [MSO Learn](#).



The Educational Orchestra Resource,

Explore the inner workings of a Symphony Orchestra, and learn about all the instruments that talented performers make musical magic with!

 MSO Learn

- [Tianyi's Guide to the Orchestra](#)
- [George Meets the Sydney Youth Orchestra](#) (warning – this one is a bit cute)
- Drew Lytle – [What makes instruments sound different](#) (pretty scientific...)
- The Musicologist website – [Instruments of the Orchestra](#)
- The Philadelphia Orchestra – [Learn about the instruments of the orchestra](#)
- The Science of Sound – [Sound for Kids](#)
- [Playing techniques for violin](#) with Two Set Violin
- [Extended techniques for flute](#)
- [Trombone mute demonstrations](#) (a great discussion starter for describing tone colour...)



Extension Activities

- Creative task – using call and response, practise singing well-known songs changing the vocal tone. Pair this up with the activity from Lesson 1 to change multiple musical elements in a song to create a reimagined rendition.
- Comparison Activity – gather a collection of instruments and have the students rate them from most mellow to brightest (or most nasal to warmest etc.) Encourage students to explain their thinking.
- Deeper discussion – what influences an instrument's tone colour (e.g. how big it is, what it is made of, how much force is used, what register it is playing in, specific playing techniques etc.)

ACTIVITIES BEFORE AND AFTER THE CONCERT

Learning Intentions

- Explore and deepen understanding of the creative forces behind the MSO performance of The Peasant Prince.

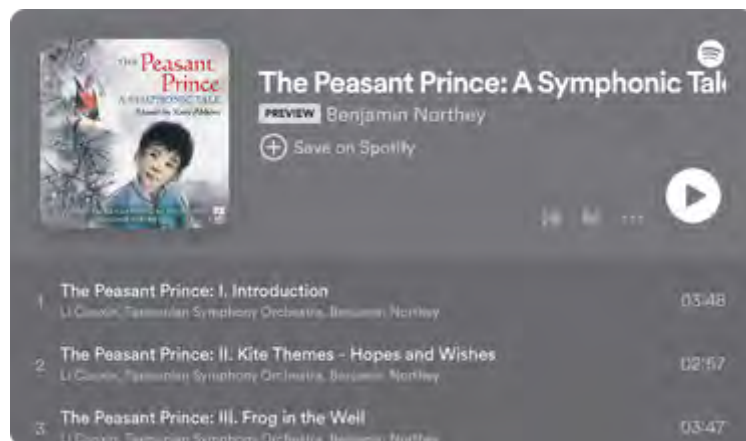
Resources

- Audio playback & projection.
- Writing or video recording equipment.

Before the concert

- Explore [MSO Learn](#)
- Take a look at [The Making of an Orchestra Resources](#)
- Listen to The Peasant Prince composed by Dr Katy Abbott, narrated by Li Cunxin and performed by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Northey

🌟 [Spotify](#)



🌟 [ABC Store](#)



- Read the story book written by Li Cunxin (available from many good book stores and online)
- Li Cunxin tells us a little about his life as [The Peasant Prince](#)
- Take a quick trip to learn about the orchestra with [George Meets the Sydney Youth Orchestra](#)
- Learn how to [“Get My Job” with Benjamin Northey](#), Principal Conductor in Residence with the MSO
- Hear from conductor [Alan Gilbert \(NY Philharmonic\) on Sesame Street](#)
- Learn from Sarah Hicks about the [role of the conductor](#)
- Discover [what does a composer do](#) with Jake Runestad



After the concert

- Write a letter or record a news report telling friends and family about the concert.
 - Who, what, where, when, why?
 - What did you see?
 - What did it sound like?
 - What did you find interesting?
 - Can you think of a time where the music matched the story perfectly? e.g. busy city sounds...

This resource was created by James Le Fevre, Head of Music at VCASS.

