

**The Ark & Music Network
present**

A Most Peculiar Wintry Thing



**Classroom Activity Pack:
Creative Composition**

A new music
show for
Ages 4+

Introduction

A Most Peculiar Wintry Thing is a new music performance commission written and produced especially for children from The Ark and Music Network and written by composer Brian Irvine. It brings together four sensational world class improvising and classical musicians with a live animator to make a wintry snowball of music. In this specially prepared accompanying classroom pack, the composer of this unique music performance for children shares a number of accessible compositional processes and effective group music-making processes for teachers to use in the classroom and which may support in the delivery of the Music Curriculum Strands.

How to use this pack:

We aim for this pack to be used to further explore the performance of *A Most Peculiar Wintry Thing* with your pupils in the classroom either before or after attendance at the performance. The use of these activities will enhance and deepen the children's understanding and benefit from the experience of attending a performance as well as supporting their overall musical development.

All of the processes in this pack are linked closely to the wintry theme of this music commission. However, teachers are strongly encouraged to adapt the activities to themes of their own choosing as appropriate to their own thematic planning across the academic year. In this way cross-curricular integration and linkage with a range of other curricular subjects is both supported and encouraged.

Overall Guidelines

- In all these activities everything should be done in a shared atmosphere of great fun. It is important that everybody (teacher included) is excited by what is being generated.
- No idea is ever wrong or bad and all ideas should be given equal consideration.
- Let the children be the decision makers but make decisions very quickly and move on. This is key and teaches children a core skill for effective composing – the ability to make choices between different musical ideas.
- The activities and processes can be used with all class levels. Activity 1 is probably best suited to senior classes or those with more experience. Other activities are suitable for all levels. Suggestions for differentiating for various ages and levels are given where appropriate.
- This pack primarily addresses the **Composing** and **Performing** curriculum strands, but also has strong relevance to the **Listening and Responding** strand.
- For all class levels the strand units of song singing, playing instruments, improvising and creating, literacy development (through creation of graphic scores and arrangements), talking about and recording compositions can be amply addressed. An exploration of sounds is also inherent as part of the composition process. Teachers are encouraged to use all these activities to work on the exploring sounds strand unit and use this as the basis for all compositional work.
- All key music concepts will be developed through these activities including sense of dynamics, pitch development, rhythmic development, sense of tempo, awareness of structure, texture, and style.
- Assessment and reflection on the work is suggested through performing all musical compositions when complete. This is best done informally and as soon as possible after the piece is made while it is fresh and the children are energised about their creation. The performance should be recorded on audio or video. This integrates performance skills development into the composing process as well as creating a listening and responding opportunity to reflect on the work created and to build musical skill, awareness and critical thinking.

Activity 1

The Winter Song Project

Section A

What they will learn:

- Rhythmic development through language
- Creating and improvising melody from a thematic prompt

This is an accessible structured process for creating a singing/performance music piece about winter out of approximately three short invented and then learnt/remembered sections. As much as possible all music and words are invented by children and the final piece is performed/sung by the children.

Making the first section of your wintry song (The A Section)

Decide on a theme with your class. In this example the theme is Winter, but cross curricular themes or other subjects areas also work very well. For example: the sea, transport, other countries, 'things I will do when I am big', fish, space etc.

Firstly ask the children to come up with a collection of winter related words. Then get them to practise saying them, to help develop awareness of the rhythms inherent in language e.g. i-cy ground, win-dy, fros-ty etc.

Now, decide on a particular wintry subject matter e.g. snow, feeling cold, favourite winter food, woolly jumpers, fairy lights etc. Subject matter is infinite. Write all ideas on big board at the front of the class.

Ask each pupil to invent and draw a picture related to the theme. They must also write a sentence on their drawing to describe something about the theme - a name of the object or person (could be a name they invent for that person) and one characteristic about them (funny, warm, grumpy, silly) etc.

When everyone has drawn and written their sentence. Ask for a volunteer to stand in front of the class, hold up their picture and read aloud their descriptive sentence, name of their wintry creature etc. Write the words on the board.

Activity 1

Section A continued

What they will learn:

- Pitch and melodic skill development
- Development of aural/melodic imagination
- Notation skills
- Awareness of song structure
- Performance skills – song learning and singing as a group

Ask the volunteer to say the sentence again. Listen to the rhythm of the words. Get the whole class to say the sentence in that rhythm.

Ask the child to sing the sentence. If you like, you may use intervals, scales, notes and chords previously covered in music lessons as a starting point and help the child to build or improvise from there.

Sing their melody with them until the melody is clear. If it is possible for you, it can be helpful to find the notes the child is singing on piano or other instrument. Otherwise just singing it a few times with the child once the melody is clear will work perfectly well too.

Then ask the whole class to sing the sentence in the same way. Again if possible and comfortable for you, find an accompaniment for it on the piano or other instrument if you play one. Now everyone sings the sentence. This is the first line of the song.

Notating your song: With the children, create a piece of graphic notation for your song as you make each section of it. Write up the finalised lyrics and use shapes and lines to indicate the shape of the melody. The pictures drawn or symbols could also be used as graphic notation for the piece. There is also an opportunity to bring in notation that the children may already using in class.

Repeat the above process until four sentences have been combined and the children can sing all four sentences together.

This is section A of your new wintry song.

Activity 1

Section B

What they will learn:

- Further rhythmic development through language
- Further melodic/pitch skills
- Development of awareness and use of dynamics and tempo
- Notation skills
- Further group performance skills as they now learn the B section.

Making the B section of your wintry song:

Ask for new volunteer. Find a new wintry thing to work with amongst the mass of drawings and words that is slightly different to what you used to make section A. Perhaps don't use a sentence this time but two words repeated.

Ask the new volunteer to sing the two words in a different way to the way that Section A sounds. So if Section A is slow, perhaps this one is fast etc. Or if Section A has lots of words perhaps this one uses less words but longer notes.

Again sing the melody they have just invented with them to help clarify it and capture it on piano or another instrument if possible. (Another helpful technique is to record it onto a phone voice recorder or a simple basic mp3 recorder. Get the whole class to sing it. Do this twice so that Section B is different in character and construction to Section A.

Everyone sings Section A followed by Section B a few times back and forth so that everyone knows it off by heart.

If the piece is being recorded as you go, this is an ideal time to reflect on the pieces and assess it individually or in peer groups.

Make reference to the elements of tempo and dynamics here also – symbols for these could be either invented or conventional/previously learnt or used symbols.

Activity 1

Section C

What they will learn:

- Awareness of musical structure by putting the 3 sections together
- Music arranging skills
- Sense of dynamics, tempo, rhythm and pitch
- Group performance skills in song-singing, instrument playing (pitched and unpitched) and harmony singing

Making the final section of your wintry song (Section C)

Say to the children - “We need one more section”

Ask if any one has any ideas of something that they could sing about winter that we haven’t done already. Let them demonstrate or sing their idea. Listen to a number of different ideas and then select one or two. Find an accompaniment and make Section C.

Arranging your wintry song

Now create an order of the sections with input from the children – this is your arrangement of the song.

Write on another flip chart your chosen arrangement of the piece e.g. - AABA ACA. The song is now written. Now sing it all through.

Additional ideas to expand the instrumentation and make a bigger sound:

- If you play piano or guitar or another instrument add a simple accompaniment if you can.
- Split sections of the song up between different groups of singers and sections where everyone sings together – this also helps create changes in dynamic between loud and soft.
- If children play instruments find a way of integrating them into the band. e.g: children can play the rhythm of a sung line or several lines using simple hand percussion.
- Try playing drones (long notes) under the melody e.g. if the song is in A try playing long A’s with the melody.
- If they have more advanced instrumental skills see if they can play the melody with the singing.
- Improvise and add-in simple vocal harmonies.

Activity 1

Performance

What they will learn:

- Performance skills
- Musical literacy & notation
- Ability to follow a leader/conductor
- Ability to start and stop together
- Listening and responding to each other during a performance
- Listening and responding as reflection afterwards

Performing your wintry song:

- Now start to put an action to every line of the song. Ask for suggestions for each line. Pick the action and do it all together. Do this for the entire song.
- Designate a stage area. Practise the whole song plus movement/dance.
- Find an audience of mums and dads or other students and teachers e.g. at lunchtime in the hallway, café or in the playground - perform it for them
- Use this opportunity to reflect on the work done. Ask the audience for their response to the performance e.g. what was your favourite part? Or record the performance on a phone (audio or video) and playback/discuss with the class afterwards.

General tips for making this process really work well:

The whole writing, assembling and rehearsal process should take no longer than 60 minutes. The piece will be about 5 mins in length and it will be easily memorised except for the structure (arrangement) which should be clearly visible to the children. Include the children in this process of creating the arrangement and get them draw the arrangement graphically for everyone to follow.

Emphasise good strong singing and good strong performance. Silence at beginning and end. Freezing on finish. Use this to develop a sense of tempo, structure and dynamics. Organise two people to introduce the piece and also give the singers and band a name.

Each song should be recorded or filmed for memory purposes at the end of each inventing session. This can be done quite simply using the voice recorder on a phone. With each new session practise the song from the last session before beginning anew.

At all points all ideas and thoughts and actions should be encouraged. All decisions and activities happen very quickly.

Activity 1

Variations

What they will learn:

- How to make a simple recording of a song
- How the simplest idea (one word, one section) can be used to make music
- How to develop musical ambition by setting a goal and completing a larger music composition project
- How to lead and conduct a performance
- How to represent their music visually in effective ways

Differentiating for various ages and abilities levels:

- Make fewer sections of music with junior classes. Two sections or even just one section will work better for younger children. Keep language use simpler – one word (repeated in a rhythmic way or stretched out over a melody with several notes) can be a complete line in your song. The idea of a list song (i.e. a list of winter things or words) may work well for junior classes or those with less music experience. Keep the ideas shorter with more repetition.
- The teacher can record the music for junior classes. Older classes may be able to do this themselves.
- This process can be done on a regular basis and would quickly build up a collection compositions by the class. This would also provide regular opportunity to develop awareness and skill for musical elements such as dynamics, tempo, texture etc as appropriate to different class levels.
- For older classes you could approach this as a year long project and set a goal to create a book of X number of songs across the year using different themes over a period of weeks.
- Senior classes can be given the chance to lead or ‘conduct’ performances. This will improve their sense of musical structure and dynamics and is also an interesting and fun way to develop listening and responding skills.
- Give the children the chance to create a graphic score to represent the dynamics and textures in the piece with the word underneath. The ‘conductors’ can then use that to guide the performance.

Activity 2

The Awesome Magical Wintry Music Machine.

What they will learn:

- Working as a group to improvise and create new sounds (exploring sounds unit)
- How to lead their group and/or follow signals from a leader
- How to listen and respond to each other's sound creations

Create an elaborate music machine with the the children playing and/or singing. Involves conducting listening and instant composition. Particularly suitable as a starter activity due to it's focus on arranging sounds (Exploring Sounds Strand Unit)

- Divide the group of children into several groups (At least 6 groups is ideal)
- Ask the children to imagine what winter sounds like or sounds that somehow evoke a feeling of winter for them.
- Use any instruments or collection of found sounds available to explore sounds (everyday objects such as paper, newspaper, plastic bags, bubble wrap, pens clicking etc). Sounds can also include vocal sounds, humming, singing and words spoken in rhythm. Body percussion (claps, stamps, finger clicks) can also be used. Explore ideas for sounds together.
- Each group invents three different/contrasting sounds and or sound patterns. You can build on notes, sounds previously explored in class to help them get started.
- The sounds can be melodies/rhythms involving all the group members. But they should be different and focus on a different aspect of melody, timbre, rhythm, dynamics etc

No two groups should have the same collection of sounds. The greater the variety of sound between groups the better.

Each group has a conductor who stands in front of the group. The conductor has three positions.

Hand on head = sound 1. Hand on belly = sound 2. Hand on knee = sound 3

Each group and their conductor demonstrates their wintry sound inventions to the other groups.

Activity 2 continued

What they will learn:

- This “pyramid” model of composition & performance develops an understanding of improvisation, conducting, communication, sound character and compositional shape.
- Sense of dynamics, structure and tempo
- How to perform music as a group
- How to listen and respond to each other whilst performing i.e. improvising skills

Make the conductors aware that they are the one in control of the group. They can do the following things:

- Indicate which of the three sounds the group makes by making one of the three hand positions.
- Make the group be silent - invent a gesture for silence.
- Control dynamics - big gesture = means loud - small gesture = means quiet.

A Wintry Performance 1

Involves all groups performing and inventing together with everyone formed in a semicircle and each of the conductors facing their group

Make the conductors aware that by listening to what the other groups are doing this can impact on the choices that they make for their own group. Emphasise that the piece is all about communicating and reacting with the other groups. It is not necessary to always make sound. Make the group aware that they must always follow their conductor. With everyone formed in a semicircle and all 6 conductors facing their group they make a piece.

A Wintry Performance 2

An overall ring-leader conductor is appointed or volunteers. The ring-leader conductor stands in the middle. He/she can freeze the other conductors which in turn freezes their group by simply touching the conductors head or arm. He/she can also restart that conductor and of course that conductors group by touching their arm or head again. Now the overall piece is determined by the ring-leader conductor.

Remember to emphasis to the performers that there are only two ways to be involved in a performing a piece of music:

1. Making sound as directed
2. Being completely silent. (This second one is the hardest)

Activity 3

Snowy Sound Circle

What they will learn:

- Use of dynamics
- Use of tempo
- Sense of structure and arrangement of music
- Leadership & conducting skills
- Improvisation of sound and music
- Following signals and performing as a group
- Listening and responding to each other's sound creations

Instant wintry composition through simple conduction. A good starter activity.

Every child finds a sound using anything on the room and creates a sound that evokes a sense of winter for them. (See Activity 2 for suggestions on this)

Ask children to form a $\frac{3}{4}$ circle around you. This is your snowball circle. Go around the circle and let everyone listen to everybody's particular sound.

Hold your arms out wide and say to the children – “when you are inside the space of my arms - make your sound. When you are outside - you are silent”

Now make a piece of music by changing the location and width of your arms e.g. move from including the whole group inside the space of your arms, to just 3 children, to 7, to 1 back to the whole group again etc.

The conductor decides when the piece starts and when it ends just by using his/her arms.

Open arms = play

Closed arms = stop

Let the children take turns at being the conductor/composer.

Make a second piece of music with two parallel snow ball circles and two different arms conductors. They can communicate between each other as part of a double snowball performance of wintry music.

Activity 4

The Besudsky Frosty Sculpture

What they will learn:

- Development of musical/aural imaginative skills
- Tempo/dynamics/structure
- How movement relates to music
- The physicality of music, particularly useful for rhythmic skills development
- Ability to start and stop sound making to a signal

Building a kinetic musical sculpture. Children use instruments, movement and voice. Involves the invention of sound and develops control and concentration.

Ask a volunteer to come to the centre of a clear space. Ask them to make a repetitive wintry sound and at the same time to make a repetitive gesture that goes with that sound. They can also use musical instruments. Sounds can be little melodic ideas of one or two notes. You can freeze them and start them by using a wintry sound such as 'brrr'.

Ask another person to join in and be attached physically somehow to the first person such as a hand on a foot etc. This second person then makes a new sound and a new gesture. Start the wintry music machine. Freeze the machine. Each child is like a "cog" in the machine is independent and unaware of the other "cogs". When they are frozen nothing can make them laugh or change their expression. (This is the hardest part).

Eventually the whole class is part of a huge frosty music making machine made up of many different sound and gestures. No one is allowed to make the same sound or gesture as anyone else. Freeze the machine - start the machine using your start/stop signal.

When the machine is frozen new instructions can be given. Give the children the chance to be the leader using these instructions or inventing new ones:

"New sound, new gesture"

"New sound and new gesture- using mouth only for sound"

"Gesture only"

"Sound only – just the girls/just the boys"

"New incredibly quiet sound with new big/slow gesture "

"New fast sound with new gesture - using only your eyes"etc

Activity 5

Mittens Melody Inventor

What they will learn:

- Exploration of sounds, pitches and melody using notes and scales
- Development of rhythmic skills using language and numbers
- Notation development through use of graphic or notated score
- Group music improvisation
- Performances skills in singing or pitched instrumental playing

Creation of a melodic line with a rhythm. An ideal opportunity to develop awareness/skills in these two elements of music. There are two component parts to this – the creation of the rhythm and the creation of the melody.

Creating the rhythm

Use the name of someone's favourite wintry thing to create a rhythm as outlined in Activity 1, Section A.

Making the Melody

To create the melody you can decide to restrict pitches to certain chord scales or keep it wide open. A simple approach to making the melody is to use the key of C. However, you can use other scales you may have been working with as a way of building up their skills.

Ask the children to shout out a letter A-G and a number 1-4. Write the letters and their corresponding number on the board as they shout them out. The number is the number of beats that the note is held for and the letter is the pitch.

Play the melody created with the chosen notes using chime bars, piano or other melody instrument. Everyone then plays or sings the melody.

Start again by asking for more words connected to winter and repeat the process.

In this way you can make two melodies. Join them together to make a pair. Now you have your completed piece. Make a graphic score or notated score of your two melodies. Use this for learning and performing your Mittens Melodies.

Perform the music you have made for another class and reflect/discuss the performance afterwards with that class and together.

About Brian Irvine

Brian was born in Belfast. His body of work reflects an obsessive love of music creation in all its forms and includes operas, orchestral works, large-scale oratorios, installations, film, theatre and dance scores as well as ensemble, solo and chamber works. His music is a highly personal concoction of the widest spectrum of music genres from punk, to improvisation to contemporary classical.

"...Some of the most exhilarating and imaginative music you'll ever hope to hear...musical play in the highest sense: exuberant, spontaneous and irresistibly alive." Washington Post

He has been commissioned by many international orchestras, opera companies, theatres and has toured extensively with his own ensembles. He has won a number of awards for his music including - British Composers Award for Opera and the BBC Radio 3 Jazz Award. His Junk opera Postcards from Dumbworld was shortlisted for the Irish Times Opera Award (2011) and his BBC Radio 3 commission Secret Cinema was nominated for a BBC Radio 3 Listeners Award (2011). Rain Falling Up was also shortlisted for a British Composers Award (2012).

He has toured extensively internationally and has appeared at some of the world's leading international music festivals/venues.

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About The Ark

The Ark is a unique, purpose-built cultural centre in the heart of Dublin's Temple Bar, where children aged 2 -12 can explore theatre, music, literature, art, film, dance and more.

The programme of world class performances, exhibitions and creative workshops changes every few weeks, so audiences both young and not so young can expect a different experience every visit. The Ark gratefully acknowledges the support of its principal funder the Arts Council and also its other annual supporters: the Department of Education and Skills, Temple Bar Cultural Trust and Dublin City Council.

www.ark.ie

About Music Network

Music Network's mission is to make high quality live music available and accessible to people throughout Ireland. In partnership with The Ark we provide high quality programming to children and families. Through our subsidiary company, Music Generation, we connect tours with music education programmes, giving children and young people rich, holistic musical experiences.

Music Network tours are funded by the Arts Council and are presented in association with RTÉ lyric fm.

www.musicnetwork.ie

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We would be very happy to
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The Ark

