

Integrating focused listening, music history and creativity

Mozart: Rondo from Horn Concerto No. 4, K495

How the horn helps to explain part of music history

In Mozart's time (known as the 'classical' era of music history) the French horn was a much simpler instrument than today. It was basically just a hunting horn, with one long tube opening out into a bell at the end: the only notes you could get clearly were the notes of the harmonic series.

When composers wrote for horn, they had to state what key the horn would be in (in other words, how long the tube would be) and then just build around the notes the horn could get. That is why so many horn (and trumpet) parts in Mozart/Haydn and Beethoven's time (roughly the decades either side of 1800) were so simple*



French Horn in Mozart's time

If you were a really good player, you could 'fudge' some additional notes by sticking your hand up the bell and stopping the sound, which changed the notes. However, this is hard to get right and, even at best, the altered notes sound muffled or snarled.



Modern day French Horn

Mozart's horn concertos were written for natural horn, for a friend of Mozart's who was a virtuoso on the horn. They are really hard on natural horn – and Mozart made it harder for his friend by writing in multi-coloured ink and peppering the score with insults.

Nowadays French horns have a whole series of valves with bits of extra tube so they can get all the notes in between. This makes the Mozart horn concertos much easier to play.

* Historical note. You may hear fairly spectacular high trumpet/horn parts in earlier 'Baroque' music (like Bach and Handel – for example the Hallelujah chorus). That is because brass players had mastered the difficult art of playing extremely high, where the notes of the harmonic series come close together, enabling them to play tunes. However, this virtuoso skill had pretty much died out by Mozart/Haydn/Beethoven's time). On the other hand, the c.19 saw the development of the trumpets and horns with valves, allowing players to get all the notes easily, so from the mid c.19 brass parts get more interesting again.

What does a natural horn sound like?

Here is a performance on a 'natural' French horn to compare with the BBC version. You can hear the 'snarls' when the player has to use his hand inside the bell to get the necessary notes:

<http://youtu.be/RDhT0suC2tk>

Science link: How to build your own 'natural' horn

Because the natural horn was so simple, it's fairly easy to build your own. You will need:

- A length of garden hose
- A plastic funnel
- A mouthpiece (any brass mouthpiece will do, or see the below links for how to use a garden hose connector as a mouthpiece)

Web links on how to make a brass instrument in the classroom

<http://youtu.be/SpP8uVR0JX4>

http://www.nyphilkids.org/lab/make_french_hose2.html

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02gd1gx>

How long a hosepipe is needed?

You can use any length, but a good guide is to match the horn originally used in the Mozart Horn Concerto, and make a horn pitched in the key of E flat.

A horn in E flat will need a hosepipe length of approximately **3.79m or just under 12.5 ft.** (This should work with standard hosepipe, but may vary slightly depending on the actual hosepipe used)

If you work with your local music hub to run a Whole Class Ensemble programme, you might want to make horns that fit more easily with any whole class ensemble instruments that you have in school. Contact your local music hub for advice if you want to do this.

Mozart: Listening and understanding the musical shape

The Mozart Horn Concerto was one of the pieces chosen for the original BBC 10 pieces project, and this means that there is a lot of useful support material online:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3H1v7vC6mqInq715SS7s52Q/horn-concerto-no-4-3rd-movement-by-mozart>

The Mozart Horn Concerto has three separate movements, and it is the last of these that is featured in the BBC '10 pieces'. This movement is called a 'rondo' because the main tune keeps coming round again.

At its simplest, a rondo alternates a main 'rondo' theme that keeps coming back (call it 'A') with different ideas, or 'episodes' (call these 'B', 'C', 'D' etc)

A simple rondo might be: **A B A C A**

or it can be longer: **A B A C A D A E A** etc

The lesson plan by Ann Barkway on the BBC 10 pieces site is quite good at outlining the Rondo structure:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/xFHT9GvfKjBbtw28pgDgyG/key-stage-2-music-lesson-plans>

Mozart's rondo is slightly more complicated. Here is a guide to the shape of the Mozart horn concerto, with timings in relation to the BBC 10 pieces full orchestral version.

Section	A	B	A	C	A	B or D	Cadenza	A (with ending)
Description	Main tune	A new tune	Main tune	Another new tune	Main tune	Mix of new tune and music heard in section B earlier	Just the solo horn - improvised	Main tune - with extended ending (a 'Coda')
Timings*	0:00	0:15	1:04	1:19	1:56	2:11	2:54	3:14

* These timings match the freely downloadable MP3 version from the BBC website on

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4GrPtrzVNzpJ4vmrr4w5Y2j/download-ten-pieces-mp3s> The timings are about 2-3 seconds later in each case on the matching video on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02b5dmz>

Don't use the BBC cinema film version (the one with Katy B and a maze) **for the following activities** Although this is a really good introduction to the piece, it repeats part of the structure and the voice over obscures the music. Use the versions listed above instead.

Preparing to listen to the Mozart horn concerto

Explain that:

- This is a 'concerto' where a solo player (here a French horn) gets all the good bits, accompanied by an orchestra
- We use the letter 'A' to mean the main tune of the piece (listen to it a couple of times)
- If you hear the main tune again, we will call it 'A' but if you hear a new tune we'll call it 'B', and if there is another one we'll call it 'C' and so on
- A 'cadenza' is where the soloist (the French Horn player) makes something up on their own, with no orchestra

Mozart listening: version 1

Tell the class that the first three section of the music feature the main tune (A), then a new tune (B) and then the main tune (A) again. Listen to the piece and tell the class when each new section starts (using the timings in the table).

For the empty boxes, ask the children to identify:

- (1) Which two sections feature the main tune?
- (2) Which section has a cadenza?

SECTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Timing	0:00	0:18	1:07	1:22	1:59	2:14	2:55	3:17

A	B	A						
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Mozart listening: version 2

Listen to the whole piece – tell the class when each new section starts (using the timings in the table) – and ask the children to try and identify which of the four options is the correct shape or structure of the music.

Which is the correct shape of the music?

SECTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Timing	0:00	0:18	1:07	1:22	1:59	2:14	2:55	3:17

OPTION 1	A	B	A	B	C	C	D	D
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OPTION 2	A	B	A	C	A	B	Cadenza	A
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OPTION 3	A	B	A	A	B	A	A	A
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OPTION 4	A	B	A	C	A	D	Cadenza	A
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Mozart: Using these ideas as basis for creativity

Create a piece using the 'Rondo' shape from the Mozart horn concerto.

The main thing is to alternate a main musical idea (the 'rondo theme') with new ideas, perhaps invented by different groups in the class

Try this:

- Using the home-made horns as the main tune. Perhaps try to imitate the 'hunting horn' style of the Mozart – or play along with the first bit of the Mozart, then stop the original recording but keep the home-made horns going. Make this your 'rondo' theme
- Ask children in pairs or small groups to come up with some different ideas, on the horns, on classroom instruments, on whole class ensemble/In Harmony instruments or using singing/body percussion.
- Make a whole piece by alternating the main 'rondo' theme that everyone plays with the other musical ideas invented by pairs or small groups
- Ask one student to do a solo 'cadenza' just before the main 'rondo' theme comes back for the last time