



QUEENSLAND SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE ORCHESTRA EDUCATION RESOURCE

Australian Curriculum links: [Years 7 and 8](#) with elements of music from [Years 5 and 6](#) and [Years 9 and 10](#)

Suitable for music specialists and general classroom teachers

Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

Background

Benjamin Britten composed *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* Op.34 in 1945 for an education film, *Instruments of the Orchestra*. The film was directed by Muir Matheson and featured the London Symphony Orchestra with Conductor Malcom Sargent.

The work was then premiered on stage in 1946.

Listen and watch

You can find the original film documentary directed by Muir Matheson on YouTube. Think about life in 1946 before smart phones, YouTube, Google, Wikipedia, even TV. You would have had to go to the movie theatre to see this film. At this time, World War Two had just finished.

Here is one example from YouTube of the opening section of the original documentary from 1946 - [*Instruments of the Orchestra*](#).

Benjamin Britten

Background

Benjamin Britten was born in England in 1913 and died in 1976. He played piano, conducted music, and was a composer. He became famous for his opera *Peter Grimes* and is most well-known for *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. Britten composed 14 operas as well as choral and orchestral music and film music.

Listen and watch

- Benjamin Britten [Four Sea Interludes](#) (1944)
- Benjamin Britten [Simple Symphony](#) Op.4 (1934)
(also conducted by Britten)
- Benjamin Britten [Les Illuminations](#) Op.18 (1939)



Henry Purcell



Background

Henry Purcell was born in London in 1659, which was 254 years before Benjamin Britten was born. Purcell was an English composer and composed in the Baroque style of the time. His family were all musical and Purcell began composing from an early age. He worked at Westminster Abbey, the venue for a number of royal weddings and funerals, and composed many hymns to be sung and played in church. The main tune from Purcell's [Rondeau from Abdelazar](#) was used as the basis for Benjamin Britten for his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.

Music from the Baroque Period

The Baroque period occurred between 1600 and 1750, between the Renaissance and Classical eras. Features of music from this era include the establishment of tonality (writing in a key), improvisation over a set bass line (ground bass), and contrapuntal writing (two or more melodies occurring at the same time). The harpsichord (*pictured, right*) was invented in this era. It was the forerunner of the piano.



Famous Baroque composers include Johan Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) ([Four Seasons](#)), and Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) ([Canon in D Major](#)).

Theme by Henry Purcell

Allegro maestoso e largamente

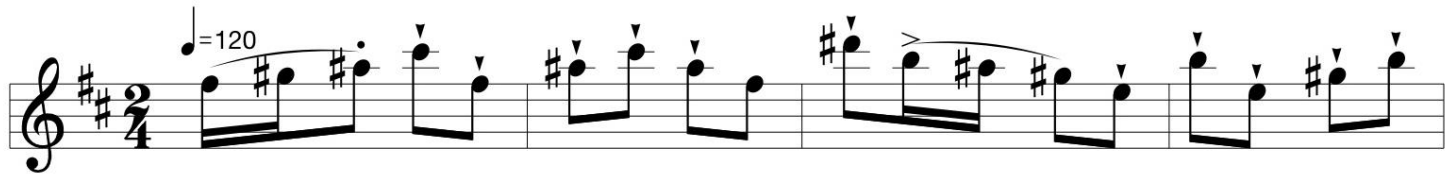
Piccolo

f *marc.*

Rondo form begins with a theme (A) that is then heard many times through the work. Between each theme are other themes (Theme B, Theme C, etc.), which are different to the main theme and each other. A common structure for Rondo form is A B A C A D A.

Listen and watch: Henry Purcell [Rondeau from *Abdelazar*](#) (Z570) (1677)
Listen for each time Theme A is played.

Theme by Benjamin Britten



Listen and watch: [Fugue](#) from *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*

Theme and Variations

Theme and Variations is a form in music where the main theme is stated at the beginning of a work and then repeated throughout the work but changed in some way each time.

The theme can be changed in a number of ways including:

- Varying the melody
- Varying the rhythm
- Key changes
- Using different instrumentation, such as changing the instruments it is played on and changing the number of instruments playing it
- Using different harmonisation techniques
- Adding or subtracting elements
- Turning the intervals upside down

Listen and watch: Purcell [Rondeau from *Abdelazar*](#)

Fugue

A fugue is a form in music where a theme is introduced in one voice and then imitated and overlapped by other voices. The melody then begins by a second, then even a third or fourth voice overlapping the previous themes. The themes intertwine and then be altered and developed in each of the voices.

The fugue was developed in the Baroque era, and Johann Sebastian Bach used this form many times.

Listen and watch: [Fugue](#) from *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*

WOODWIND

[Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra](#) begins by introducing the families of the orchestra. This is the main theme of the work, which, as mentioned, is the main tune from Henry Purcell's Rondeau from Abdelazar:

Allegro maestoso e largamente

Piccolo

The musical score for the Piccolo part is written in 3/2 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes a *marc.* (marcato) marking. The second and third staves continue the melodic line with various articulations and dynamics.

Narrator's text:

The Woodwind are superior varieties of the penny-whistle.
They are made of wood.

MEET THE INSTRUMENTS – WOODWIND FAMILY

Woodwind instruments produce sound by being blown into.

Flutes have a hole which you blow across, while the **clarinet** has a single reed which vibrates to create the sound.

The **oboe** and **bassoon** use two reeds.

Woodwind instruments were originally all made of wood, however now flutes are most often made of brass and the other instruments can be made from plastic.

The **piccolo** is the smallest and highest instrument, half the size of the flute.

The **bassoon** is the biggest and lowest sounding instrument.



Piccolo



Flute



Clarinet and mouthpiece with single reed



Bass Clarinet



Bassoon



Oboe



Double reeds of oboe and bassoon

BRASS

The Brass instruments get their turn with the French Horns playing the first two bars, which the trumpets then take over.

When the trumpets are playing the horns, trombones, and tuba are playing chords marked ***fp*** (forte-piano) with a crescendo sign.

The image displays a musical score for two parts: French Horns (Hns.) and Trumpets (Tpts.). The score is written in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The French Horns part begins with a melodic line in the first two bars, while the Trumpets part is silent. In the third bar, the Trumpets enter with a melodic line, and the French Horns play a sustained chord. The score continues with both parts playing together, with the French Horns part featuring a crescendo sign and the Trumpets part featuring a forte-piano (***fp***) marking.

Narrator's text:

The first BRASS instruments were trumpets and hunting horns.
These are their modern descendants.

MEET THE INSTRUMENTS – BRASS FAMILY



Trumpet

The brass family are instruments that are made of metal. The sound is created by the buzzing of the player's lips. The sound changes by the length of tubing used and how fast the air moves through the instrument.



Tuba



French Horn

Trombone



STRINGS

The string family (violin, viola, cello and double bass) then take their turn playing the theme.

Violin 1 begins the theme



A variation appears in bar 2

All strings take a turn of the theme from highest to lowest

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

Double Bass



Narrator's text:

The STRINGS, large and small, are scraped with a bow or plucked with the fingers. Also part of their family is their cousin, the harp (*pictured above*), which is always plucked.

MEET THE INSTRUMENTS - STRING FAMILY

The violin is the smallest and highest-sounding of the string instruments. The viola is larger and, like the violin, is held under the chin. The cello is larger still and sits on the floor in front of the player. The double bass is the largest and makes the deepest sounds. The player stands or sits on a high stool to play.

Sound is created by vibrating the strings using a bow or by plucking the string with a finger. A bow is made of wood and horsehair (from their tail), strung tightly between the bottom of the bow (called the 'frog') and the tip.



PERCUSSION

Members of the percussion family take a turn at playing the theme. This is an excerpt of the conductor's score showing all the percussion instruments playing the theme.

In order from top: *Timp.* = Timpani, *Tria.* = Triangle, *Tamb.* = Tambourine, *S.D.* = Side/snare drum, *Cym.* = Cymbal and *B.D.* = Bass Drum.

The image shows a musical score for a percussion ensemble. The score is written in 3/2 time and consists of six staves, each for a different instrument. The instruments are labeled on the left: Timp., Tria., Tamb., S.D., Cym., and B.D. The score is divided into six measures. The first measure shows the Timpani playing a theme starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second measure shows the Triangle, Tambourine, Side/snare drum, and Cymbal all playing the theme. The Triangle and Tambourine start with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic, while the Side/snare drum and Cymbal start with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Side/snare drum has a *marc.* (marcato) marking. The Bass Drum plays a steady rhythm throughout. The score includes various dynamics such as *pp* (pianissimo), *f* (forte), and *sf* (sforzando). There are also markings for *poco a poco cresc.* (poco a poco crescendo) and *tr* (trill). The score ends with a *fp* (fortissimo piano) dynamic.

Narrator's text:

The PERCUSSION group includes drums, gong, tambourines and anything else you hit.

MEET THE INSTRUMENTS - PERCUSSION FAMILY

Percussion instruments create sound by being struck. Some instruments just make a sound; others play particular notes.

They can be hit with beaters, sticks, with hands or with each other.



Timpani or kettle drums



Tuned percussion instruments can play melodies

PERCUSSION - Timpani

The timpani is a tuned percussion instrument meaning that it can play a melody by tuning each drum to different pitches. Three timpani are used to play this theme, with each drum tuned to an A, C#, and an E.

Foot pedals then can adjust the sounds on each drum giving many pitches. If you have three timpani in the school you can play this theme.



Using a classroom xylophone or chime bars, select 3 notes, a third apart, and play this theme.

A C# and E

Sing the theme using Do, Me, and Soh

PERCUSSION

Tap or play the snare drum part. Count six *ta* beats to the bar to keep the pattern simple.

Snare Drum

Roll or tap very fast for 6 beats in last bar.

Narrator's text:

The PERCUSSION group includes drums, gong, tambourines and anything else you hit.

Theme and Variations - Woodwind

To conclude this section of the work the whole orchestra joins together to play the theme once more. Listen to a recording of [Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra](#).

The timings of when you will hear the instruments enter are listed (this may vary according to which recording you are listening or watching).

Variation A: 2:02 minutes

The highest of the Woodwind themes is the clear, sweet voice of the FLUTE, with its shrill little brother, the PICCOLO.

Variation B: 2:42 minutes

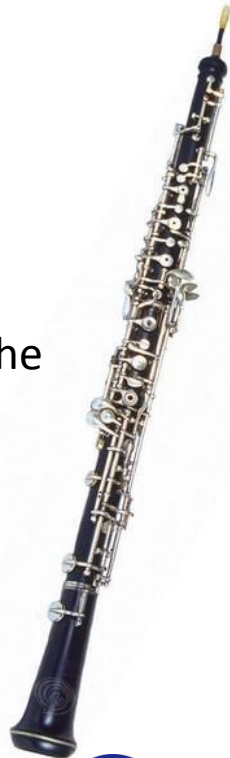
OBOES have a gentle, plaintive quality, but they can also be forceful if called for by the composer.

Variation C: 3:37 minutes

CLARINETS are very agile. They make a beautifully smooth, mellow sound.

Variation D: 4:15 minutes

BASSOONS are the largest of the woodwind team, so they have the deepest voices.



Theme and Variations - Strings

Variation E: 5:04 minutes

The highest voices in the String family are the VIOLINS. They play in two groups: First Violins and Second Violins.

Variation F: 5:39 minutes

VIOLAS are a bit larger than violins, and so are deeper in tone.

Variation G: 6:39 minutes

CELLOS sing with splendid richness and warmth. Listen to this fine sound!

Variation H: 7:42 minutes

The DOUBLE BASSES are the grandfathers of the String family, with heavy grumbling voices.

Variation I: 8:43 minutes

The HARP has forty-seven strings and seven foot-pedals to alter the pitch of its strings.



Theme and Variations - Brass

Variation J: 9:33 minutes

The Brass family begins with the HORNS. These are made from brass tubing coiled in a circle.



Variation K: 10:21 minutes

I expect you all know the sound of TRUMPETS.



Variation L: 10:50 minutes

The TROMBONES have heavy brassy voices.
The TUBA is heavier still.



Theme and Variations - Percussion

Variation M : 15:55 minutes

There is an enormous number of PERCUSSION instruments. We can't play them all, but here are the most familiar ones.

First the TIMPANI.

The BASS DRUM and CYMBALS

The TAMBOURINE and TRIANGLE

The SIDE DRUM and CHINESE BLOCK

The XYLOPHONE

The CASTANETS and GONG

and before they all play together, the WHIP.

Fugue

We have taken the whole Orchestra to pieces. Now let us put it together as a *Fugue*. In a fugue the instruments come in one after another, in the same order as before - beginning with the Piccolo. Benjamin Britten composed the *Fugue* to accompany Henry Purcell's theme.

Listen and watch: [Fugue](#) from *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*

Piccolo

French Horn



At the end, the French horn will play Henry Purcell's fine melody, while the others go on playing Benjamin Britten's Fugue. You will hear both themes played at the same time.



Benjamin Britten's theme

Even the percussion are given the 'melody'.
Notice the rhythm is the same as that played by the piccolo.

The first staff of music is in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and 2/4 time. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 120. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accents and slurs.

The second staff of music continues the melody from the first staff, starting at measure 5. It features similar rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

Snare Drum

The Snare Drum part is in 2/4 time and begins with a dynamic marking of *f*. The rhythm consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, mirroring the melody of the other staves.

The Snare Drum part continues from measure 7. It includes a *cresc.* marking and a *tr* (trill) marking. The piece concludes with a 3/4 time signature and a dynamic marking of *sf*.

Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

Now, [listen to the whole work](#) from start to finish, identify the main theme and the variations of it, as well as the different instruments you hear.



Please note:

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