



**Cambridge Assessment
International Education**

Teachers' Guide to set works

Cambridge International

AS & A Level

Music 9483

Use this syllabus for exams in 2023 and 2024.

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Set Works (2023–2024)

Section A

Johann Sebastian Bach
George Frideric Handel

Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV 1041
Water Music, Suite in F major, HWV 348
Movements: 1 Overture, 2 Adagio e staccato, 5 Air and 9 Hornpipe

Section B

Myths and Legends

Edvard Grieg
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Claude Debussy

Peer Gynt Suite No. 2, Op. 55
Scheherazade, Symphonic Suite for Orchestra, Op. 35
La cathédrale engloutie, from *Préludes* Book 1, No. 10

Introductory comments

These Notes for Guidance will suggest a model of exploration and investigation of the Set Works specified in the 9483 syllabus (2022–2024). They will offer teachers and candidates outlines and signposts, together with some more focused detail relating the music to the key concepts outlined on page 3 of the syllabus. The Notes will leave opportunities for teachers and candidates to make further investigations into sections of the work that require additional study.

The syllabus should be consulted as the comprehensive authority on what candidates should know and learn. These Notes for Guidance must be used together with the syllabus.

What are Set Works for?

Throughout history, scientists, writers, artists, politicians – to name only a few professions – have learned through studying and building on the work of successful practitioners who have gone before them. A study of the work of composers shows this is also true of musicians.

By studying these Set Works, candidates will learn to describe the music they hear and develop skills to know what is important in the overall scope of the piece and how to identify and understand the role of the musical elements in closer focus.

By **repeated listening** to each of the works, real familiarity with the Set Works will be established. Knowledge of the sound of the music is essential in order to engage in the analytical process. Candidates will learn how to listen constructively and, as a consequence, will start to think and talk about the music with peers and teachers in increasingly knowledgeable ways.

In Section A, just five of the 35 marks available relate specifically to the Set Works. However, by studying the works carefully, candidates will learn about a range of devices and features that are typical of the works of this period and be able to apply their knowledge and understanding directly in the context of an 'unseen' piece/ recordings, which is the focus of the remaining questions.

Relevance to other components

Study of the Set Works will establish connections with candidates as performers – score reading skills and interpretation of the musical information will resonate with the way candidates approach music they intend to perform.

Understanding how the music of the Set Works is constructed will include identification of a range of compositional techniques and candidates will find this is a substantial aid when they are working with their own compositional ideas.

Recordings and scores

There are benefits to listening to a work for the first time without a score. It allows the listener to consider, 'What am I hearing?' and 'How can I make sense of this music through my ears?' Subsequent access to the music score enables the candidate to navigate the composition visually and gain insights into its construction.

Candidates should learn to identify sections of the music, often by tempo markings, and describe events simply and clearly enough for examiners to know which part of the music is being referred to in answer to examination questions. In this way, the order of events within the broad outline of each piece should become well-known.

Candidates are allowed to take their own recordings of the Section B Set Works into the examination, but scores for these works are not allowed. In their answers to examination questions, candidates should not make references to timings from their own specific recordings. The range and variety of recordings mean that such references are of little value to examiners. They also do not provide evidence of independent, in-depth familiarity with the music.

Teachers should aim to expose candidates to different performances and interpretations of music, and to discuss these; this will equip candidates to answer questions on different versions of previously unheard performances in Section A. It will also support the wider discussion of music that may be relevant to the broader questions of Section C.

Specimen paper and past papers

Past and specimen papers are available from Cambridge and will enable teachers and candidates to anticipate the style of questions and practise the working of answers giving them confidence in what to expect in the exam setting.

Published mark schemes include the generic band descriptors; these are particularly useful for indicating the range of evidence examiners are looking for in each different section of the Listening Paper.

Section A: Compositional Techniques and Performance Practice

Johann Sebastian Bach

Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV 1041

George Frideric Handel

Water Music, Suite in F major, HWV 348

Movements: 1 Overture, 2 Adagio e staccato, 5 Air and 9 Hornpipe

Five marks are directly related to a specific Set Work in Question 1, but it is the close familiarity with typical features of the music that are highly relevant in their application to unprepared listening in Question 2. Study of the Set Works will also support the development of music literacy.

Question 3 requires candidates to demonstrate their skills of aural perception in the comparison of performances. Listening to a variety of performance interpretations and period-related practice in these Set Works is vital, giving opportunity to apply what has been learned to an unprepared context.

J S Bach – Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV 1041

Musicologists remains unsure about the date of the composition of this solo concerto. It could have been composed at Cöthen (1717–23), but there is also an argument for a later Leipzig origin for the work.

What is certain is that Bach continued to favour the Italian concerto style, especially Vivaldi's use of well-defined ritornello structures. 'Ritornello' refers to a recurring, strong thematic outline, played in the orchestral 'tutti', with potential for motivic development in alternating solo episodes.

Bach was known as a virtuoso keyboard player, but he was also a highly competent violinist. His knowledge of the instrument and its possibilities shines through in this composition. The concerto is structured in three movements with Bach's unique style displayed in his use of dense counterpoint, rich textures and motivic elaboration.

The string orchestra, with its idiomatic continuo foundation, is actively engaged in the musical argument of the two outer movements. The slower central movement is characteristic of the Italian model: a melody of voice-like quality and beauty, with an accompaniment characterised by repeating ostinato patterns.

Learners should understand the baroque conventions of the continuo part, given as a bass line in the score. A group of players is involved in the continuo part. Keyboard players were expected to fill in appropriate harmonies, sometimes indicated by 'figured bass', and had liberty to 'extemporise' in terms of harmonic texture. Learners are not expected to understand the detailed working of figured bass; however, they should have an appreciation of the range of instruments that might be used for the bass line, including cello and/or double bass, or bass lute. Instruments capable of interpreting the harmonic implications of the bass line might include harpsichord or organ, or guitar/lute depending on what is best suited to the character of the music.

The bass line and treble part in Baroque music form a most important relationship. They are both melodic in character with important motivic ideas likely to be present in either part. In studying this music, learners will become increasingly familiar with keys and chords, and the way modulations and cadences define the structures. They should be able to recognise modulations and describe this in relationship to the tonic key.

There is much to be learned from these two Set Works for learners who want to compose music in a tonal style.

The features identified in these notes can be seen and appreciated in the score (literacy) but must also be increasingly heard aurally.

Bar numbers

A characteristic of the music of the two outer movements is the drive and energy promoted by the anacrusis at the start of the melodic material. In the references below, bar numbers refer to the bar in which the anacrusis starts.

Movement I – Allegro moderato

The degree of integration between the ritornello sections and solo episodes in Bach's opening movement produces a sense of organic cohesion in the music, flowing seamlessly from the outset.

In Vivaldi's use of Ritornello form, the sections are usually much more clearly defined. The solo (concertino) violinist plays as part of the four-part string texture in 'tutti' sections but maintains an independent role as soloist in the episodes.

A brief overview of the movement indicates that there are **three** main ritornello sections:

- R1 Opening thematic presentation of 24 bars in the key of A minor.
- R2 Bar 51 onwards, now in the relative major key of C, but modulating to E minor, bar 84.
- R3 Bar 142, return of the theme in A minor.

There are two main solo episodes:

- S1 Bars 24–55.
- S2 Bars 84–142, but extended over the return of R3, variously combining with the orchestral tutti towards the movement's conclusion.

Musical detail

Bars 1–24 – First statement of the ritornello theme

A close evaluation of the first 24 bars of this movement alone will reveal many important features and allow learners to understand how motifs and materials first stated here are later developed extensively.

Bars 1–4

- Notice the leap of a fourth to the tonic note in bar 1 and the initial pattern of conversation between strings and continuo.
- Bar 3 contains two groups semi-quavers related to each other as a **descending sequence**.
- The four-bar phrase ends with a clear cadential shape of dominant to tonic.
- The rhythmic pattern in the first beat of bar 4 with its conjunct (stepwise) movement is a recurring motif that serves to aid continuity and flow between phrases.

Bars 4–8

- A different, yet characterful anacrusis begins the next phrase in violins.
- The repeated pattern of chromatic auxiliary (neighbour) notes whilst outer parts move in parallel thirds is a common Baroque device seen in bars 4–6 and underlines the dominant-tonic harmony of this passage.
- An **imperfect cadence** brings this section to a half-close.

Bars 8–14

- Learners can hear correctly prepared **suspensions** in this section.
- The bass line phrase in bar 8 onwards can be heard as a **descending sequence**.
- This pattern can also be seen and heard as part of the rich texture in viola and violin (bar 9) working in **contrary motion**.
- Scale patterns of both **melodic** and **harmonic minor** shapes can be identified here and throughout the music.

Bars 15–19

- The ascending scale and trill mislead the ears into thinking a modulation to the dominant is imminent.

Bars 20–24

- A combination of **articulation** and **tied** notes continue to provide a texture that variously emphasises strong and weak beats.
- This ritornello section surprises us with a brief modulation to the dominant major key (E major).

First solo episode

The 'new' melody in the solo violin starts in A minor, but the anacrusis opening and the extensive use of sequence binds it closely to the ideas of the ritornello. Throughout the movement, candidates will hear features of the solo section in the tutti and features of the tutti in the solo writing.

Importantly, the weight and texture of the string accompaniment is reduced in volume and density to allow prominence to the soloist during the solo episode. References to the ritornello theme (bar 32, violin 1; bar 51, all upper strings, now in C major) can be clearly heard in the accompaniment. The off-beat link motif first heard in the bass part in bar 4 (two semi-quavers followed by a quaver, in a rising 3-note pattern) becomes an important feature of the accompaniment in bars 26, 28, 34, etc.

In the solo violin part, learners will notice:

- A constant semi-quaver melody running through to bar 43, characterised by conjunct movement.
- The second part of the solo from bar 43 features broken chord patterns and a notated ornamentation on the strong beats of the bar, through a descending sequence of three repetitions over a quaver ostinato harmony.
- The bass line motif (bar 4) forms an important part of the dialogue with the soloist here.
- A **Circle of 5ths** can be heard in bars 29–32. [The falling fifths are easier to 'see' in the score if the first note of each bar is imagined an octave higher.] The bass notes on each main beat are A → D; G → C; F → B.
- This is followed by a section (bars 32–41) that references the opening ritornello motif **and** circles through a full Circle of 5ths, starting and ending in A minor.
- From bar 49, the music of the solo violin provides an extension, facilitating a seamless overlap as the second statement of the ritornello returns in C major, in bar 51.
- The soloist joins the orchestra in bar 55.

Bars 51–84 – Second statement of the ritornello theme

Bach varies the relationship between soloist and orchestra by giving the soloist brief interjections when the orchestra drops out completely (bars 61–62; 65–66). He also lets the soloist take the lead for five bars of extension material from the trill in bar 72, moving to a strong perfect cadence in E minor. The contrapuntal textures in the orchestral parts are still evident, but there is now a greater level of textural contrast; for example, in bars 73–76, the upper strings punctuate the first beat of each bar whilst the primary movement lies in the soloist and continuo parts.

Bars 84–142 – Second solo episode

Learners will note that this solo entry mirrors that in bar 24 but is now a fourth lower. The music of the ritornello is woven into the accompaniment of this solo episode, seen at bar 101 (D minor) and bar 122 (what key has the music moved to here?). In what ways is the music of the solo developed and extended in comparison to the first solo entry? Once again, Bach overlaps the solo with the returning ritornello.

Bars 142–171 – Third ritornello section

The main theme returns in the orchestral tutti in the tonic key of A minor, but the soloist continues to have an independent role in the music, only joining consistently with the orchestra for the final seven bars of this movement.

Movement II – Andante

This slower movement, opening in C major, presents an expressive melodic solo contour against an accompaniment with its ostinato pulse effect in the inner strings. The continuo part has a strong and distinctively shaped bass theme, decorated on every fourth quaver. Learners can be guided to explore Bach's use of expressive dissonance in this movement. From the opening bars, the composer uses 4–3 suspensions, for example, not as learners might expect to see with tied long notes, but fully prepared and resolved within a texture of detached quavers.

The elegant shaping of the solo melody is fully outlined by the composer with appoggiaturas and decorative figurations at the end of phrases precisely notated. This is rather different from some equivalent movements in the works of earlier composers, in which performers often took the opportunity to decorate and embellish repeat sections with extensive ornamentation.

In this movement, features to note include:

- The expressive use of leaps in the melodic contour.
- Bach's use of intense chromatic twists and turns in his melodic writing (e.g., bar 13).
- A harmonic scheme that presents material in the dominant key, G major (bar 15), and supertonic minor, D minor (bar 21).
- The use of the diminished seventh chord (chord ii^{o7}) to modulate to a related minor key, for example, to D minor in bars 17–18; to G minor in bars 31–32.
- The many examples of sequences, melodically and harmonically.

Learners will find comparing performances of slow movements easier to navigate in the first instance. They should be exposed to good 'modern' performances, as well as those that are 'historically informed' and understand the main differences in approach including pitch and considerations of instrumental technique, such as the use of vibrato.

The wording of performance comparison questions seen in past papers asks for a comment on differences in approach to tempo, ornamentation, articulation, and dynamics, for example, as well as instrumentation, pitch, and the 'overall sound' as possible reference points. Practice in recognising these and any other relevant features is an important part of preparation for this part of the examination.

Movement III – Allegro assai

Bach concludes the concerto with a lively movement in compound triple time (9/8). The music has the feel of a gigue, the dance movement often concluding a baroque suite. Its opening anacrusis and rapid stepwise quaver movement propel the music forward with energy and purpose.

The ritornello is presented in a fugato opening of 25 bars. The entry of the solo violin is marked in bar 25, but there is considerable overlap of motifs and solo material with returning ritornello references featuring throughout the movement. The soloist contributes an increasingly virtuosic display, working to a climax ending on a pause at bar 70. The fugal entries now resume in E minor, but with astonishing demonstrations of sparkling violin technique from the soloist. It seems that this is a type of **cadenza**, albeit an accompanied one, where the soloist's abilities are placed under the spotlight.

The final recapitulation of the ritornello material, with soloist as part of the orchestral tutti, begins on the up-beat to bar 117.

Bars 1–25

The tonic-dominant relationship is at the heart of the fugato principle where counterpoint is produced as a result of successive entries of the theme in different 'voices' starting in the tonic. The entries in this section begin with the solo violin and orchestral first violins playing together. The second violins enter with a version of the theme a fifth lower at the end of bar 4, and the continuo returns to a tonic statement of the theme at the end of bar 8. In bar 14, the viola commences a version in the relative major key.

In the bars where the harmony remains consistent throughout, a rhythmic pedal figure is generated (bars 16–17) or its inversion, where the pedal is in the treble register (bars 6–7). This is one example of a figuration that is developed later in the movement. Another is the pattern of the first four quavers of the theme in bar 2. They are reproduced in various guises and can be seen in bars 26; 47–49; 74–80.

Bar 25–116 – Solo material

Bach lightens the accompaniment to accommodate the solo entry. In contrast to the ritornello theme, the music is characterised by a shapely tonic arpeggio figure, starting on the first beat of the bar. It rises by way of a trill to emphasise the leading note (with a punctuating response in the orchestral violins) of the dominant chord that outlines the second part of the phrase. Sparse off-beat chords in the accompaniment allow the sound of the rapid scale figurations to dominate up to the re-entry of the ritornello theme in E minor (bar 42).

Learners will notice:

- A restatement of the solo theme, now in the dominant at bar 46.
- Reference to the ritornello theme (bar 60) and a re-building of a rich texture that functions harmonically rather than contrapuntally, with parallel movement in thirds and sixths.
- The solo violin retains its independent voice as the texture becomes more transparent and uses the four-quaver pattern as a motif to carry the music through a series of passing key changes from bar 73.
- The soloist's contribution increases in virtuosity in the upper instrumental range until the rapid cross-string from bar 82 frames the approach to building the climax marked by the pause at bar 90.
- The passage from bar 82 is remarkable for its orchestral textures and use of the Circle of Fifths harmonic device to build expressive intensity.

Bars 90–116

The first entry after the pause is the ritornello theme in the continuo (E minor) followed closely in the same bar by the theme in A minor (violin 1, doubled by the soloist). The contrapuntal nature of the texture is initially re-established, but it is clear with the departure of the soloist in bar 94 that this section of the movement allows the violinist the opportunity for further virtuosic display in a type of accompanied cadenza. The flow of rapid semi-quaver movement intensifies to a further example of a figuration demanding a complex cross-string display known as 'bariolage'. The soloist connects seamlessly with a recapitulation of the ritornello material in the full ensemble at bar 117.

Learners can usefully compare this section with the opening tutti, looking and listening for all the ways in which Bach avoids mere repetition in the re-statement of his themes and textures.

G F Handel – *Water Music*, Suite in F major, HWV 348**G F Handel (1685–1759) and J S Bach (1685–1750)**

Handel's music was extremely popular in his lifetime and has remained so to this day. Born in Germany in the same year as J S Bach, Handel's widespread appeal may have been connected to the fascinating life of a single man, a cosmopolitan traveller who composed in a successful amalgamation of different styles and traditions. He mixed with aristocrats and the nobility, and in England, he became music tutor to the royal family.

In contrast, Bach's musical career saw him remain close to home with his growing family, in various North German locations. Patronage for his work came principally from church or court. He was music director at the Chapel of The Duke of Weimar and subsequently at the court of a prince in Cöthen. Later, he became cantor of St. Thomas's school and music director in Leipzig. Bach's reputation as an organist and his command of counterpoint in his compositions did not gain him the level of acclaim that Handel found in his lifetime. At the end of Bach's life, the composer and his music fell into obscurity and remained there for 50 years or so after his death. 250 years on, with historical perspective, it is safe to say that Bach's music is perhaps one of the most studied, performed and revered of any composer.

Handel played violin in the orchestra of Hamburg Opera from 1703–1706 (he was a student of both violin and oboe) before travelling at the age of 21 to Italy to further his studies. Here, he absorbed all aspects of contemporary Italian music practice and achieved fame as a keyboard player and organist. His musical exposure to all things Italian remained with him for life, and his achievements in opera and oratorio are amongst his most highly acclaimed.

In 1710, Handel entered the employ of the then Elector of Hanover, who a few years later was to become King George I of Great Britain. It has been suggested that the writing and performance of the *Water Music* suites was a means to pacify the King and restore the relationship after Handel's rather lukewarm commitment to his position in Germany; such tales are not easy to verify. It is clear, however, that Handel enjoyed his life on the London opera scene, and it is in opera and oratorio (in particular *Messiah*) that the composer has secured his legacy to this day.

Water Music remains one of the most popular of Handel's instrumental compositions. As a response to a royal request for an evening of music on the River Thames as part of a programme of public entertainment, Handel composed a piece for 50 performers. It was enjoyed by the King and members of his court from his boat, by the public, and also by members of the aristocracy in the flotilla of boats that accompanied the journey from Westminster to Chelsea.

The nature of this outdoor performance 'venue' impacted on the choice of instruments and there are some fascinating 'period performances' that aim to reproduce the ranks of, for example, Baroque oboes and hunting horns that would have undoubtedly been amassed. A notable performance is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyTfftQvdA

The loss of the original manuscript in Handel's lifetime and subsequent attempts by scholars to re-construct the music has not dispelled the uncertainty about exactly how the music should be played. Learners will find differences in scores, performances, and instrumentation. It is unlikely that a harpsichord was present in the Thames performance (its delicate sound would not have travelled in the outdoors), yet a standard continuo group of players is often included in concert hall performances. A starting place to listen could be: www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVAB2z1RPu4

It is often remarked that this music lacks the complexity and subtleties of Bach's or Vivaldi's instrumental music, but this is largely due to the fact the music was composed for outdoor performance.

The Suite

The baroque suite was an important instrumental form. The dances are presented in an abstract or stylised form, often retaining the rhythms and characteristics of their original dance structures. The movements are invariably in binary form and presented in the same key.

Learners are required to study the overture and three movements from the first suite, sometimes referred to as '*Horn Suite in F*'.

1 Overture [Overture]

Largo

With its origins in Venetian opera, the French overture, as standardised by Jean-Baptiste Lully in his ballet scores, is the model that Handel uses here to introduce his suite. It follows the characteristic design of a slow, pompous opening, often characterised by dotted rhythms, followed by a faster Allegro in imitative style (though this imitation is not strictly maintained).

As befits a grand outdoor opening, the theme in double-reeds doubling strings is presented in a bold, homophonic texture with the strength of the music in the treble and bass sometimes moving in parallel (sixths, thirds), sometimes in contrary motion. The 'pompous' or 'formal' character is created by the figuration of three semi-quavers launching towards the steady crotchet beat. Some manuscripts direct the viola and second violin parts to play in a 'double-dotted' manner, as was characteristic of this music.

Many performances will demonstrate considerable variation in the use of appoggiatura and trills, and learners can listen to the varied ways in which the repeated notes in bars 7–8, for example, might be decorated. Learners can also follow the harmonic movement of the parts, including the transitory modulations in this repeated 12-bar opening.

Allegro

True to the two-part pattern of the French overture, Handel begins the Allegro with a contrasting texture of imitative counterpoint in two solo violins. The terms 'concertino' and 'ripieno' in this movement remind us of the Concerto Grosso principle, where groups of soloists and the orchestral 'tutti' form discrete groups. There is much doubling between wind and strings in this section, but candidates will not be expected to know precise details because of the differences between scores.

Two solo violinists begin the music, but the use of counterpoint and imitation is more flexible than a strict fugal treatment. The theme is divided into three sections; the characteristics of each can be recognised in different presentations as they are fragmented or extended. The use of suspensions in the harmony, with ascending and descending sequences in the linear outlines, are common features in the music.



Learners might notice:

- The 'answer' to the theme enters a fifth lower, two bars later.
- An example of 'invertible counterpoint' is seen in bar 20 as the treble melody becomes the bass entry in the tonic key.
- The second part of the theme with its characteristic shape and potential for cadence or extension.
- The third part of the theme is a development of a section of the initial motif and is extended to form a pattern of sustained, off-beat minims moving through expressive dissonances and resolutions of harmony.

The form of the movement contrasts 'solo' passages of reduced instrumentation with orchestral 'tutti'.

Bars	Description	Key
13–20	Theme and 'answer': Violin I and II, concertante.	F major
20–27	Ripieno orchestral tutti – theme in the bass.	modulating to...
27–34	Solo violins and oboe in reduced texture.	C major modulation to...
34–40	Tutti with the theme in the bass.	D minor
40–54	A passage alternating shorter soloist sections with tutti responses.	A minor C major (bar 50)
54–76	Return of the theme in treble voices. Full orchestral tutti. Theme moves to bass. Concluding bass part emphasises a sustained dominant pedal.	C major (bar 54) F major (bar 56) F major (bar 62)

The texture of the tutti passages throughout retains a basic four-part voicing, whichever instruments are assigned to each part. This is a highly practical approach for music to be performed outdoors.

Learners will notice the varied ways in which materials are extended and developed and should be encouraged to identify the idiomatic baroque figurations and harmonic devices used by the composer.

2 Adagio e staccato

After the bustle of the previous movement as it ends poised on the dominant chord, the loud, staccato, block chords in the Adagio present a dramatic opening to this new movement. The texture remains homophonic to bar 18 and contrasts in a way that could not be more emphatic. There is also a harmonic 'jolt' from the imperfect cadence in F at the end of the Overture, to a dominant chord in the relative minor key at the start of this movement.

Structurally, the second section of the movement is marked by a change in texture, indicated by successive legato entries with highly expressive dissonances in the suspended harmonies. A quiet, homophonic accompaniment from bar 24 accompanies the oboe melody through to an imperfect cadence in D minor.

Learners will hear very different interpretations of this music in performance. In the concert hall, an oboe soloist typically takes the opportunity to decorate this simple outline in a highly decorated manner, and learners will benefit from making comparisons. Such an interpretation would have been highly unlikely in an outdoor setting, where ranks of musicians might have agreed on *appoggiatura* decorations, but nothing more complex.

5 Air

The Air has its origins as an instrumental expression of a vocal melody and, whilst included as a dance option in the suite, it is not shaped in one of the standard dance patterns such as minuet, courante etc. This movement, full of grace and elegance, is structured in binary form.

The manuscript for this portion of *Water Music* is the only one to have survived in an autograph score. Handel's use of horns in this movement (and heard in others) is a reminder that scholars believe this was the first time the instruments were heard in music in England. In some scores, the Air is given as number 6 in the sequence of movements due to the presentation of the Andante at bar 106 as a separate movement. The theme in the first violin part is given here to avoid any confusion.



Section A

Bars 1–8

The two, four-bar phrases of the music are characterised by a dotted rhythm pattern that persists throughout the whole movement. The opening motif in violin I is echoed in violin II and acts as a link to the repeat or following music.

Section B

Bars 9–18

This section is extended by two bars at the cadence, and imitation of the rhythmic motif is more extensive. From the dominant seventh chord in bar 9, the first phrase explores some brief modulations, firstly to B-flat, then G minor, before a strong perfect cadence in bar 12. Returning to a repeat of the material from the first phrase of section A, the music is now in the tonic key.

A principal source of interest in this Air is generated by different instrumentation of each of the three repetitions, and the addition of the sustained horn part in the second and third repetitions. Learners will also notice the important role the horns play in the texture of the ending, where they also join in with the important dotted-quaver motif.

8 Hornpipe

Associated with sailors and seafaring, this hornpipe with its lively triple metre adds a particularly English contribution to the suite. It is very brief, comprising just 16 bars in binary form. Handel directed that the music be played three times, first by strings, then woodwinds, and finally strings and woodwinds together.

The rhythmic character of the music is propelled forward by the various ways in which the minim is heard on the first beat of the music (bars 1 and 3), then more frequently in bars 4 and 5, with an unexpected off-beat minim in bar 7. The texture is mainly homophonic with frequent, quaver passing notes to push the music along.

Section A is an 8-bar phrase of two halves, bars 5 and 6 corresponding to bars 1 and 2, but with a decisive modulation to the dominant key in bar 8.

Section B: with some rhythmic changes at the start of this section, the music quickly moves from C major to a perfect cadence in D minor midway via short descending sequences in the treble part. The final four bars return to the tonic by way of G minor and C.

Like the Air, the Hornpipe ultimately depends on the changing timbres of wind and strings to sustain interest across several repetitions.

Section B: Understanding Music

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

Peer Gynt Suite No. 2, Op. 55 (composed 1893)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

Scheherazade, Symphonic Suite for Orchestra, Op. 35 (composed 1888)

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

La cathédrale engloutie, from *Préludes* Book 1, No. 10 (composed 1909)

Myths and Legends

For the purposes of this syllabus, a precise definition of each of the words 'myths' and 'legends' is not intended. Together, they suggest the idea of the stories of ancient folklore, of narratives which hint at elements of moral truth, but whose historical authenticity cannot be verified. Often, there are 'larger-than-life' characters, fantastic beings, or magical elements. The stories of myths and legends may characteristically be embedded in traditions, belief-systems or cultures and often reference the forces of the natural world.

Peer Gynt

Peer Gynt is the central character in Henrik Ibsen's famous play of the same name. Some incidents in the story were taken from Norwegian folklore and the central character is believed to have been an actual person, famous for his storytelling about creatures known as trolls, living some time at the end of the eighteenth century in Norway. In telling Peer Gynt's life story, the famous Norwegian dramatist reveals a headstrong, self-seeking character, who argues with everyone and is despised by most in his community. He is banished when he runs off with the bride of another man and then succumbs to the evil power of the trolls who live beneath the mountains. Two important female characters in the narrative are Åse, Peer's long-suffering mother, and Solveig, a young girl who has given her heart to Peer. It is their prayers that help set Peer free from the trolls.

When his mother dies, Peer abandons Solveig and wanders far from his homeland to the lands of the east. He becomes wealthy, cynical, and unscrupulous. Returning as an older man to Norway, his ship is caught and wrecked in a fierce storm. On home ground, the mysterious character of the Button-Moulder warns Peer that his soul must be melted down as useless unless he can find someone who will vouch for him. Faithful Solveig, now white-haired and almost blind in her old age, rescues him once again through her love and forgiveness.

Scheherazade

The Sultan of Arabia puts to death his much-loved Queen as the ultimate punishment for her unfaithfulness to him. So that he will never again be deceived, a cruel and grievous law decrees that from this time forwards, the Sultan would marry anew each day, only to execute his bride the following morning.

To put an end to this terror for young women in the land, Scheherazade and her younger sister put in place a clever plan. Scheherazade marries the Sultan, but early next morning, her sister, who has been allowed to stay in order to say her farewell before the impending execution, awakens her so that she can begin telling a story of such delight and intrigue that the Sultan could not help but want to hear the end of it, meaning Scheherazade would live another day.

The tales, told for 1001 Arabian nights, include the stories of Aladdin and his lamp, Ali Baba and Sinbad the Sailor. Finally, the Sultan's admiration for the courage and beauty of his Queen brings an end to his threats, and happiness is restored in the kingdom.

La cathédrale engloutie – The Sunken Cathedral

A Breton legend tells the story of how the cathedral of Ys became submerged beneath the waves as a punishment for the misdeeds of the main characters of the story. The building emerges from the water again at sunrise as an example to others: the bells can be heard across the waters.

The Music

In these notes, bar numbers or rehearsal marks are provided for ease of reference, but learners are not expected to know bar numbers. Labels or names attached to the musical materials are not definitive, and any clear way of describing the music in exam responses is acceptable.

Learners can gain familiarity with the music by listening to a range of recordings and interpretations of each movement. Encouraging learners to give voice to their preliminary responses in discussion with teachers/peers is an important element in developing aural perception.

E Grieg – Peer Gynt, Suite No. 2, Op. 55

The incidental music written for Ibsen's play is made up of more than 20 items, but Grieg reworked the musical material for the eight pieces that eventually became movements for two suites.

The music of Op. 55 was put into its final form in 1890–1892, some considerable time after the music for the first production of *Peer Gynt* was composed in 1876. Op. 55 assumed an independent life in the concert hall, separated from its literary origins. The music was well-received, became extremely popular, and has remained so ever since. The eight pieces are not chronologically related to the play, but each suite is comprised of complementary movements that focus on a scene or character.

The suite in the nineteenth century

The suite in the Baroque period is strongly associated with the art form of popular and courtly dance. In the 19th century, the Concert suite developed to reference links with literature and ballet. In both instances, the music is detached from its original setting.

Norway in the music

Norway in the time of Grieg and his contemporaries was a very different country from the nation of today. Having been under the crowns of Denmark and Sweden for centuries, Norway struggled to support its own musical institutions and develop an independent cultural life.

Grieg's parents were encouraged to send their son to Leipzig for specialist music training by the well-known violinist and family member, Ole Bull. Bull was knowledgeable and influential in helping develop Norway's cultural identity and he introduced Grieg to the 'trollish' aspects of the mountain melodies.

Rikard Nordraak was also an important influence on Grieg's familiarisation with indigenous folk melody by introducing him to Lindeman's collection of 'Older and Newer Norwegian Mountain Melodies' (1853). Grieg did not deliberately set out to imitate Norwegian folk elements, but rather understood this music as an unconscious part of his creative personality. Even though the stories of this second suite see the protagonist travel far from home, the foundation of melodic shaping and character remain close to Grieg's homeland.

I The Abduction of the Bride (Ingrid's Lament)

In the play, Peer snatches the bride of another man and carries her up the mountain, but here, the music begins with that dramatic moment of her rejection and abandonment by the wilful, despised character of Peer.

The music conveys the title character through a leitmotif presented high in unison strings (minus double bass), across two octaves, with added piccolo in the third bar in a higher octave still.



The sense of shock and scandal conveyed by the accented, dotted rhythms, abrupt ending and fortissimo dynamic in this opening could not be clearer.

How is Peer's character portrayed in this music? Learners might identify:

- the dotted rhythm, heavily accented.
- the repetition in bar 2 for added emphasis.
- the perception of gathering pace and fury in the shortening note values.
- a ff statement including a crescendo and cymbal crash.
- a melodic line built on the strong harmonies of 'punched' crotchet wind chords.

Learners will note the similarity of the introductory and closing material and how this provides a 'frame' within which the melodic substance of the lament is presented.

Introduction

The *leitmotif* of just four bars contrasts with a slower, quiet and almost eerie moment where the vitality of the music has subsided momentarily. This may suggest the despair of Ingrid or hint at Peer's inevitable meeting with the trolls in these mountains. The subdued timpani rolls and distant brass calls generate a sense of unease (note the hand-stopped, muted horn sound). Peer's motif returns as an exact repetition but the repeated *andante* section, now entitled 'doloroso' forms a link to the central, substantial lament setting, paving the way for the passionate grief and sorrow of the music to come.

Andante doloroso

Andante doloroso

Violins

p cantabile

cresc.

f

dim.

p

fp

fp

etc.

sul G ----- for the complete melody

Learners will hear the clear, elongated perfect cadence of G minor, towards the end of the first statement of the lament-melody. Distinctive features of the melody include:

- Off-beat, octave double-stopping in the violas, acting as a quiet accompaniment figure for the whole of the melody to bar 34. Does the off-beat 'pulse' suggest the 'dragging' despair of the music?
- Bar 17, 'sul G . . .' refers to a specific instruction for violins I and II to play the melody entirely on the lowest string, G. Grieg is indicating that the melody should be played in the timbre or colour of a single string with no open strings or changes to other strings permitted. In this way, the melody becomes that of a single 'voice' – perhaps Ingrid herself.
- The ebb and flow of expressive detail is an essential element of the melodic statement.
- The quasi-sequential treatment of some parts of the melody in bars 1–8 gives way momentarily to a brighter figure using a dotted-quaver-semiquaver figure and a falling semiquaver motif, both returning later in the melody.
- The mostly homophonic texture of rhythmic doubling in most parts take place around the inner voice of the violas and adds to this sorrowful, almost funereal first statement.

Learners should be able to compare the setting of the melody repeated for a second time from bar 35. Subtle differences that contribute to a heightening of emotion include:

- Violin I plays the lament two octaves higher with violin II doubled an octave lower.
- The 'throbbing' accompaniment deepens with *divisi* quavers in violas and cellos.
- Sustained harmonies in woodwind and brass give a richness to the 'sorrow'.
- Textures are more complex with several independent lines that learners might identify in the accompaniment.
- The distinctive falling chromatic harmonies can be heard as representative of Ingrid's despair.
- In bar 53, at the height of the lament, a weighty G minor chord is further enhanced with a continuing triplet pedal in the timpani doubled in the low trumpet part.
- In the 14-bar extension of this section, the melody gives way to an overwhelming sense of deterioration and decline. The fragmentation of the melody in this final section of the repetition (e.g. bars 57–58; bar 60, oboe) perhaps hints at the 'breakdown' of Ingrid's character under the weight of her sorrow.

Concluding section

At the point at which everything in the music seems to have drained away, the timpani part violently quickens into a restatement of Peer Gynt's theme from bar 1. While the music is *almost* identical to the Introduction, learners might search for subtle alterations that add the final blows to this dark and grief-filled tale.

II Arabian Dance

Context

While the influence of Norwegian melody is evident in the first movement of the suite, in this portrayal, Peer is far from home, and we have a chance to witness something of the European fascination with all things 'Eastern' at the time. In the drama, the setting is an Arabic oasis where enslaved girls dance and sway to the music.

Elements of Turkish music, Persian poetry and Arabic storytelling found their way into the heart of European culture and this influence can be seen in the music of Lully, Mozart, Schubert and many others. The style 'alla turca' was at its height in eighteenth-century Vienna and some features of the music include:

- The influence of the instruments of Janissary bands. The bands comprised the elite guards of Turkish sovereigns, sent into the field of battle by the Ottomans to intimidate their opponents with the huge noise they were able to create using high-pitched flutes, drums and Turkish Crescents.
- The use of percussion instruments to create the possibility of dramatic dynamic contrasts within the music.
- Improvisation around a small number of pitches.
- The free embellishment and ornamentation of melody.
- Reference to the practice of Arabic musicians to interpret distinctive modes or scales in response to the required emotion, occasion or time of day.

The music

Listeners may sense the importance of two melodies at the beginning of this movement with a central contrasting episode using a third melody. The sound world of the Turkish Janissary band is evident from the start in Grieg's percussion section of triangle, tambourine, (military) side drum, cymbal, and bass drum. This plays an important part in the accompaniment of the two initial melodies.

Bars 1–11

Against a simple **pp** percussion accompaniment, two piccolos in thirds announce the first melody:

Allegretto vivace

Piccolo 1

p

The end of the phrase marked 'x' is a fragment whose rhythm and pitch are used extensively as a 'motif' later in the music.

Bars 11–19

The second melody in woodwind unison across 2 octaves is a characteristic evocation of Arabic modality, with embellishment and improvisational qualities:

woodwind:

f

Again, the motif at the end of the phrases, here marked with 'y', becomes a significant feature punctuating the music that surrounds the central episode.

In bar 13 the *tutti* emphasis of this motif on a unison B-flat is underpinned by a textural construction in the strings that ingeniously mimics the rattling jingles of the tambourine/Turkish Crescent sound, and the side drum rolls with bass drum of the percussion section. Learners can track the use of this 'percussive' string texture in the music.

The image shows a musical score for five string instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso. The music is in C major and 4/4 time. In bar 13, all instruments play a unison B-flat motif. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and dynamic markings (f) to create a rattling effect. The Viola part has a '3' above it, indicating a triplet. The Violoncello and Contrabasso parts also have a '3' above them, indicating a triplet. The Violin I part has a '3' below it, indicating a triplet. The Violin II part has a '3' below it, indicating a triplet. The Viola part has a '3' below it, indicating a triplet. The Violoncello part has a '3' below it, indicating a triplet. The Contrabasso part has a '3' below it, indicating a triplet.

Bars 20–45³

Learners will hear a strong drone effect at this point with the instruction to play '*non div.*'. The double-stopping indicated here gives a rough 'edginess' to the sounds, requiring a heavier use of the bow across strings compared to the more controlled sound of the *divisi* melody that follows, where strings lightly double the flute's C major melody. Ornamentation in the music of violin II adds to the playfulness, as do the abrupt key changes (up the C major triad), together with dynamic contrasts. The melody in thirds becomes melodic fragments in sixths, with trills and drum rolls adding intensity to the texture.

Learners should be able to describe not only the technical ways in which the instruments are used, but also reference the effect this has in evoking the Arabian sound world of the storyline pictured in this movement.

Bars 45⁴–97

Now, there is a sudden contrast in the music.

The image shows a musical score for Violin I and Cello. The Violin I part is in C major and 4/4 time, featuring a melody with double-stopping and dynamic markings (p). The Cello part is in C major and 4/4 time, featuring a drone effect with double-stopping and dynamic markings (p). The Violin I part has a 'p' below it, indicating piano. The Cello part has a 'p' below it, indicating piano. The Violin I part has a 'p' below it, indicating piano. The Cello part has a 'p' below it, indicating piano.

Can learners identify these contrasts and describe what happens in the music now? Some things that might be discussed are listed here but there are other details that may also be discovered:

- A 'new' A-minor melody that strongly suggests the oasis scene of dancers.
- The sustained music of the dancers and their movements are conveyed in the bowed music of violin I with a legato cello line, and *pizzicato*, off-beat accompaniment in violin II and violas. The alternation of inner *pizz.* parts with on-the-beat cellos recalls the percussion accompaniment of the opening.
- The swaying of the dancers is conveyed through a smoother rise and fall in the dynamics, and ebb and flow of tempo. This contrasts with the much more abrupt dynamic changes and more precise pulse of the music heard previously.
- The reduction of orchestral forces to strings alone with a triangle on a single note at the beginning of each bar.

Learners can explore the way the A minor melody is presented with subtle variations in each phrase, including the more static four bars before the melody moves off again. Musical references to the 'y' motif above can be heard here and in the A major section that follows, now expanded with additional orchestral forces. The woodwind unisons in clarinet and bassoon remind us briefly of the earlier unison melody before the return of a richer-textured (how?) string melody now setting off in the dominant minor key.

Bars 97–147

An abrupt re-entry of the unison melody of the opening takes us back to a close repeat of the music from first heard from bar 11, and learners can explore this final section for themselves, seeing all the ways in which Grieg draws together the fragments of melody, decoration, and texture, together with his use of the orchestral forces in this concluding section.

It is also interesting to reflect on the ways in which Grieg was able to reference some aspects of authentic Arabic practice, albeit through a nineteenth-century lens.

III Peer Gynt's Homecoming (Stormy Evening on the Sea)

This movement is set in a very specific time frame – a stormy evening. The first page of the score of this movement reveals the huge orchestral forces Grieg is going to use. What do learners *hear* in the music on listening for the first time?

They may be aware of the agitated, restless nature of the opening music, and the danger and calamity that are heard as the music progresses. The musical ideas that may be obvious on a first hearing might include:

- The ascending (distress?) calls that start the music and continue to be threaded through the musical texture:

Allegro agitato

picc./ fl.1+2 *f*

Bar 27
Horns, Trumpets (sounding pitch) *ff*

- A 'swelling' figuration:

Bar 5,
Bassoon I (and clarinets) *p*

- The huge orchestral 'crashes' at bars 27, 69, 107, etc.
- The chromatic undulations:

Bar 79
Flute I *fp*

- An uncertain ending – what is the outcome for Peer?

More detail – the story

This music is played immediately before Act V in the play. The ship on which Peer journeys home is caught in a storm off the Norwegian coast. From Grieg's own writings, we know that the music from bar 107 is intended as a representation of the sinking ship.

More detail – the music

Although the musical ideas that are clear on early hearings of the music are suggested above, it is Grieg's use of the orchestra in depicting the storm with a relatively small number of ideas that is perhaps the most important element in so effectively representing the storm. Instrumentation of the orchestral outbursts across the movement, for example, can be usefully compared, noting how the sounds become deeper and more terrifying as the storm progresses.

Bars 1–26

Although the movement as a whole depicts the rise and fall of the storm, Grieg does not start the music in calm seas – we are plunged into an uncertain narrative from the outset. Learners might notice the ways in which the strings contribute to this effect in the use of *divisi* strings, *tremolando* and sudden surges of volume combined with accented attacks on the notes to give a sense of the motion of the waters of the turbulent sea. The section is underpinned by an insistent tonic pedal in lower strings. The 'distress' calls are restricted to the upper woodwind in this section. The shape of the call is always upward, outlining the open fifth and octave from whatever the starting note, perhaps evoking the raw power of the natural world. The rhythm and accents give a sense of repeating urgency to the deteriorating situation.

Bars 27–69

The lower strings lead chromatically downwards to the low B and the sudden outburst gives us a sense of the power of the orchestral forces Grieg is using. The call transfers now to horns and trumpets confirming the B minor outline, filled with shrill dissonances in flutes and clarinets. The additional use of alto, tenor and bass trombones gives depth and power to the sound, and the timpani continue to add an accented emphasis to the music as the intensity of the storm increases. The extreme contrast of the *pp* section that follows, with a single horn continuing to call out over the now C-sharp pedal and undulating music transferred to lower strings produces an effect of fearful uncertainty. A comparison of differences in orchestration and shifting pedal points of each section will be instructive for learners.

Bars 70–107

Grieg's use of varying techniques on specific instruments – rolls on the timpani or single accented strokes, for example – can be seen in the scoring. The chromaticism introduced in this section, with its mirrored responses between flute and lower strings and an echo in violin I, produces a texture that supports the tumultuous development of the storm. The strings engage in a fingered *tremolo* between the two notes of the interval outlined. The richness of the diminished seventh harmony over a soft, sustained tuba C-sharp at bar 79 begins the build up to what Grieg described as the 'terrific noise' of a sinking ship at bar 107.

Bar 107–166

The way in which the music subsides can be described by observing how Grieg uses instrumental timbre and techniques in relation to the essential 'ingredients' of the music listed above. From bar 167, it is left to the deeper sounds, from bass drum to horn and double bass to bassoon, to quieten us to the point of presenting the ethereal open intervals of sustained upper woodwind at bar 179, expanding and settling on an E major chord, the dominant of the main melody to follow in the next movement. In spite of the slowing tempo and measured pause, *attacca* tells us that the music must remain under control as it moves seamlessly to *Solveig's Song*.

IV Solveig's Song

In Ibsen's work, the faithfulness of Solveig is expressed in her 'song': a beautiful melody heard at three important points in the drama. Reminding us of Norwegian folk song style, an orchestral version is also heard in the play. Some of the words in the sung version reference the passing of the seasons: winter, spring, summer ... and perhaps the whole year will go by, Solveig reflects. The sense of waiting, longing, yearning and a range of shifting emotions are poignantly represented in the shaping and orchestration of this melody.

Although Grieg matches the mood at the end of the storm to the opening of the Song, there could not be a greater contrast in terms of the orchestral resources deployed in each movement. There are no strident sounds from trumpets or percussion and no expressiveness of the double reeds. The harp brings a new colour to the music, creating a very different soundworld. The sonorities of flutes, clarinets and horns are mainly subdued in supporting the openings of phrases and cadence points. Richness of expression and range of feeling is held almost entirely in the string section with violins taking the lead in both important melodies.

While the first melody is embedded with profound sadness, the second melody references a different mood, lighter of heart and determined to acknowledge a contrasting perspective. The first, in common time and in A minor, is alternated twice with the second melody using a dotted rhythm in triple time, now in the tonic major before coming back to the lonely music of the introduction.

Bars 1–7 Andante

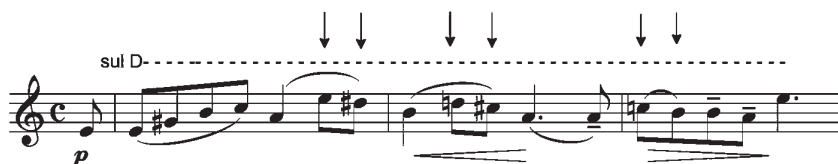


The quiet uncertainty at the end of the storm music seamlessly transfers to a muted unison melody in violins and violas. Simple in outline yet with a shape that longingly reaches upwards and includes a personal element of decoration and vocalisation in the glissando, it is answered with a sense of defeat as the final motif is echoed down through the lower strings. The E major chord recalls the soft woodwind ending of the previous movement as it hangs in the air.

Bars 8–24

The harpist plays a simple accompaniment pattern alternating a lower open fifth with an off-beat chord, firmly establishing the key of A minor. The rhythm at the end of the yearning melody, where a short, stressed note is followed by a much longer, unstressed note, is sometimes referred to as a 'snap' and is a characteristic of folk music.

Grieg provides detailed instructions for the bowing and fingering of this melody in the first violin part, hinting that this is the representation of Solveig's own voice. The second phrase, a slightly varied repeat of the first is expressively stronger, resolving in C major. The third phrase, to be played entirely on the D string, begins by outlining the dominant harmony of A minor and is then characterised by falling chromaticism (marked with arrows) that is also heard in the accompanying string parts.



This downward movement in the smallest semitone steps produces an effect of weary decline, sadness, and resignation.

Bars 25–38 *Allegretto tranquillamente*

This second melody, like the first, captures the essence of the folk tradition of Grieg's homeland from a different vantage point. More playful in shaping and mode, its higher tessitura is accompanied with a homophonic texture in the middle strings and a constant *pizz.* pedal in the double bass for the twelve bars of this section. Gentle, soft, accented, and off-beat bell-like chords in harp and woodwind continue the interplay of overlapping tonic-dominant harmonies, heard also in the previous section.

Bars 39–55 and 56–69

Both melodies are each heard once more with subtle alterations that provide a more intense, deeper exploration of Solveig's feelings and long suffering. Some points to note include:

- A louder opening in the harp accompaniment with fuller scoring in off-beat chords at bar 39.
- Violin I *divisi* now in octaves.
- A bowed bass part, now adding sonority and warmth (bar 41).
- *Divisi* accompaniment in the strings is a richer texture with descending chromatic patterns now in three additional parts, intensifying the anguish of the music (bar 53).
- The contrasting melody is also doubled at the octave on repeat with higher-pitched, off-beat, sustained chords.
- The final repeat of the second melody is elongated as it transfers to the 'coda'.

Bars 70–76 Concluding Section

Learners may usefully reflect on the way Grieg's use of pulse and tempo changes in this movement contribute to the portrayal of the character of Solveig.

There are statements of the embellished melodies, but they do not develop or travel far from their basic presentation. As each section slows and pauses with every attempt to re-start, the music eventually subsides to the bleak, lonely statement of the opening. The music underlines the heaviness of Solveig's suffering but portrays the resilience of this remarkable woman who is ultimately able to redeem the worthless soul of Peer through her love and forgiveness.

N Rimsky-Korsakov – *Scheherazade*, Op. 35

Overview

Learners will notice a close chronology in the lives of Grieg and Rimsky-Korsakov. The Scandinavian composer was as receptive of Russian-facing musical influences as he was aware of the Germanic heritage from his Leipzig days onwards. When Grieg met Tchaikovsky at a famous New Year's Day lunch in 1888, the two composers established a warm and enduring friendship. Russia faces East and West, geographically and culturally, and Rimsky-Korsakov was well aware of the exotic nations that bordered his country's empire.

Rimsky-Korsakov was part of a group of Russian composers known as 'The Mighty Handful' or 'The Five', who specifically championed musical nationalism. The group was made up of Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Most were self-taught musicians based in St Petersburg but had in common the desire for national identification in their music. Balakirev was a mentor figure for Borodin, Cui and Mussorgsky, commenting also on Tchaikovsky's music from time to time. Whilst Tchaikovsky was never part of 'The Five', there are common qualities of radiant orchestration, strong melodic contours, and mesmerising storytelling in the music of all these composers.

Rimsky-Korsakov was destined for a naval career from the age of 12. Largely self-taught in harmony and counterpoint, he met Balakirev in 1861 and, with his encouragement, music became central in Rimsky-Korsakov's life; he later became a professor at St Petersburg Conservatory. Rimsky-Korsakov's experiences at sea as a young naval cadet found their way into several of his works.

Scheherazade

This music is a symphonic suite with its literary basis in the Tales of the Arabian Nights. Although clearly inspired by the stories in content, the composer withdrew the detailed narratives for each of the four movements in the second edition of the score, suggesting that the listener should enjoy the more general mood of the music.

'All I had desired was that the listener, if he (sic) liked my piece as symphonic music, should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders and not merely four pieces played one after another.'

This quotation from the composer's memoirs is further supported by his argument that themes are not to be viewed as leitmotifs always pointing to the same 'poetic idea and conception'. Further interesting material from Rimsky-Korsakov's memoirs is reproduced in the opening preface to the Eulenberg miniature score. The initial programme note remains, even if movement titles do not, and the reference to 'weaving tale into tale and story into story' gives us a strong clue that the narratives overlap and intertwine. There is, however, a 'unifying thread' in Scheherazade's own music on the solo violin as she tells of wondrous tales for the ears of an entranced Sultan.

The movements in these notes are identified numerically and by opening tempo indications, with the translated titles of the first Belaieff score given in brackets. Learners should bear in mind that the composer does not tell the stories exactly; the themes are musical ones that the composer is at liberty to transform.

Manuscript examples

All the examples in these Notes are written at sounding pitch (score in C) unless otherwise indicated.

Examination questions

Scheherazade is a substantial orchestral work and candidates will **not** be expected to have a detailed understanding of the complete score. They should have a concise overview of the music of each movement in terms of the significance and effect of the techniques Rimsky-Korsakov uses.

Some topics are relevant across all movements, for example, the use of instruments and textures, or the unifying role of the narrator and other important themes. Some aspects of the music connect with Grieg's or Debussy's music: depiction of the sea/storm/destruction or the theme of departures; embracing the Orient; new harmonies, new colours.

Candidates should be able to refer to *selective* detailed examples to support their answers. The style of questioning will **not** presume or expect a comprehensive knowledge of the entire score.

Candidates may use the abbreviation R-K in subsequent references to the composer once an initial reference to Rimsky-Korsakov in their essay answers has been made.

Listening – familiarisation

An authoritative performance of Russian music by Russian musicians makes a good starting point and, in this video recording, many of the instrumental techniques can be closely observed:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdnUBQT5Bqw&t=117s

[From the Annecy Classic Festival 2013, Saint-Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Yuri Temirkanov – conductor]

The composer's exploration of colour, often using solo passages of virtuosic display in the music, together with flexibility in tempo and interpretation, make this a rewarding work to experience across a range of different performances.

I Largo e maestoso (The sea and Sinbad's ship)

Rimsky-Korsakov's naval career as an officer co-existed with his work as a composer for many years and it is not surprising to find that his music draws on personal experience and his understanding of life at sea.

With an orchestra that is not dissimilar in its colourful scope to that used by Grieg in his third movement (now with harp and extended wind and percussion sections), seventeen bars of important musical material introduce this movement.

First, a rather stern and heavy opening theme can be safely interpreted as the composer's expression of the Sultan and his brutal edict. It is primarily a *musical* theme, and Rimsky-Korsakov transforms it almost immediately from bar 20.

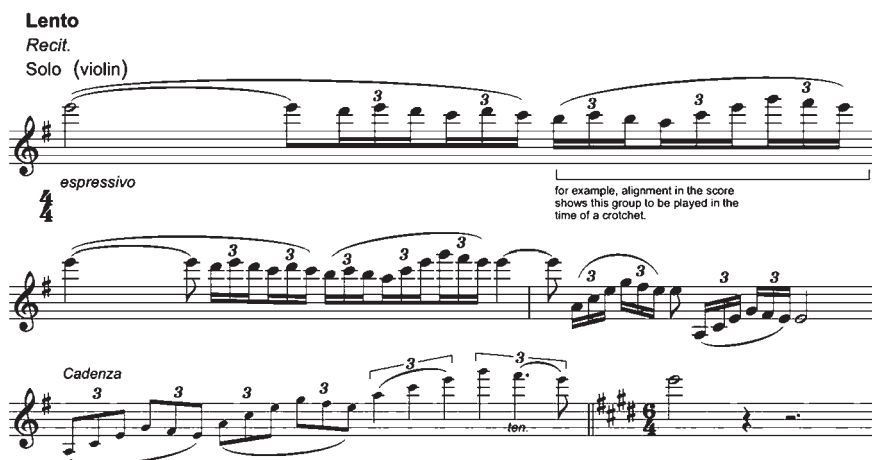


The musical means by which the composer suggests the Sultan in the opening bars include:

- A slow, broad unison statement across 2 octaves.
- Use of low woodwind, deep growling brass and *pesante* (heavy, weighty) strings.
- A theme with the opening descending fourth as a defining interval.
- A Grand (or General) Pause followed by an echo of the end of the theme setting an ominous tone.

This is followed by five timeless, *pp* block chords, held by pauses and climbing into the higher registers of the woodwind, joined finally by a single horn (see also Movement IV, bar 655). Rimsky-Korsakov admitted to being influenced here by Mendelssohn's use of chords to similarly open the way to the magical world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This ethereal sound creates expectation – and we are introduced to the storyteller herself for the first time.

Scheherazade is represented by a spacious melody, here with harp *glissando* chords punctuating her voice in the style of a vocal 'recitative'. The flexible rhythms (see example below) and pitch shapes associated with the characteristics of vocal recitative are clearly present in this expressive melody. The term *recit.* can also mean a solo section in an instrumental context.



The features of this melodic theme with harp accompaniment include:

- A distinctly modal character around A natural minor (Aeolian).
- Stepwise tumbling triplets followed by...
- ...an ascending arpeggio figure outlining a minor seventh chord (found in different guises throughout the work), then descending by step.
- The music unfolds into the calm ocean of a bright E major at bar 18.

How the musical ideas are used

Bars 1–69

A very clear example of how the composer's ideas are not exclusively attached to programmatic ideas can be seen in the musical transformation of the opening 'Sultan's theme' to portray something very different in mood and 'feel'.



- The Sultan's music of bar 1 is 'smoothed out' at bar 20 and extended to form a cadence point.
- Combined with the spacious accompaniment (bar 18 onwards) that seems to portray the depths of the ocean, it is not difficult to imagine the gently rocking melody suggesting the calm motion of the sea and Sinbad's ship.



- The chromaticism at the end of the theme (the general shape at bar 21 is outlined by the descending highlighted notes E, D-natural, C-sharp, B-sharp) is a springboard for the chromaticism in the double basses (bars 22–29, for example) and indicates a general sense of ease with which the composer moves themes to related keys in quick succession.
- Another way the theme is subtly altered is by **diminution**. Learners can follow the interaction of clarinet/oboe and first violin parts from bar 20, and note how the theme reduces in length and produces a sense of urgency with the more rapidly appearing trill figure, as well as shifts in key.
- The cycle of dominant-related key changes is underpinned first by a slow-moving descending chromatic movement in the bass to be followed by a change in direction at bar 31, where the chromatic twists and turns surge upwards back to the daylight of E major at bar 44.
- Learners can continue to track how the composer uses the thematic features (articulation, trills, chromatic movement, cadential chords), textures and orchestration (notice the addition of timpani from bar 44, and then the addition of lower brass, for example) to sustain the portrayal of the rolling sea right through to bar 70.

Bars 70–81

Still within a 6/4 time signature, the texture contracts to block chords in wind instruments over a new tonic pedal in the bass:

Tranquillo

etc.

This new, tranquil section sees a reduced instrumentation (the *pizzicato* cellos can be clearly heard in this new sonority) with a plaintive, insistent theme of just five pitches moving through various solo voices:

Solo flute

dolce

A shortened opening section of the (now) 'Sinbad' theme is heard in solo horn at bar 76 and presented in a 'call and response' texture with the plaintive flute (then oboe) theme against quietly sustained chords and the widely spaced accompaniment figure in a solo cello line.

Bars 94–148

The triplet motif returns in the fragmented transposed solo violin theme and is now lightly accompanied (notice the solo clarinet figure at bar 96) to form a stronger swirling woodwind/upper violin texture against a deep accompaniment figure, building in strength. Learners can explore how these materials, together with a fragmented return of the Sultan/Sinbad theme (bar 114), build to an interim climax at bar 123 **[E]**.

Learners might notice and find ways to describe how the following features contribute to the evolving picture of the ship at sea:

- The diminution of thematic materials, driving the music forward.
- Different rates of descending chromatic lines in the horns and bass.
- The scoring of sustained chords.
- Changes in the rhythmic setting of the accompaniment pattern at bar 123 **[E]**.
- Changes in orchestration and the redistribution of the thematic material to upper brass as the music drives towards a further climax.

Bars 149 [F]–205

There is an abrupt change of mood following the forceful dominant chord in bar 148. Landing in a much softer E major, the materials from the earlier *tranquillo* section return, but with significant and subtle alterations in the instrumentation. How is this new sense of playfulness achieved?

- How does the distribution of musical material here compare to the earlier passage? (Note the accompaniment figuration, now removed from the strings, for example.)
- Note the addition of Scheherazade's tumbling triplet pattern and also an altered version of it in the solo clarinet part.
- The plaintive theme first heard at bar 79 intertwines with both Scheherazade's original theme and a shortened Sultan's theme, heard now in solo cello.
- Contraction and fragmentation of materials remain as important composing devices here as well as the use of chromaticism.
- Bar 181 [H] parallels the earlier section at bar 102 [D] but reaches its climactic heights sooner. The downward pull of the chromatic line is strengthened by lower brass sonorities confirming a sense of the power of the sea in this descriptive writing.

Bars 206–236 Coda

As the music returns to its contrasting mood once more at bar 206, the 10 bars of soft dominant pedal in the lower strings gives the impression of a significant shift towards a sense of response, in spite of the interaction of all the movement's musical materials, distributed in the texture above. The tonic pedal arrives at bar 216 [M] and persists for the final 21 bars of the movement.

Learners should be able to describe how the instruments and materials are used to bring the music to a *pianissimo* conclusion.

II Lento (The story of the prince-kalandar)

Scheherazade as narrator returns at the start of the second movement. Her solo violin is accompanied by harp, now using a different tone quality of the instrument with the music starting a fourth lower. The extended *cadenza* figure spans the lowest notes of the instrument to high harmonics, and also features some double-stopping in the quaver triplets.

Mindful that the composer did not want the connections of the music to the potential programmatic elements to be overstated, it is nevertheless helpful to note that a kalandar is a kind of wandering beggar, perhaps a prince – a son of a Sultan – assuming a disguise in the midst of his troubles. The melancholy theme in the solo bassoon might well represent his sad complaint.

This is an important theme given how it transforms and dominates a large part of movement IV.

Andantino
Capriccioso quasi recitando
Solo bassoon

rit. assai

The motif in bars 15–16 [boxed] is also used extensively by the composer as the work unfolds.

The solo bassoonist is directed to play *ad. lib.* and *dolce et espressivo*, confirming Rimsky-Korsakov's trait of giving plenty of expressive direction and freedom in interpretation to the orchestral performers in the score. The harp on a spread chord of B minor with four muted solo double basses playing a drone-like open fifth accompanies the theme, creating a rustic picture of the vagrant. Keeping the melody within the double reed timbre, the oboe takes on the theme at bar 26 [A]. This personal theme becomes more 'public' as it moves to tutti violins and then full orchestra. For all four of the themes' repetitions, the key remains the same, but it is the change of instrumentation and texture that sustains interest.

This substantial movement is primarily built upon two main themes: the kalendar theme above with linking material that connects to the more forceful, rhythmically precise nature of the contrasting 'fight theme', given here in bars 132–138.

Allegro molto
Risoluto e marcato

Notice the tritone (diminished fifth or augmented fourth – 'the devil in music') distance between the two brass entries and that Rimsky-Korsakov again keeps this music in the same timbral family. The composer himself hinted to a friend that in the second part of the movement 'one might see a fight'. There are several fights in the tales involving various kalendar princes, but perhaps the one between a genie and a princess who attack one another with magic fire can be heard and imagined in the exchanges between trombones and trumpets here. A characteristic of the Fight theme is the strong downward leap of a perfect fourth – the opening interval of the Sultan's music. In the final section, the Prince theme and Fight theme are worked up into the excited, brilliantly colourful eastern dance.

The following *overview* will help learners to navigate their way around this movement as it alternates contrasting moods and scenes of the narrative. Like the first movement, this is composing with orchestration as a vital technique in the presentation of themes and ideas. It is broadly in ternary form [A-B-A] with an introduction, a coda, and some linking material.

Bar nos.	Structure and main features	Tonal centre
1–4	INTRODUCTION Scheherazade once more narrates her opening music, now with an extended cadenza figure	E natural minor resolving to...
5–104	First main section – A	
5–25	Andantino First statement of the Prince-Kalendar theme – solo bassoon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustained drone accompaniment. • drone shifts down a tone for the second part, bar 15. • the playing of the descending triplet figure at the end of the theme reminds us of Scheherazade. 	B minor
26–47	Second extended (how?) statement of the theme – solo oboe with an important emphasis on the motif notes (bar 36) developed later <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other points of orchestration? 	B minor

Bar nos.	Structure and main features	Tonal centre
48–70	Third, initially quiet statement of the theme: the music is now pressing on – how?	B minor
71–104	A fourth extended statement reveals a further strengthening of the character represented by the theme. How is this achieved? Note a hint of the Sultan's music in lower strings (bar 95).	B minor
104–165	LINK	
104–162	In this section, notice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the descending triplets at the end of the Prince's theme are linked to the triplet figure of the Fight theme bar 105. the tritone emphasis in sustained chords including <i>tremolo</i> strings creating a shivering, shaking effect of anticipation, etc. bar 56 – compare this version of the Sultan's music with bar 95. 	Chromatic shifts around pedal points
162–165	The contrasting flexibility and freedom of the cadenza-like interpretations return, with three statements from the clarinet.	
165–347	Second main section – B	
165–322	Can Learners describe the main discourse of the 'battle' here, noting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the interplay between the Fight and Sultan thematic material? the use of contrasting textures and use of colourful military percussion? 	E major with transpositions of motifs and materials throughout
322–348	LINK	
322–348	How does this passage compare to its parallel passage at bar 162?	D minor / G minor
348–424	Third main section: return of the Prince-Kalandar Theme – A	
	There is endless invention in the orchestration of the theme on its return. For example, note the off-beat brass and crescendo surges all adding to the excitement (bar 401 onwards) and sense of triumph.	B minor – with more chromatic auxiliaries
	Can learners locate the three statements of the theme in this passage?	
424–473	CODA	
424–473	The fourth statement of the theme and its treatment acts as a coda with solo statements and reduced orchestration creating a magical moment before the final tutti build up to a sparkling conclusion.	B minor

III Andantino quasi allegretto (The young prince and princess)

The third movement contrasts significantly with the movements either side. It is lyrical and intimate in mood and, unlike in the other movements, Scheherazade's music now appears as an *Intermezzo*, a 'central' section within the movement.

It is difficult to be certain of the initial programmatic inspiration. The young prince of the original title may refer to Prince Camaralzaman, who was imprisoned in a tower for disobeying his father. The opening theme is stately yet languishing. When a genie appears accompanied by a Chinese princess, we might imagine the rapid scalic flourishes to represent the magical elements of this tale and perhaps the loveliness of the princess. The composer himself mentions the princess 'carried in a palanquin' as the whole orchestra plays her music (bar 107).

Once more, the themes and their potential for musical use and development should be of primary concern, whilst contributing to painting the story in a more general sense. Learners will notice that the two themes of this movement share similar shaping and characteristics within the lilting 6/8 Andantino. The regular phrase lengths and two-quaver anacrusis define each melodic entry, and there is considerable 'internal' repetition within the second Princess theme.

Overview

Bar	Content
1–69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> structured Prince/Theme 1 incorporating... more flexible wind flourishes.
69–126	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> structured Princess/Theme 2.
126–142	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> return of Prince/Theme 1, now decorated with descending triplets hinting at and linking to...
142–173	<p>INTERMEZZO initially for violin and harp:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...Scheherazade's music – intertwined with fragments and references to Prince/Theme 1.
173–197	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> return of Princess/Theme 2
197–209	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CODA

More detail

Perhaps it is appropriate that Rimsky-Korsakov gave his two characters themes with common features. Outlining the themes below will help learners to navigate this movement. Bars 1–142 form the largest section of the movement where the two themes are presented and explored in a variety of ways.

Bar 1–69

Setting a very different mood, the Prince/Theme 1 begins the movement in the string section alone; the texture is one of melody with sustained chordal accompaniment. The composer personalises the first 8-bar phrase by requiring the melody to be played by upper strings entirely on the single timbre of the instrument's D-string.

In the second phrase, the music moves exclusively to the G-string and its 8-bar outline begins in a rhythmically identical way. As it descends, a 4-bar extension of the theme will become significant later, as the movement progresses.

Andantino quasi allegretto

The musical score for Violins is presented in three staves. The first staff, labeled 'Theme 1a', begins with a dynamic marking of *p* and the instruction 'Violins (sul D)'. The second staff, labeled 'Theme 1b', is marked '(sul G)'. The third staff shows a 4-bar extension of the theme, marked 'poco cresc.', 'mf', and 'dim.'.

The woodwind flourishes of rapidly ascending and descending scalar material, together with the modal harmonic shift in their light string accompaniment, create a magical effect.

26

The musical score for Solo clarinet (sounding pitch) begins at bar 26 with a dynamic marking of *p*. The score shows a rapid ascending and descending scalar flourish.

Some features to notice include:

- examples of the re-distribution of the theme to other instruments, often paired, such as to the double reed timbre of oboe and *cor anglais*.
- the effect of the use of separate bows (violin I) in the execution of a rapid, measured semiquaver figure in bar 50, combining with Theme 1b, now in a shift to F major.
- the tender exchange of dialogue as the extension materials of the theme are fragmented in the section up to the key change at bar 69.

Bar 69–126

The composer introduces a second, graceful 8-bar theme in B-flat major with a quiet side drum pattern, hinting at the Oriental origins of the Princess:

Clarinet (sounding)

The theme is characterised by a playful lilt generated by the off-beat accent, the tie in the rhythmic pattern of each bar, together with contrasting legato and staccato articulation. The muted *pizzicato* strings and indications of *pochissimo* in terms of speed and expression, indicate the nuances of the delicate sound here.

Features to note include:

- The repetition of the theme in flutes and clarinet.
- The contribution of triangle and tambourine.
- The harmonic pedal in the inner parts of the texture.

The second phrase of this music – Theme 2b – remains muted, but is smoother in this arco statement at bar 86:

- The phrase is made up of two × 4-bars with semiquaver decoration when the music is repeated in oboe and flute.
- The music has moved to F minor with imperfect cadences in bars 4 and 8 above.
- Scheherazade's materials are woven into the accompaniment – rising triplets and harp spread chords – the storyteller tells her tale.
- There is a restrained yet colourful use of the percussion section – triangle, tambourine, side drum and cymbals.

Theme 2b is repeated a fourth higher from bar 94 and in the 4-bar extension, timpani rolls, and exaggerated dynamics contribute to the heightened expression of the music.

violins

At bar 106 **[G]**, the composer shows his total mastery of orchestration using the full orchestra for the quite return of Princess Theme 1a.

Bars 126–142

The Prince/Theme 1 returns briefly with references to Scheherazade's tumbling triplets, linking to a moment of repose in this third movement.

Bars 142–173 Intermezzo

Whilst the orchestra remains silent, Scheherazade plays her music with harp accompaniment exactly as at the opening of the work but significantly, she proceeds to dig deeper into her resources both technically and expressively. As the orchestra joins in, learners will notice:

- The virtuosic cross-string technique of the violin cadenza in bar 145 continues as accompaniment to dolce woodwind fragments of the Prince's music.
- The Prince's extension motif in the violin at bar 153 is now used as the basis for a dramatic orchestral surge at bar 157.
- There are references to harp and woodwind flourishes, similar to those at the opening of the movement.
- A continuing shortening of the thematic material occurs up to bar 173.

Bars 173–197

The playfulness of the Princess theme returns. Learners could compare the passage at **[O]** with the previous, parallel passage at **[G]**. How does the composer treat the themes now as the movement draws to its conclusion?

Bars 197–209 Coda

This is a playful close, with woodwind sounding the descending triplet figurations against rising broken tonic chord figurations in *pizzicato* strings.

IV Allegro molto (Festival in Baghdad – The sea – The ship breaks up against a cliff surmounted by a bronze horseman – Conclusion)

This movement is no simple reprise of the work's main themes. Every thematic reference brings with it fresh settings, richly orchestrated to carry the listener on in their experience of the narrative. There is an additional emphasis on rhythm and speed in the music of this movement.

The four separate descriptions of the (withdrawn) programme are structured as **two** main sections of the movement. Most of the movement is taken up with a portrayal of the festival, a joyous whirl of activity in which we catch sight of the Kalandar-Prince, the lovesick Prince and Princess, and the stern Sultan. The driving brass sections maintain a sense of uncertainty in the midst of this portrayal, perhaps indicating how much the hopes and fears in the stories are intermingled musically.

The movement then references the sea. In the stories, a ship is pulled towards the magnetic mountain, wrenching the nails from the timbers, causing her destruction. The shipwreck is connected to one of the Kalandar-Prince stories rather than Sinbad, but this serves to underline the need to avoid a programmatic interpretation that is too literal.

Listeners should use their growing familiarity with the principal themes of the work to navigate through the sections of the movement, carefully considering the significance of this new context.

Bars 1–30 Introduction

The Sultan's music is not only sinister, but now ferocious – how is this achieved in comparison to the statement in Movement 1?

Learners can compare the pitching, rhythmic elements and instrumental techniques in the music of the Sultan and Scheherazade respectively. They can identify features from the primary musical materials in Movement I that have heightened significance here and in the substantial section from bar 30:

- triplet figurations (sometimes playful, sometimes forceful, sometimes decorative etc.).
- trills.
- pedal.
- increasing virtuosity in Scheherazade's voice.

Bars 30–586 *Vivo*

Rimsky-Korsakov sets the fast tempo in a rhythmically exciting way, using a duple time signature – 2/8 explicitly divided into a range of possibilities:

- Bars of 6/16: six semiquavers treated as two groups of three (compound duple), e.g., bars 30–105.
- Bars of 3/8: three quavers (simple triple), e.g., bars 105–109.
- Simultaneous duple and triple pulse, e.g., bar 142 onwards.

This generates an effect of hemiola – a device used, for example, in Baroque dances – adding to the exhilarating energy and drama of the music.

Learners should now be able to locate and discuss the way in which materials re-appear, how they are transformed, and the musical effects generated in their new settings. There are features of all the themes that seem to merge, and it is not always possible to distinguish one from another in the whirlwind of activity in this fantastical depiction. For example, the flute melody at bar 38 is a rapid version of the Prince-Kalander theme yet containing the major/minor references from the sustained chords of Movement I, the triplet figurations of Scheherazade's music, and an emphasis on the pitch outline of the important link motif (sometimes minor, sometimes major) within the Prince-Kalander theme.

Other themes in their new context include:

- Bar 141, Princess theme (also bars 435; 451).
- Bars 210–230, a bold fragment of Kalander's theme rhythmically extended in the brass.
- Appearance of the Sultan's music at bar 274 **[M]**.
- Bar 322: Fight theme.

Learners might also note the important role of the percussion in generating energy as well as contributing towards the 'Oriental' colour.

Bars 586–665 *Allegro non troppo e maestoso*

The change of time-signature at bar 586 gives a clear signal that we have returned to the music of the open sea and its ship with its familiar, widely spaced, broken chord figure from the opening of the work (bar 18), deep in the cellos. The main theme is first heard two bars later, now in the trombone against sweeping harp glissandi and cymbal crashes.

The image of the sea returns, full of churning and building ferocity. How might learners describe the way this music contrasts with the earlier, calmer portrayal?

Listen out for:

- A variety of string techniques to embellish the texture from bar 586.
- Scheherazade's triplets in piccolo and flutes, transforming to ascending and descending chromatic triplets from bar 599, joined by clarinets.
- The use of expression signs: *crescendo* and *diminuendo* markings accentuate the sense of wind and sea-swell of storm conditions.
- Emphatic quaver repetitions in the brass theme.
- The role of the percussion section in supporting the drama of the storm and the ship's destruction.
- The descending chromatic figure in the lowest of each orchestral family section at bar 619, leading to a brief reiteration of the 'Fight' motif as the storm subsides.

Coda

Many of the delicate solo sounds and figures from the opening movement are referenced from bar 635 [Z] as rising block harmonies prepare us for the return of Scheherazade's solo violin, echoing the simplicity of her music at the beginning of the work. The string texture continues to use sky-high pitches achieved using harmonics, whilst the lower strings play the last utterances of the Sultan's theme.

The woodwind chords here provide a symmetry with the opening of the work and indicate things are drawing to a close. The voice of Scheherazade, who has spun such wondrous stories, rises and fades for the last time.

C Debussy – *La cathédrale engloutie*, from *Préludes Book 1, No.10*

Debussy takes his place along with other composers whose output spanned either side of the turn of the century, as one who had a larger vision than carrying on traditions and adhering to rules in a compliant way. In every aspect of musical composition – form, use of melody, harmony, rhythm, instruments – Debussy has something rather different to offer.

There has long been controversy surrounding the label of 'Impressionism' regarding Debussy's music. It was a term initially allied with the world of art in the later 19th-century, but a label that Debussy rejected as a descriptor for his work. Some of the traits of Impressionism, depicting an impression rather than the reality of an object, concern for and a response to, rather than the object itself, might all be perceived in the 'hazy outlines' and harmonic blurring of Debussy's music. However, this is only one facet of his compositional style.

There are many *other* important features that can be observed in Debussy's music, including:

- The abandonment of traditional tonal practice, choosing to exploit the use of parallelism and unresolved 'dissonances' in seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords.
- References to modality, pedal points and use of pentatonic and whole tone scales.
- Use of bitonality.
- A new rhythmic complexity.
- His pioneering interest in instrumental colour, particularly in delicate orchestral shadings.
- An imaginative response to nature.
- Responding to poetry and storytelling, referencing deeper mental processes.
- An openness to new forms and structures.

Debussy had been fascinated by the eastern music he had heard at the Paris exhibition of 1889. By 1909, there was a surge of interest in exoticism in the arts. This was also the year when Diaghilev's 'Russian Ballet' started their annual performances in Paris including a dance performance set to Rimsky-Korsakov's music, *Scheherazade*. Debussy's own writings point to a connection between his music and the world of dreams, spontaneous association of ideas and the *memory* of experiences.

Debussy's creative output spanned the end of Romanticism to include the onset of 'Neo-classicism', the latter a return to an openness towards the 'classic' lines of older musical styles. Debussy's music has a 'classic' sense of proportion and symmetry in its compact structures. The return to medieval modes, for example, also held many possibilities in a new context.

Debussy's writing for the piano is a highly significant addition to the repertoire from both a technical and expressive perspective. The two books of *Préludes* undoubtedly reference Bach's collections of the same name. An evolving form in Debussy's hands uses the flow of horizontal lines, but this is much more than imitation. Significantly, Debussy's *Préludes*, whilst also numbering 24, do not follow a strict cycle of keys as do Bach's (and Chopin's) *Préludes*.

Distancing himself from the Romantic concept of 'programme music', with its literal musical representation, Debussy famously titles each of the piano *Préludes* with a number but leaves the descriptive title of the piece until the end of the score. Whether the title is *Voiles* (Sails) or *Des pas sur la neige* (Footprints in the Snow), for example, Debussy wishes the performer or listener first to experience the music independently of the suggestion implied in the title. Learners should keep in mind the tension between the organic intentions of the music overall and too literal an interpretation of the programmatic detail of the music.

The music

The mysterious and provocative sound world of the music communicates itself with immediacy on the very first hearing. Many pianists perform the work at a conservative tempo and listening to a variety of performances will therefore be of great interest to learners. The time signature of six crotchet beats per bar, but also notated as three minims per bar in some sections, gives rise to a question about consistency of the crotchet pulse. Some performers push the tempo on from bar 8 playing at almost double speed in relation to the opening tempo; there is some evidence that this was Debussy's intention. Others strictly maintain the initial crotchet pulse throughout the piece.

There are two important ideas or themes in this music. Firstly, the rising crotchet motif to be more fully developed later in the music but first stated in bar 1:



The second minim theme first heard in bar 7³:



Bars 1–7

Widely spaced sustained chords at the extremes of the piano keyboard introduce us to an uncertain soundworld with an emphasis on intervals of octave, fourth and fifth. Within this, the texture of moving chords, also built vertically around these same intervals and moving in parallel, are reminiscent of the late Middle Ages practice of **organum**. This calm, watery opening later becomes stronger with the tide. The shaping of the chord 'motif' evokes **plainsong**. The musical materials Debussy uses strongly portray the idea of an ancient cathedral in terms of magnificent architecture, and already the sound of heavy church bells is hinted at in the resonances of this opening passage. The music contains elements of modal (Phrygian) and pentatonic scales; the descending bass line from G to F to E gives emphasis to a sense of the ocean depths.

Bars 7–13

This second theme gives prominence now to the bell tones in a C-sharp minor tonality – something of a leap from preceding the Phrygian mode – adding to the sense of pervading mystery.

Bars 13–27

There is a return to the initial mode followed by the first theme of 5 rising chords now over a pedal C. The theme is extended and developed with triplets in accompaniment providing a sense of momentum. There are changes of tonal centre outlined by the pedals: B major; C minor mixed with E-flat major (bitonal); a passing use of the Dorian mode as the music returns to C major (bars 22–27).

Debussy pictures the cathedral rising from the waters using clear directions and articulation markings. We sense the increased movement of the waters in the use of shorter note values even as the steady, descending crotchet passage links us to the next section.

Bars 28–41, 42–46

The warm sound of full chords in both hands over the bass pedal C allows us to 'see' the cathedral in full view. This is a chorale-like statement of the full first theme.

Debussy creates the metallic sound of the bell motif using simultaneous major seconds in octaves in the high register in bars 42–45. It is in a passage like this that Debussy demands much of the performer in terms of pedalling, in enabling the various lines of the texture to prevail with clarity; note also the precise performance directions in the score.

Bars 46–71

The descending pedal from bar 42, acts as a transition to A-flat/G-sharp and the return of the second theme and its development.

Bars 72–82

The music here suggests the descent of the cathedral once more beneath the engulfing waves. How does the statement and treatment of the first theme and other musical ideas contribute to this?

Bars 83–88

A low fragment of the first theme leads into the Coda, finalised with the purity of a full, major chord.

The components of the legend – the sea and its ritual tides, the drowning of a great church building and its bells, the sense of mismatch between the power and mystery of the natural elements and the structures of a peopled community – are integrated in a composition that centres on the sonority of sound and, for a large part, nuance of stillness, quiet and slow-moving emergence.

School feedback: ‘While studying Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge International A Levels, students broaden their horizons through a global perspective and develop a lasting passion for learning.’

Feedback from: Zhai Xiaoning, Deputy Principal, The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China

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