



QUEENSLAND SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

## YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE ORCHESTRA EDUCATION RESOURCE

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

Suitable for music specialists and general classroom teachers

# Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

## Background

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

The work was then premiered on stage in 1946.

## Listen and watch

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

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

# Benjamin Britten

## Background

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

## Listen and watch

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



# Henry Purcell



## Background

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

## Music from the Baroque Period

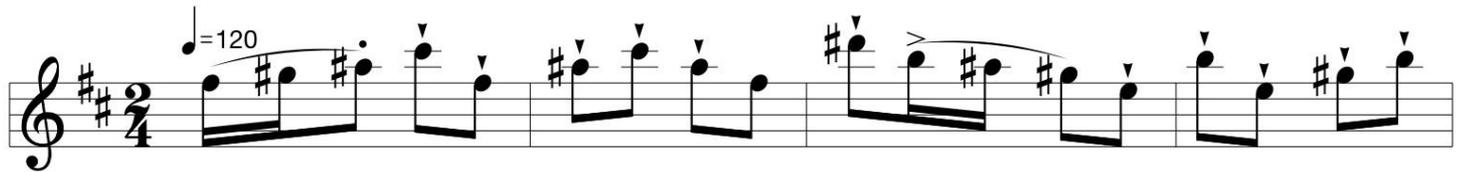
The Baroque period occurred between 1600 and 1750, between the Renaissance and Classical eras. Features of music from this era include the establishment of tonality (writing in a key), improvisation over a set bass line (ground bass), and contrapuntal writing (two or more melodies occurring at the same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



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



# Theme by Benjamin Britten



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

# Theme and Variations

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

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

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

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

# Fugue

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

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

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

# WOODWIND

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

**Allegro maestoso e largamente**

Piccolo

The musical score for the Piccolo part is written in 3/2 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes a *marc.* (marcato) marking. The second and third staves continue the melodic line with various articulations and dynamics, including a piano (*p*) dynamic. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and includes slurs and accents.

## Narrator's text:

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

# MEET THE INSTRUMENTS – WOODWIND FAMILY

Woodwind instruments produce sound by being blown into.

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

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

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

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

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



Piccolo



Flute



Clarinet and mouthpiece with single reed



Bass Clarinet



Bassoon



Oboe



Double reeds of oboe and bassoon

# BRASS

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

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

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

## Narrator's text:

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

## MEET THE INSTRUMENTS – BRASS FAMILY



Trumpet

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



Tuba



French Horn

Trombone





# MEET THE INSTRUMENTS - STRING FAMILY

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

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



# PERCUSSION

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

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

The image shows a musical score for a percussion ensemble. The score is written for six instruments: Timpani (Timp.), Triangle (Tria.), Tambourine (Tamb.), Side/snare drum (S.D.), Cymbal (Cym.), and Bass Drum (B.D.). The time signature is 3/2. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into six measures. The Timpani part starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and plays a series of notes. The Triangle part starts with a forte (*fz*) dynamic and plays a series of notes. The Tambourine part starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and plays a series of notes. The Side/snare drum part starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and plays a series of notes. The Cymbal part starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and plays a series of notes. The Bass Drum part starts with a forte (*fp*) dynamic and plays a series of notes. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation marks, and a crescendo marking (*poco a poco cresc.*) under the Bass Drum part.

## Narrator's text:

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

## MEET THE INSTRUMENTS - PERCUSSION FAMILY

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

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



Timpani or kettle drums



Tuned percussion instruments can play melodies



# PERCUSSION

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

Snare Drum

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

## Narrator's text:

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

# Theme and Variations - Woodwind

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

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

## **Variation A: 2:02 minutes**

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

## **Variation B: 2:42 minutes**

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

## **Variation C: 3:37 minutes**

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

## **Variation D: 4:15 minutes**

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



# Theme and Variations - Strings

## **Variation E: 5:04 minutes**

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

## **Variation F: 5:39 minutes**

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

## **Variation G: 6:39 minutes**

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

## **Variation H: 7:42 minutes**

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

## **Variation I: 8:43 minutes**

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



# Theme and Variations - Brass

## Variation J: 9:33 minutes

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



## Variation K: 10:21 minutes

I expect you all know the sound of TRUMPETS.



## Variation L: 10:50 minutes

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



# Theme and Variations - Percussion

## **Variation M : 15:55 minutes**

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

First the TIMPANI.

The BASS DRUM and CYMBALS

The TAMBOURINE and TRIANGLE

The SIDE DRUM and CHINESE BLOCK

The XYLOPHONE

The CASTANETS and GONG

and before they all play together, the WHIP.

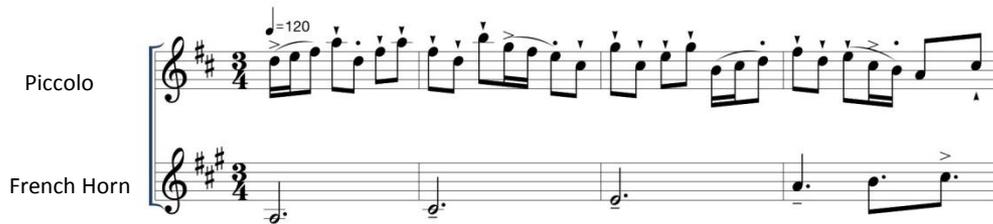
# Fugue

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

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

Piccolo

French Horn



Musical score for Piccolo and French Horn. The Piccolo part starts with a tempo marking of 120. The French Horn part begins with a sustained note.

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



Musical score for Piccolo and French Horn, continuing from the previous section. The Piccolo part continues with a complex rhythmic pattern. The French Horn part continues with a sustained note.



# Benjamin Britten's theme

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

Musical notation for the first staff of the theme. It is in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and 2/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accents and slurs.

Musical notation for the second staff of the theme, starting at measure 5. It continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns and accents.

Snare Drum

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

Musical notation for the Snare Drum part, starting at measure 7. It includes a *cresc.* marking and a *tr* (trill) marking. The time signature changes to 3/4 at the end of the staff, with a dynamic marking of *sf*.

# Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

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

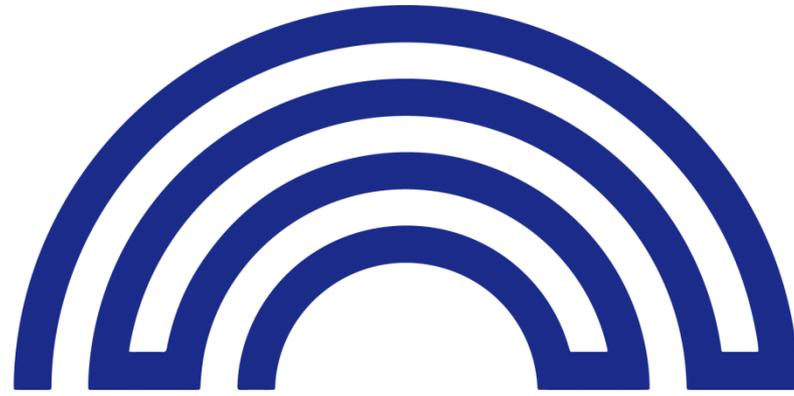


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