

Sounding the Somme – Power of Pipes

Lesson Plan

Introduce the class to the project and explain they are going to be exploring the role and music of the bagpipes in the military before writing a piping inspired tune of their own. Recap on the Somme Starts lesson and any other Sounding the Somme projects you have undertaken as necessary.

1. Lesson 1 – Pipers in War

Discussion

Ask the pupils think about the bagpipes and generate a discussion on where and when they are used. Hopefully the war, or remembrance services will be part of this discussion. Using the web-based resources on the Sounding the Somme website, explain how piping has always been part of Scottish military history and played an important role in WW1.

When discussing the role of bagpipers in the war, include the following points:

- Pipes have always played a part in Scottish military history and this continued during WW1 and beyond.
- Originally, pipes were used in battles to signal tactical movements to the troops.
- There were 2,500 pipers in WW1.
- The sound of the pipes boosted morale amongst the troops and pipers often led men ‘over the top’ of trenches and into battle.
- They also used to keep soldiers entertained away from the front line and would lead sing-alongs in the evenings.
- Pipers were unarmed and often an easy target for the enemy in battle, as a result, around one thousand pipers died during WW1.
- Pipers were present on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, including Pipe Major William Lawrie who was injured in battle and died later that year, who wrote a retreat march tune *Battle of the Somme*, designed to be played at the end of the day and to lead men away from battle
- Today, it is not known exactly which tunes were played to lead men ‘over the top’ so were are focusing on the tunes inspired by the Somme for this project

Watch some of the BBC documentary *Pipers of the Trenches*. We have made some recommendations of which short extracts to watch, but this could be expanded if desired.

Introduction of Tunes – The Battle of the Somme

Using the online resources, listen to the recordings of the tunes the *Battle of the Somme* and *Sunset at the Somme*. Explain that this tune was written by a piper who was actually in the battle.

Discuss with pupils how the music makes them feel? What are the characteristics of a pipe tune, and particularly one that would lead men into battle? What do the tunes make pupils think of now 100 years later? Discuss the role of bagpipes in Remembrance Services held each year in November.

Create a mind map or a list of words or phrases on the whiteboard based on the responses, focusing on adjectives and emotions as key words.

Pupils should be aware that this is a reflective tune, written as a response to a battle, possibly inspired by the countryside it was fought in, or the people that took part in it. We have paired it with another tune also inspired by the events at the Somme written by another soldier who was there, Pipe Major George Stuart McLennon. Conclude the lesson.

2. Lesson 2 - Writing a tune

Recap on the previous lesson and explain to pupils that this week they will start to write their own tunes.

Traditional Music styles

Before pupils start to write their own tunes and melodies, go through some of the musical elements of writing traditional tunes. Play demonstrations to the class or use online examples if required.

This is a very short guide of things to think about before composing:

i) Decide on the metre/time signature of the tune

Traditional piping and dance tunes fall into the following categories:

Reels

4/4 time signature, usually quite fast so it feels like it is in two. It has an A part and B part of eight bars each, which are repeated.

Jigs

6/8 time signature (compound time) and also has a repeated A and B part of eight bars long.

Slip Jig

A jig in three, with a time signature of 9/8 and a lilting feel.

Hornpipe

A tune in 4/4 with the emphasis on the first and third beat. This style of tune originated in the maritime tradition.

Waltz

A simple tune in 3/4

This is just a guide, you certainly don't have to stick to any one particular traditional music style for this if you would prefer not to.

ii) Decide on a key, and this might be affected by your instrumentation

Most traditional tunes for bagpipes are written in the key of D major, with a dominant drone on an A. (NB This doesn't mean that they are tuned to this, most bagpipes today tune to a concert Bb at 466.16 Hz.) Many traditional tunes that work well in this style are often in the key of D major, A major and E minor but you can pick any key for your tune.

When writing your melody, try to be moved by the sounds you are creating and have an emotional connection to the music. Think about the soldiers and what they went through in WW1 as you write your tune. Play around with ideas, sketch outlines.

iii) Add ornamentation for a more traditional sound:

Ornamentation is used in traditional music and often gives it its distinctive sound. Ornamentation can be left up to individual performer and is sometime written out. Examples of ornaments used in pipe music can be found written out on the scores of the pipe tunes included in this lesson. We suggest adding some simple ornamentation at the end of the compositional process to enhance the melody. The most common ornaments used in traditional music are:

Grace Notes/ Acciaccatura – particularly used on long notes and repeated notes (a technical necessity for the pipes as they can't play repeated notes), but not always from the note directly above or below.

Mordent/Inverted Mordent

Turns

Scottish Snaps

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Use the rest of this lesson to compose the tunes. The methods of composition to be used for this task are entirely up to you and should reflect how your school normally teaches composition. This could be using keyboards/pianos, computer facilities (Logic, Cubase or Sibelius) or other methods. Pupils should work alone for this task, but young pupils might want to work in pairs or small groups.

3. Lesson 3 – Continuing Compositions

Recap on the work completed in the previous lesson.

Use this lesson to continue composing tunes. For any pupils ready to move on, start to add some accompaniment to the tune and think about arranging it for a small ensemble. Simple drones are a good place to start, and would be used on the bagpipes, then build up to chord progressions and more interesting textures.

4. Lesson 4 – Performances

Recap on the work completed in the previous lesson.

Finalise the compositions and arrangements and produce written scores of the tunes during this lesson. Try pairing up different tunes to make a medley, as would be done in traditional music. Share the piece with the whole class.

These compositions can act as standalone pieces to be performed in a school concert or at a Somme100 FILM centenary performance. The melodies can also be used as original material for the Somme Unseen Project.

You could share the work created with the whole school at a concert, a Somme100 FILM performance, or/and platformed on our project website!