

Strauss – Sunrise

Listening

Listen to the Philharmonia Orchestra play this music on the link [here ►](#)

Context

About the composer: Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Richard Strauss was a German composer and conductor who lived during the late **Romantic period of music**. He became famous for writing large-scale orchestral works that used instruments of the orchestra to tell stories and create vivid musical pictures. Strauss was interested in how music could represent ideas, emotions and scenes to tell stories. His music often uses powerful contrasts in dynamics, texture and orchestration.

About the piece: Sunrise from Also sprach Zarathustra (1896)

This famous opening section is known as 'Sunrise'. It was inspired by the writings of the famous philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and is intended to represent the rising of the sun and the start of a new day. You might recognise this music from films and adverts you might have seen on television.

Listening Guide

Timings	Musical features to listen out for
0:00-0:22	Low drone (sustained note) from the organ, double basses and low brass
0:22-0:33	Three rising notes from the trumpets with a crescendo (getting louder)
0:33-0:43	Two loud chords from the full orchestra with a crescendo and timpani notes with a rallentando (getting slower)
0:44-1:04	Repetition of the three trumpet notes and the orchestra chords
1:05-2:00	Repetition of the three trumpet notes, louder, with the orchestra extending their idea to include cymbal crashes, loud chords and dramatic crescendos, giving a sense of excitement, ending with a long major chord (listen out for the organ at the end!)

Key musical features

- **Instrumentation:** Full symphony orchestra including organ
- **Tempo:** Slow, broad tempo
- **Dynamics:** Strong contrasts between loud (forte/fortissimo) and soft (piano/pianissimo)
- **Texture:** Initially very thin but becomes gradually thicker as the music progresses
- **Rhythm:** Long, sustained pedal points with dramatic chords
- **Melody:** Simple rising brass lines - heroic
- **Mood:** Sense of wonder, excitement and power
- **Harmony:** Use of major and minor chords

Short 5-minute task: Sunrise Listening Challenge

Ask pupils:

“What do you think a sunrise sounds like?”

Collate responses to see what ideas and words your learners come up with. You might want to collate these on a board or similar, displaying their ideas.

Play the piece of music, perhaps selecting the opening 45 seconds, asking pupils to consider:

- Is the music loud (forte) or quiet (piano) at the start? Does it change?
- Is the tempo of the music fast or slow?
- What instrument families are playing?
- What kind of feeling does the music give you?
- Ask students to write their thoughts down – this could be a single word, longer sentences or even as a doodle or drawing
- Discuss as a class

Add these ideas to the collection of thoughts on the board to create a word collage for the piece of music as a means of an introduction to the music.

Stretch and Challenge

- Challenge pupils to identify how Strauss uses the orchestra to create particular moods
- Challenge pupils to identify changes in texture and why this might happen (link to the movement from darkness into light, as the sun rises)

Support and Scaffold

- Consider use of picture cards showing the sun rising, mountains, the sky changing colour, space
- Use these to help identify the sun rising throughout the piece

Medium 20-minute task: Sunrise Soundscape Performance

This task looks to create a link between music and art, linking how Strauss uses music to paint pictures of scenes and emotions. This is often called programme music – where the music represents a scene, a story or an emotion – and it was very popular in the Romantic Period of music. This task looks to allocate contrasting sounds representing the sunrise to encourage pupils to think about creating their own sunrise soundscape.

This task would work in small groups, where pupils in each group are assigned different sounds. For example:

Sunrise Element	Sound idea
Night-time	Body percussion heartbeat
First light	Finger tapping
Birds waking	High pitched vocal sounds
Sun rising slowly	Glockenspiels/chime bars
Full daylight	Regular rhythm using clapping and stomps

The idea behind this soundscape is to layer the sounds on top of each other, starting with the night-time sounds, adding the first light, then the birds waking, and so on. This helps to introduce pupils to texture and how multiple layers can be put on top of each other to help tell a story – in this case, the sun rising. This is similar to how Strauss layers instruments together in his piece.

As an extension to this, you might want to ask pupils to represent their composition in the form of art – for example, a drawing or painting to depict the different elements of sunrise.

Stretch and Challenge

- Create varied rhythmic patterns
- Use dynamics, including crescendo and diminuendo, to create contrast
- Appoint pupil conductors

Support and Scaffold

- Use visual cue cards
- Allow pupils to copy ideas – e.g. an idea from a teacher
- Use one pattern which can be repeated

45-minute task: Performing and Composing a sunrise

Listen again to Strauss's recording. As a class, discuss:

- Why do you think Strauss chose brass instruments and an organ?
- Why are the opening notes so powerful in showing a sunrise?
- Why does the opening brass melody gradually get higher?
- What effect do the timpani have?

This task involves trying to perform some of Strauss's piece, before moving to write their own sunrise composition.

Performing a Sunrise

The opening section of this piece is really effective to try and recreate using body percussion, voices and instruments. There are four main elements:

1. A low drone on the note C
2. A rising 3 note trumpet melody, using notes C – G – C (where the last C is an octave higher)
3. Two chords – **C major** (CEG) followed by **C minor** (CEbG)
4. A timpani roll and dramatic moment using the notes C and G

The score below helps to show these different elements together. Try performing this as a class, using voices, body percussion and instruments that you might have available in your setting.

The musical score is written for four parts: Trumpet, Organ, Full Orchestra, and Timpani, in 4/4 time. The Trumpet part begins with a rising three-note melody (C, G, C) in the first measure. The Organ part provides a low drone on the note C throughout the first five measures. The Full Orchestra part shows two chords: C major (CEG) in the third measure and C minor (CEbG) in the fourth measure. The Timpani part features a roll in the fourth measure, followed by a dramatic moment using the notes C and G in the fifth measure.

Try swapping groups around so they get to experience the four different components that make up this piece, aiding their understanding.

Composing a Sunrise

This task looks for pupils to create their own sunrise theme, using similar ideas to those found in Strauss' piece.

Each composition then should be performed to the class. To scaffold the task, ask pupils to include:

- A quiet beginning using a drone and rising melody
- A crescendo
- A repetition with a thickened texture
- A loud, strong ending

You may want to give your class a free structure to work in, but if you need a little bit more of a scaffolded structure, consider:

Section A: Before Dawn – the Dark Night

- Quiet dynamics
- Drone on a low sound to create stillness
- Slow tempo – perhaps using a slow heartbeat as an ostinato
- Sparse texture with a rising melody

Section B: The Rising Sun

- Crescendo
- Add more instruments/sounds gradually over the top of Section A – using pitches which gradually get higher will help create the effect of the sun rising. Dropping the drone out for a few seconds will also have a big impact on the feel of the music!
- Clearer sense of a beat with repeated rhythms
- Increase in tempo
- Make the melody rise higher – like the sun in the sky

Section C: Full Daylight

- Loud dynamics
- Lots of instruments playing at the same time to create a dense texture, rich and full
- Confident ending using a rallentando and triumphant timpani stomps

Stretch and Challenge

- Consider use of ostinato patterns
- Use contrasting textures
- Compose a melody and sing or play this
- Conduct the ensemble
- Add pitches – consider using the pentatonic scale C D E G A to create a magical sound world

Support and Scaffold

- Use a fixed structure as a composition plan
- Use given rhythmic prompts – for example Ta Ta Ta Ta, Ta Ti-Ti Ta Ta

Links to other subjects

This piece can link well to these other areas of the school curriculum:

Subject	Links
PSHE	Use of descriptive language, development of speaking and listening skills, use of a narrative structure (beginning – middle – end)
Science	Reference to the rotation of the Earth and why we get sunrises (and sunsets)
PSHE	The emotional impact of music on the listener
Drama	Performing and expressing mood through movement
Art	Paint, draw or sketch a sunrise based on Strauss' music
Computing	Consider recording the composition if you have software available to be played alongside the artwork

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Drone	A long sustained note, often in the bass instruments
Crescendo	A dynamic marking meaning getting louder
Diminuendo	A dynamic marking meaning getting quieter
Rallentando	A tempo instruction to get slower
Romantic Period	A period of Western Classical music from roughly 1830-1900. This involved expanding the instruments of the orchestra (including instruments like the piccolo, cor anglais, contrabassoon, harp, trombones, tuba and lots more percussion instruments)
Ostinato	A repeated rhythm, melody or pattern
Programme Music	Music that represents a story, a scene or an emotion. Very popular during the Romantic Period of Western Classical Music
Pentatonic	Pentatonic A five note scale – e.g. using the notes C D E G A
Major chord	For example CEG – major chords often sound happy
Minor chord	For example CEBG – minor chords often sound sad

Sensory activities for all

Richard Strauss – Also sprach Zarathustra

Short task: Light and Dark

Sensory focus: Visual attention

Resources:

- Torches
- Fibre optic lights
- Bubble tube

Activity: Keep the room dim at the start. As the famous opening grows louder, gradually introduce more light until the room is bright, symbolising sunrise. Reduce the lighting again as the music becomes calmer.

Musical link: Responding to increasing dynamic level (volume) and texture (number of layers) in the music.

Medium task: Planet Discovery Trail

Sensory focus: Exploration and communication

Resources:

- Pictures or models of planets
- Space-themed sensory objects

Activity: Place different “planets” around the room. As the music plays, pupils move between stations to explore each one using touch, sight and (where appropriate) smell.

Development ideas:

- Include instruments at each station.

Resources:

- Chime bars
- Ocean drum
- Rainmaker
- Wind chimes

Activity: Invite pupils to choose an instrument that they think matches the planet or atmosphere. Explore playing quietly for calm moments and more boldly for dramatic sections.

Musical link: Develop knowledge of instruments and how to play them to fit with the mood of the music.

Longer task: Colour the Music

Sensory focus: Creative expression

Resources

- Large paper
- Wax crayons or paint sticks

Activity: Invite pupils to make marks that match the music:

- Big, bold lines for loud brass fanfares
- Gentle circles and swirls for quieter sections
- Dots or stars for sparkling musical moments

The focus is on responding to the music rather than creating a finished picture.

Musical link: Interpreting musical elements e.g. dynamics, tempo, instrumentation, through another art medium.