

Beethoven – Overture to The Creatures of Prometheus

Listening

This piece was recorded by the Philharmonia during the Covid-19 pandemic. The video below contains the full piece:

[Listen here ►](#)

Listen out for the introduction from 2:11 and the Overture from 5:37. The introduction does look at the possible different plots and contains some animations to explain the plot which might be useful for your pupils to access the music, but please do watch the video introduction prior to showing your class to ensure it is appropriate for them.

Context

About the composer: Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven was a German composer who is considered one of the greatest musicians of all time. He lived during the transition between the Classical and Romantic periods of music and is famous for works such as his Fifth Symphony, Ninth Symphony and Für Elise.

Beethoven was known for his powerful musical ideas and his ability to tell stories through music. Despite gradually losing his hearing, he continued to compose some of the world's most famous music.

About the piece: Overture from The Creatures of Prometheus (1801)

The Creatures of Prometheus is a ballet written by Beethoven in 1801. A ballet is a story told through dance and music. The story is based on Prometheus,

a figure from Greek mythology. According to legend, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans, helping them gain knowledge, creativity and civilisation.

The Overture is the opening music to the ballet. It introduces the dramatic mood of the story and prepares the audience for the adventure ahead.

Listening Guide

Timings	Musical features to listen out for
5:37-6:40	Adagio (slow) tempo for this section. The piece opens with fortissimo (very loud) chords from the full orchestra followed by a much quieter (piano) section based in C major
6:41-7:05	Allegro (fast) section. This has very fast violin writing with the woodwind and brass having chords above. These are sometimes syncopated (off beat) to give the music even more energy
7:06-7:24	The fast tempo remains, but the music changes character with woodwind having an ascending melodic idea. The major key remains but we are now in G major , a closely related key to C major
7:25-8:16	From 7:25 there is more of a hint at minor tonalities and chromatic melodies before the brighter major key returns. There is strong contrast between fortissimo (very loud) and piano (quiet) in this section before the opening allegro idea is hinted at
8:17-8:42	A return to the opening Allegro idea (6:41). There are some changes to the music to keep the listener on their toes and keep the excitement up
8:43-10:22	A repeat of the music from 7:06 but now in a different key (C major). The music to the end builds on the music from before, finishing triumphantly in C major with the full orchestra

Key musical features

- **Instrumentation:** Full Classical orchestra including strings, woodwind, brass and timpani
- **Tempo:** Opening Adagio (slow), then Allegro (very fast)
- **Dynamics:** Sudden changes between fortissimo (very loud) and piano (quiet) sections
- **Texture:** Mostly melody with accompaniment, becoming richer as more instruments join
- **Rhythm:** Strong, driving rhythms with syncopation that create excitement and momentum. Lots of fast quavers in violins
- **Melody:** Memorable melodic ideas passed between different instruments
- **Mood:** Heroic, adventurous, exciting and dramatic
- **Harmony:** Clear Classical harmonies creating tension and resolution, based around C major

Short 5-minute task: Heroic Listening Challenge

This task acts as an introduction to the piece, looking at the way the music makes the characters appear.

Play the opening 90 seconds of the piece. Ask pupils to consider:

- Is the character brave or frightened?
- Is the character a hero, villain or explorer?
- Which musical features helped you decide?

Discuss your ideas as a class and as a means to introduce the story of Prometheus, and how he stole fire from the Gods. For a more creative response, ask your learners to consider responding by:

- Drawing a hero symbol
- Writing three describing words
- Freezing in a dramatic pose showing the character

Ask pupils to explain their thinking, linking to the music they have heard.

Stretch and Challenge

- Ask pupils to justify their answers using musical vocabulary
- Compare Prometheus with another mythical hero
- Identify when the mood changes and explain why

Support and Scaffold

- Provide word banks: brave, strong, mysterious, exciting, magical
- Allow pupils to point to picture cards showing emotions
- Discuss ideas with a partner before sharing

Medium 20-minute task: Out of This World Art Challenge

This task looks to allow pupils a chance to listen to the full piece, perhaps two or more times, whilst they create a piece of art to represent the story of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods. You could ask pupils to respond to the title theme of the concert – ‘Out of This World’ – to give inspiration to their thinking. This could then form part of a display in school if you have the space for this, encouraging pupils to understand more about the plot and the myths of the ancient world.

This task allows for clear links to Art and History as explored below. If pupils need some inspiration, consider the following moments from the plot to help pupils to think creatively!

- Prometheus climbing Mount Olympus
- Sneaking past the gods
- Stealing fire
- Escaping from the gods

Stretch and Challenge

- This could be extended to a piece of creative writing, or a scene from a play for pupils keen to explore different creative pursuits

Support and Scaffold

- Give a clear plot of what to draw – Prometheus stealing fire and the other God being annoyed and firing lightning bolts at him in revenge

Longer 45-minute task: the Magical Quest

“Imagine you are creating a new mythical adventure with the title ‘out of this world’. Your hero must travel through the stars to bring a magical gift back to Earth.”

Step 1: Listen and Gather Ideas

Listen to different sections of Beethoven’s overture – for example, the opening adagio, the start of the allegro and the final 30 seconds.

Discuss:

- How does Beethoven create drama?
- How does he show action?
- How does the music sound heroic?

Consider the following to help your pupils understand the music:

- **Instruments:** Full Classical orchestra including strings, woodwind, brass and timpani
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- **Texture:** Mostly melody with accompaniment, becoming richer as more instruments join
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Step 2: Plan a Musical Journey

Groups create a four-part story, to include a narrator outlining what is taking place with the music accompanying:

1. The hero begins the quest
2. A challenge appears – for example, an enemy blocking your path
3. A magical object is discovered – it holds the power to the universe!
4. The hero returns triumphantly

Step 3: Compose Music

Using voices, percussion (tuned or untuned) and/or classroom instruments (if available), create music for each section.

Encourage pupils to include:

- Loud and quiet sounds (dynamics)
- Fast and slow sections (tempo)
- Repeated rhythms (ostinato) – long chords and fast repeated ideas
- Contrasting moods (major and minor keys, high and low pitches)

Step 4: Perform

Groups perform while another pupil narrates the story. Ensure pupils are being active listeners by asking them to spot the criteria below:

Performance Criteria

Did the groups...

- Create contrasting sections?
- Work together effectively?
- Use dynamics purposefully?
- Match music to the story?

Discuss as a group to give feedback on the music composed and performed by the groups.

Stretch and Challenge

- Consider creating a leitmotif for the main character
- Consider changing this leitmotif as the character's story develops
- Direct the ensemble
- Notate the composition using graphic score or staff notation
- Answer how the music matched the story using musical vocabulary

Support and Scaffold

- Ask pupils to create two contrasting sections and then add a third if they are able
- Using body percussion and unpitched instruments initially to give confidence
- If moving to pitched instruments
 - e.g. glockenspiel – consider using 2 or 3 different notes initially

Links to other subjects

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

Subject	Links
Art	Through the art challenge and drawing the plot outlining the mythical story
History	Exploring myths and legends through the plot
English	Through exploring a creative writing task linked to the plot
Drama	Through exploring a possible scene linked to the plot

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Classical Period	A period of Western Classical music from roughly 1750-1830. This period involved the use of the orchestra in pieces like symphonies, where there were 4 instrumental families (woodwind, percussion, brass and strings) sounding together
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)
Major chord	For example CEG – major chords often sound happy
Adagio	A tempo instruction meaning slow
Allegro	A tempo instruction meaning fast
Chromatic	Moving up by semitones – e.g. C, C#, D, D#, E, F..
Syncopated	Where a rhythm is played off-beat, creating energy
Fortissimo	A dynamic marking meaning very loud
Piano	A dynamic marking meaning quiet
Minor chord	For example CEbG – minor chords often sound sad

Sensory activities for all

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Short task: Wake Up the Creatures

Sensory focus: Body awareness, movement

Resources

- None (or soft mats)

Activity: At the start of the music, invite pupils to pretend they are sleeping statues. As the orchestra begins, encourage them to gradually “wake up” by opening their eyes, stretching their arms, reaching upwards and beginning to move as the music becomes more energetic.

Musical link: Understanding of the structure of the piece – the overture begins with a slow introduction before bursting into lively, energetic music.

Medium task: Musical Statues with a Twist

Sensory focus: Listening, gross motor skills and self-regulation

Resources

- None

Activity: Instead of stopping the music, encourage pupils to become “statues” whenever they hear a quieter or gentler musical phrase. As the lively music returns, the statues “come to life” again.

Musical link: Responding to changes in dynamics and musical character.

Medium task: Invent Something New

Sensory focus: Creativity and problem-solving

Resources:

- Loose parts (blocks, tubes, fabric, connectors)

Activity: Inspired by Prometheus giving creativity to humanity, invite pupils to invent or build something new while listening. There is no right answer—it could be a sculpture, a machine or an imaginary creature.

Musical link: Celebrates creativity, one of the central ideas behind the story.

Longer task: Conduct the Orchestra

Sensory focus: Confidence and expressive movement

Resources:

- Baton, ribbon or conductor’s stick

Activity: Invite pupils to become the conductor. Encourage pupils to make large, energetic gestures during the lively music and slow, flowing movements during the quieter introduction, noticing how the music changes.

Musical link: The overture’s clear contrasts make it easy to match movement to the music.