



Mimi's Symphony

Creative Learning
Teacher Resource



Mimi's Symphony

Notes for Teachers

Mimi's Symphony is a delightful orchestral story that introduces children to the world of classical music through the adventures of Mimi, a little magpie blown from her nest.

As Mimi encounters various animal groups in a suburban park, each represented by a different section of the orchestra, children learn about the instruments and sounds that bring these characters to life.

The story, narrated by Justine Clarke, emphasises themes of belonging, community, and the power of music to bring people together. The performance not only introduces children to orchestral music but also engages them in storytelling in Mimi's journey.

Developed and performed by Justine Clarke and George Ellis, in Mimi's Symphony, students will learn about storytelling, classical music and instruments, performing as an ensemble in an orchestra, character development and role-playing across the animal and human world.

- **Subject areas:** English, Creative Arts, Music, Drama and Visual Arts.
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability

With thanks to Justine Clarke and George Ellis for sheet music excerpts, photographs and illustrations throughout this resource.

A magical animal wonderland

An introduction to Mimi's Symphony and the animals that inspired the music

Teaching point: In Mimi's Symphony, animals and their behaviours and sounds inspired Justine Clarke and George Ellis to use certain instruments for different animals (see the end of the resource for sheet music excerpts)

- Brass instruments represent dogs.
- Woodwinds represent the magpies, and our hero Mimi.
- Percussion and piano themes are the insects
- The strings section represent the possums

Divide students into small groups and assign each group a different part of Mimi's journey. Have them use their bodies, movements, and sounds to act out their scene.

Provide simple instruments or sound-making tools to enhance their storytelling. Afterward, have each group perform their scene for the class, creating a full retelling of Mimi's Symphony. How much do the sounds of the instruments mimic the animals?



What is a symphony?

An introduction to classical music and the orchestra

A **symphony** is a long piece of music (or composition) played by many instruments from different 'family' groups or sections.

Did you know, the word symphony comes from the Greek word *symphonia* meaning 'an agreement of sound'. In Mimi's Symphony, the animals (instrument families) come together to make a symphony sound at the finale – so, when the animals work together it's the perfect harmony – they're all in agreement!

An **orchestra** is made up of lots of musicians who play music together with these different instruments.

Classical music is European or Western-style music that is written for musicians to read and play off the page. It is rarely improvised and can include complex melodies.

Classical music might be played alongside an opera or ballet, can be emotional and dramatic in its sound, and was often performed in royal court.

Classical music is played with strings, woodwinds, percussion and brass instruments like the viola, cello, flute, piano, timpani, trumpet and horns.

Famous classical musicians are Mozart, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven and Bach.

What is a symphony?

An introduction to classical music and the orchestra

All instruments have unique sounds and characteristics and are grouped into 'families'. There are four families – Woodwinds, Brass, Percussion and Strings.

Woodwinds include instruments like the Clarinet, Flute, Oboe and Piccolo. They are usually made of wood or metal and musicians blow into a mouthpiece at the top of the instrument, which is shaped like a tube

Brass instruments are made of metal and form curved tubed shapes, and include the Tuba, Trumpet and Trombone. Musicians buzz or vibrate their lips together to create sound.

Percussion instruments include the Timpani, Bass Drum, Snare Drum and Xylophone and are struck, shaken or scraped by musicians to make their sounds.

Strings are wooden instruments with hollow bodies like the Bass, Viola, Cello and Violin. Musicians use their fingers to pluck the strings, or a bow to run along series of strings to create sound.

Teaching point: in groups of 2-3, select an instrument or instrument family to research – draw the instrument from multiple angles and label each of the parts. How does a musician play these instruments? Where do they usually sit within the orchestra? How many instruments are usually played in each family in a symphony? Can you recreate the sounds of these instruments with your lips, voice or body?

What goes on inside the mind of a conductor?

Reading and interpreting sheet music

Each conductor writes different things on their score, some don't write anything at all, but George does...

- The vertical line down the middle of the page indicates a new musical phrase
- The dynamics are indicated and circled too so he knows they are coming! He writes it in English (strong) and Italian (ff for fortissimo)
- He also writes when he cues an instrument in:
 - o Glock. = glockenspiel
 - o Str. = strings
 - o Pno. = piano
 - o Clt. = clarinet
 - o Vc. = cello
 - o Br. = viola

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Handwritten conductor's score for Mimi's Symphony, page 24. The score includes staves for Flute, Oboe, B♭ Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, B♭ Trumpet, Trombone, Glockenspiel, D.S. & Xyl., Nar., Piano, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is heavily annotated with handwritten notes and markings. A vertical line down the middle of the page indicates a new musical phrase. Dynamics are indicated and circled, including 'mp', 'p', 'ff', and 'f'. Handwritten notes include 'B/Vc', 'Str', 'Glock', 'pno', 'Br', 'Vc', 'D.B.', 'she is a baby magpie, but it's a beautiful sound. Wouldn't you agree?', and 'STRONG'. The score is written in treble and bass clefs with various key signatures and time signatures.

Music vocabulary

An introduction to classical music and the orchestra

Duration: The lengths of sounds and silences in music, such as a constant musical beat, longer and/or shorter notes and silences in rhythm.

Pitch: The relative highness and lowness of sounds.

Performing media: The instruments, voices or sound sources used in a piece of music.

Timbre: The distinctive and identifiable quality of a sound, such as the effects created by blowing, hitting, shaking.

Dynamics: The volume of sound.



Activities in the classroom



Teaching points: activities for students

For the classroom before and after you watch the performance

Character Diary Entry (English and Drama)

Have students imagine they are Mimi and write a diary entry about her day. They can describe how she felt being blown from her nest, what she thought when she met the other animals, and how she felt at the end of the story. For younger students, provide a sentence starter:

This morning, when I was blown from my nest

I felt..., When I met... I thought they were...

By the end of the day, I was feeling... because...

The most surprising part of my day was...

I learned today that...

Animal Masks Creation (Visual Arts)

Provide students with paper plates, paints, markers, and other craft supplies to create masks representing the different animals in Mimi's Symphony.

Guide them to think about the colours and shapes that would best represent each animal. Once the masks are complete, use them in a follow-up drama activity where students act out scenes from the story.

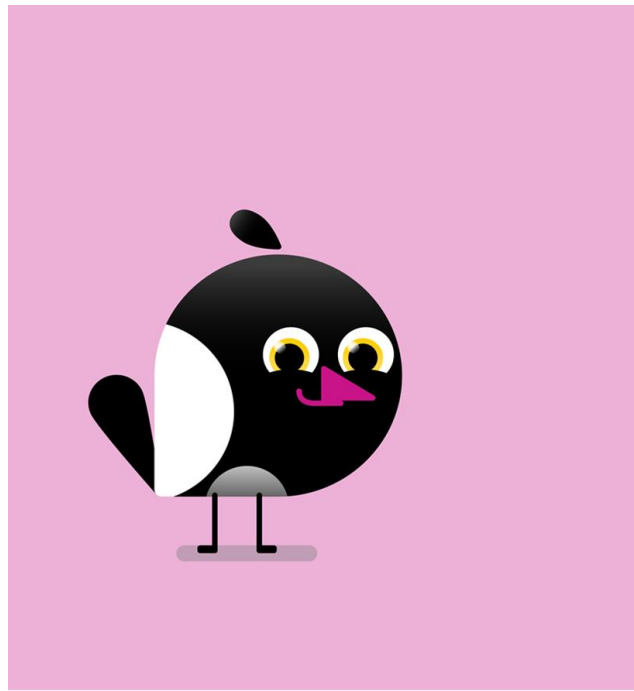
Teaching points: activities for students

For the classroom before and after you watch the performance

Emotion Collage (English, PDHPE, Visual Arts)

Discuss the different emotions Mimi experiences throughout the story. Then, provide magazines, coloured paper, and other materials for students to create a collage that represents these emotions.

Encourage them to think about the colours, shapes, and images that best capture feelings like fear, excitement, or happiness. Display the collages in the classroom as a visual representation of the story's emotional journey.



Teaching points: activities for students

For the classroom before and after you watch the performance

Character Role-Play (English and Drama)

Have students choose a character from Mimi's Symphony to role-play. Provide them with prompts to consider how their character would move, talk, and interact with others.

Students can then act out a day in the life of their character, either individually or in pairs. Afterward, discuss as a class what students learned about their characters and how they might feel in different situations

Instrument Exploration and Animal Movement (Drama and Music)

Have students bring in or find simple everyday objects that can be used as instruments, such as plastic containers, metal cans, or cardboard tubes.

Guide them in using these objects to create sounds that mimic the animals in the story. For instance, tapping on a plastic container can represent the rhythm of the dogs, while shaking a jar filled with rice can mimic the sound of insects.

Students can then use these "found instruments" to perform a piece of music that represents the different animal characters.

Teaching points: activities for students

For the classroom before and after you watch the performance

Wind Soundscapes with the Audience (Music)

Practice creating different wind sounds with the students using their mouths. Guide them in creating a wind soundscape that mimics the scene where Mimi is blown from her nest.

Combine their sounds with the music from the orchestra, layering the wind over the instruments to recreate the experience of the story.

Call and Response Animal Sound (Drama and Music)

Play a game of call and response where you, as the teacher, play or vocalise a sound that represents an animal from Mimi's Symphony (e.g., a short, sharp whistle for the magpies or a low, rumbling hum for the dogs).

Students then respond by mimicking the sound or creating a complementary rhythm with their instruments.

This activity can be done with limited instruments, using claps, stomps, or simple percussion tools. Rotate roles so students have the chance to lead the call and response as the different animals.

Curriculum links and resources



Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

Creative Arts (Drama)

- CAE-DRA-01: experiments with and identifies ways feelings, ideas, roles and situations are embodied and enacted in drama
- CA1-DRA-01: makes and performs drama to embody and enact characters, ideas and stories, and describes ways that drama communicates ideas
- CA2-DRA-01
- makes and performs drama to embody and enact characters, ideas and stories for an audience, and describes ways the dramatic elements are used to convey meaning

Creative Arts (Music)

- CAE-MUS-01: experiments with and identifies ways sound is organised in music through singing, moving, playing instruments and using listening skills
- CA1-MUS-01: performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate ideas through sound, and describes ways musical ideas are conveyed
- CA2-MUS-01: performs, uses listening skills and composes to communicate musical ideas, and describes ways the elements of music are used to convey musical ideas

Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

Creative Arts (Visual Arts)

- CAE-VIS-01: experiments with and identifies ways materials and techniques are used to represent subject matter and ideas in artworks
- CA1-VIS-01: makes artworks using materials and techniques to represent subject matter and ideas, and describes ways artists convey ideas in artworks
- CA2-VIS-01: makes artworks using art forms to represent subject matter and ideas, and describes ways artists convey ideas about their world to audiences through artworks

English

- ENE-OLC-01: communicates effectively by using interpersonal conventions and language with familiar peers and adults
- EN1-OLC-01: communicates effectively by using interpersonal conventions and language to extend and elaborate ideas for social and learning interactions
- EN2-OLC-01: communicates with familiar audiences for social and learning purposes, by interacting, understanding and presenting

Science and Technology

- STE-SCI-01: identifies and describes characteristics of living things, properties of materials, and movement
- ST1-SCI-01: measures and describes changes in living things, materials, movement, Earth and the sky

Resources

More about the Sydney Opera House

Sydney Opera House: Our Story

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/our-story>

How we work – strategic plans and programs

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/about-us/how-we-work>

Community projects

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/about-us/in-the-community>

Careers and opportunities

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/about-us/careers-and-other-opportunities>

Creative Learning resources

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/learn/teachers-and-students/classroom-resources>

Get in touch

Got questions? Contact us with any enquiries about our education programs for schools via phone or email.

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Sheet music excerpts

