SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Learning & Engagement Teaching Kit

Stage 5 & 6

Acknowledgements

Contact

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"Your life can be changed and enriched through all sorts of music; music from now, music from the past, music from the very distant past and music from as recently as yesterday.

Through intensive listening students become involved in one of the highest orders of thinking.

As a teacher, by bringing students to a concert and studying music in the classroom, you are providing your students with a special pathway to musical knowledge through direct experience of and contact with live music."

Richard Gill AO
(1941 – 2018)

Conductor, notable educator and advocate. Richard was the founding Artistic Director of Education at Sydney Symphony. He has inspired generations of musicians through his work and continues to inspire new generations through his legacy.

Syllabus Link

NSW Curriculum

La Mer by Debussy covers a range of topics from the NSW syllabuses:

Music 1:

Music for large ensembles
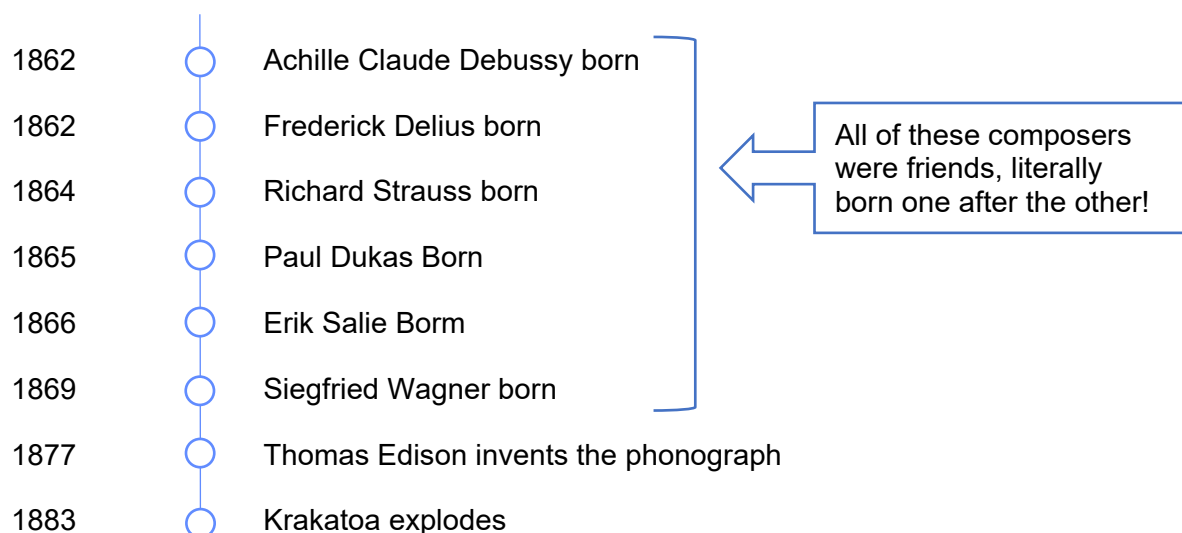Music of the 20th Century

Music 2:

Music 1900 – 1945

Background:

Historic Context

By the middle of the 19th century, Romanticism was in full swing in all of the arts. It began as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the mechanistic, law-driven universe of science. But the benefits of scientific discovery led to rapid improvements for societies: expansion of rail networks; global communication by telegraph; advances in medicine and disease prevention. So the Romantic movement moved from reaction to the expression of the optimism of the times. However, by the end of the 19th century, the Arts community again became restless, questioning all the new conventions. The result was impressionistic artworks, literature and music. They wanted something new: less sugar-coated and more real. Claude Debussy entered the twentieth century with music that broke all the rules and paved the way for new expression.

19th – 20th Century Timeline:

1862	○	Achille Claude Debussy born
1862	○	Frederick Delius born
1864	○	Richard Strauss born
1865	○	Paul Dukas Born
1866	○	Erik Salie Borm
1869	○	Siegfried Wagner born
1877	○	Thomas Edison invents the phonograph
1883	○	Krakatoa explodes

All of these composers were friends, literally born one after the other!

1889	○	Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* series and *The Japanese Bridge*
1889	○	Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night*
1893	○	Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky dies
1894	○	Debussy's *Prelude to an Afternoon with a Faun*
1896	○	Wilhelm Röntgen identifies X-rays
1901	○	Australian colonies federate
1903	○	First flight of the Wright brothers
1905	○	Albert Einstein's *Theory of Special Relativity*
1905	○	Debussy's *La Mer*
1913	○	Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*
1913	○	Debussy's *Jeux* – final orchestral work
1914	○	World War I begins
1916	○	Gallipoli campaign ends in failure
1917	○	Russian Revolution
1918	○	Debussy dies of cancer during the German bombardment of Paris
1918	○	World War I ends

Features of 19th/ Early 20th Century Music

This entire time period is transitional, experimental, even a full scale revolt in terms of the arts. The musical richness and flamboyance of music in this period was a product of bending the rules of the previous classical period and experimenting with new ideas, sounds and instruments. By the late 1900s and into the new century, rules and conventions were not merely bent, but smashed! Freedom was sought from all restraints of the past, such as rhythm, melody, tonality and formal structure. A new musical world was being created for a new century.

Pitch (Melody and Harmony)

- Transition from conventional tonality to whole tone scales, modes and even atonality
- Transition from an extended harmonic range to no rules or conventional patterns in harmony which became clusters of layered notes
- Transition from sweeping epic melodies to brief motives, and eventually mere sound with no discernible melodic progression

Duration (Rhythm and Metre)

- Transition from an extended rhythmic vocabulary which included displaced accents and polyrhythms to metres which defied rhythmic definition
- Transition from polyrhythms to polymetre, different groupings of the same note value
- Transition of symmetrical to asymmetrical metres in which the bar cannot be divided into equal beats
- A complete transition to no discernible rhythm in some works now merely streaming sound

Tonality

- Transition from a defined tonal range to extreme chromaticism and stretched further to the whole tone scale and even atonality
- Transition from conventional major/minor scales to modes, both ancient and modern
- Transition from conventional triadic harmony to quartal harmony (chords stacked mostly in fourths) and secundal harmony (chords stacked mostly in seconds)
- Transition from definite to indefinite harmonic changes

Texture

- Transition from melody dominated homophony to multiple experimental textures
- Conventional instrumentation transitions to experimental instrumentation with instrument combinations never heard before
- Transition from monothematic textures to polythematic textures
- Some 20th century compositions are almost entirely a fascinating "stream of consciousness" in texture.

Dynamics and Expressive Devices

- Transition from either uber-dramatic dynamics or uber-sensitive dynamics at the height of Romanticism to sustained/subdued dynamics in impressionism and unpredictable/excessive exaggeration in expressionism

Structure and genre

- The Romantic period spawned an expansive, epic range of traditional forms such as symphonies, highly virtuosic concertos with an expanded instrument range and mega-operas

- In the 20th century, the modernist movement became multi branched from Neo-Classicism and Neo-Baroque-ism to music that defied classification

- Jazz developed with surprising connections to "serious" music and vice versa (eg. Duke Ellington was inspired by Debussy, and Debussy was inspired by jazz he heard in Paris)

- Late Romantic genres transitioned to modernism, impressionism, post-Romanticism in the early 20th century

- Transition from extended, sometimes fluid structure to little or no discernible structure

Orchestration Instrumentation

- Standard, though expanded string section

- New instruments added, such as the range of saxophones

- Exotic instruments included such as antique Asian cymbals, gamelan gongs

- Almost no limit to what could be added to the orchestra

Techniques of Orchestration

- Transition from big themes with big harmonies to broad soundscapes with brief motives or no motives at all

- Experimentation with timbre, tone colour (eg. solos with groups in combinations never heard before)

- Transition from defined melodies and harmonies to indeterminacy (but not yet to graphic notation, minimalism, spectralism)

Instrumentation

Strings	Woodwind	Brass	Percussion	Other
Violin I	2 Flutes	4 French Horns	Timpani	2 Harps
Violin II	1 Piccolo	3 Trumpets	Bass Drum	
Viola	2 Oboes	2 Cornets	Cymbals	
Cello	1 Cor Anglais	3 Trombones	Gong (tam-tam)	
Double Basses	2 Clarinets	1 Tuba	Triangle	
	3 Bassoons		Glockenspiel	

Work: *La Mer, trois esquisses symphoniques pour orchestra* L.109 (1903-1905) by Claude Debussy

French for *The sea, three symphonic sketches for orchestra*

1. *De l'aube à midi sur la mer* (*From dawn to midday on the sea*)
2. *Jeux de vagues* (*Play of the waves*)
3. *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* (*Dialogue between wind and waves*)

Composer Background

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Brought up in a poverty stricken area in Paris, Claude Debussy somehow learned piano and by age 11, under the patronage of a Russian millionairess, he was studying piano and composition at the Conservatoire de Paris. At the age of 22, Claude won the Prix de Rome and went to Rome to study composition. He did not finish the course, but en route back to Paris took a detour to Bayreuth and met the revolutionary German composer, Wagner, who had considerable influence on the young composer.

Three periods in Debussy's composition evolution have been identified:

- From 1884 (*L'enfant prodigue*, which got him the Rome prize) to 1894 (*Prelude to an Afternoon with a Faun*), during which he moved his style to an increasingly original use of pitch and harmony.

- 1905 (*La Mer*) in which Debussy explored new musical sensations using a combination of harmonies, timbre and texture to create a musical stream of consciousness evoking impressions of the sea as a soundscape.

- From 1906 to 1914, Debussy abandoned all attempts to depict nature in music and composed music that was purely abstract, now in the pure stream of modernism. This included Etudes, Sonates, and Jeux, Debussy's last completed orchestral work. Melody finally disappeared in a flow of sound created by timbre and rhythm.

Claude Debussy's music composition career was always breaking new ground at every point. The remarkable thing is it all took place in just 25 years! Many consider he is the only composer who achieved so much change in his lifetime.

Work Background - *La Mer* (1903-1905)

This work marked the first of a series of compositions by Debussy that completely upturned the traditional musical language of the Romantics.

La Mer Is not meant to be a literal representation of the ocean, but the way the ocean evoked responses in Debussy. He wrote it a long way from the ocean in landlocked Burgundy, however impressions of the ocean from the paintings of J.M.W. Turner, Monet, and a woodblock print by a Japanese artist, Katsushiki Hokusai called "The Great Wave" particularly impressed him. He requested that a print of "The Great Wave" appear on the cover of the orchestral score.

La Mer was first performed in December 1905 and the sounds must have astonished the audience. It was not well received, probably for two reasons: the conductor lacked the skill to prepare the orchestra for such an innovative work, and Debussy's marital problems were all over the Paris news

and many held him personally in contempt. However, in January 1908, Debussy conducted *La Mer* in Great Britain and it was received with considerable acclaim.

Instrumentation

Strings	Wind	Brass	Percussion	Other
Violin I	2 Flutes	4 French Horns	Timpani	2 Harps
Violin 2	1 Picolo	3 Trumpets	Bass Drum	
Violas	2 Oboes	2 Cornets	Cymbals	
Cellos	1 Cor anglais	3 Trombones	Gong (tam-tam)	
Double Basses	2 Clarinets	1 Tuba	Triangle	
	3 Bassoons		Glockenspiel	

Listening Guide
Overview:

A superficial look at this work could lead to a conclusion that it is a symphony in three movements with programmatic references to the sea, but this is neither a Symphony nor a Tone Poem.

In fact, sometimes it is referred to as an "anti-symphony". Debussy himself subtitled it, "Three symphonic sketches for orchestra", and never called it a symphony. No programme can be made to fit the music because it is a stream of consciousness of Debussy's idea about the sea.

Debussy achieved an unprecedented flow of sound in *La Mer*, going beyond all precedent in harmony, tonality and timbre in his innovative combinations of instruments. It is a stunning flow of tone colour, nuance, mood, atmosphere, and sensation. It has no formal plan, deliberately shunning the structure and developmental focus of a symphony.

In fact, Saint-Saens said of La Mer: "Debussy has not cultivated a style but the absence of style."

One musicologist said that La Mer was "written by one of music history's greatest rule breakers".

- Movement 1: "*From Dawn to Midday on the Sea"*
  - Starts in ethereal mystery and moves by degrees to open-ness.

- Movement 2: "*Play of the waves*"
  - A kind of post-symphony scherzo, full of lively motion.

- Movement 3: *"Dialogue between Wind and Waves"*
  - Conjures the interplay of powerful forces.

Movement I: *De l'aube à midi sur la mer – très lent*

This is a soundscape, a background of textured harmonies with ever changing tone colour/timbre above which bursts of evocative motives emanate from solo instruments in unusual collaborations.

The movement commences with a vague atmosphere created by double basses and timpani with an echo effect on two harps and a rising motive in cellos, bars 1-5. then the first prominent motive appears beginning with oboe and clarinet continuing with cor anglais and trumpet (6-22):

Another motive, this time for solo oboe at bar 44 and extended at bar 46:

At bar 60, a rhythmic motive by solo oboe is accompanied by a lyrical motive for solo violin:

A passage reminiscent of Balinese influence at 77 utilises the pentatonic scale and intervals of a 5th to conclude a defining section of shimmering sound from the full orchestra (73-76).

Following close from this is a very "Hollywood" theme from the lower strings (way before Hollywood!) from bar 85:
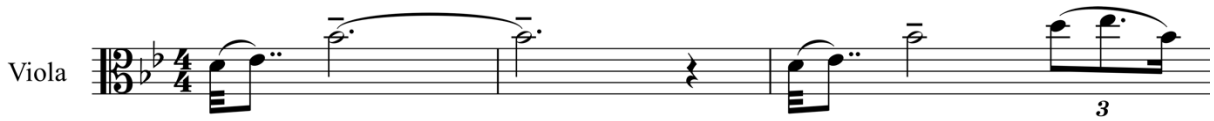
A section of motive fragments from all the winds from bar 113 leads into a cello solo at bar 123:

A triumphant brass chorale from bar 133 leads to a climactic finale from all the orchestra with a pentatonic descending scale of Balinese influence to the final bar.

## Movement II: *Jeux de vagues – allegro (dans un rythme très souple)*

A sparkling scherzo full of playfulness as the title suggests. It is again a continuous play on motives, some related, others suddenly appearing. It is as if the motives themselves play hide and seek! The soundscape of the accompaniment is significantly less dense than the first movement, at first with shimmering tremolos but growing more rhythmic.

At the conclusion of the movement the playfulness gradually fades away. Some significant motives that appear in this "Play of the Waves" are highlighted below:

This motive in cor anglais also appears in an extended version, then followed by a statement in the oboe (bars 9-27):

A new breezy motive takes over from Violins 1 and 2 with winds accompanying (bars 36-48):
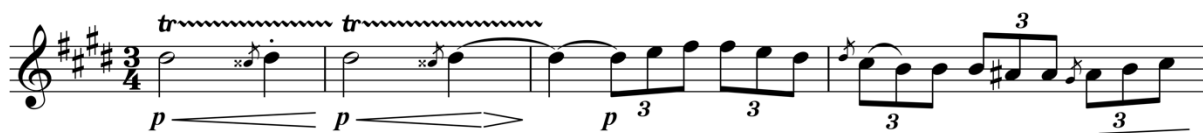
An innovative interplay between 2 harps and horns in harmony (bars 48-59) eventually leads to a solo French horn motive (bars 68-74). The oboe, solo violin and cello all have motives which become more and more fragmentary until solo oboe and solo clarinet have this extended motive (bars 118-121):
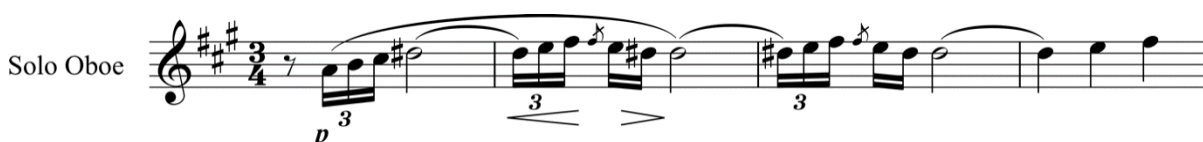
The clarinet has a repeated motive from bars 134-141.

A climax is reached from 147-162 involving (unusually for this movement) the whole orchestra. A quiet, but animated section immediately commences with a motive from flute repeated in the oboe, modified and restated in what is probably the most extended use of a motive in this movement (bars 163-186). it is the motive previously quoted in solo violin (bar 36ff).

From an *fff* from full orchestra (bars 215-218) the scherzo dies away to *ppp* from 224. The oboe/clarinet theme from the opening of the movement makes appearances in high winds right up to the finish.

Movement III: *Dialogue du vent et de la mer – animé et tumulteux*

This movement is full of extended themes that are almost always repeated once, and sometimes a number of times. They are usually characterised by particular solo instruments or combinations and many are built on an ascending or descending minor 2nd interval (as in "Jaws" fame!) or major 2nd interval.

There are two motives that appeared in the first movement: the trumpet motive and the brass chorale motive. The mood is darker, more closed in at the beginning, using timpani and lower strings, but with a very different effect, compared to the first movement.

The first motive, entirely endemic to this third movement, belongs to oboe, cor anglais and bassoon (bars 56-64, repeated 65-71):

The trumpet motive appears in bassoons and cellos at bar 98 and repeated three times to bar 118.

A cornet solo pierces through the soundscape at bar 129.

The horn chorale from the first movement enters at bar 133 and repeated from bar 139.

A chromatic motive appears in solo flutes and oboe from bars 159-166 and repeated twice after that:

The second part of this motive starting with the cor anglais at bar 179 is tossed to French horns doubled with flutes and then to piccolo and violins from bar 195 climaxing with *ff* in violins and horns (bar 203) that fades to *pp.* The motive persists in different instrument combinates until it is joined with the horn chorale at bar 258 which is now a full brass ensemble.

Fragments of the original flute and oboe motive are joined by a building soundscape from the full orchestra to a momentous climax that concludes La Mer in *fff* high drama!

Audio Excerpts

Access the Spotify playlist by visiting the following link:

Link

Excerpt No.	Movement	Bars	Activity	Page
1	Movement 1: *De l'aube à midi sur la mer – très lent*	1 - 30	Activity 1	16
2	Movement 1: *De l'aube à midi sur la mer – très lent*	60 - 77	Activity 2	19
3	Movement 2: *Jeux de vagues – allegro (dans un rythme très souple)*	163 - 193	Activity 2	19
4	Movement 3: *Dialogue du vent et de la mer – animé et tumulteux*	104 - 119	Activity 5	25
5	Movement 3: *Dialogue du vent et de la mer – animé et tumulteux*	211 - 229	Activity 5	25

Score Excerpts (Click below to access)

Link

Excerpt No.	Movement	Bars	Activity	Page
1	Movement 1: *De l'aube à midi sur la mer – très lent*	1 – 15	Activity 2	19
2	Movement 1: *De l'aube à midi sur la mer – très lent*	60 – 70	Activity 3	23
3	Movement 2: *Jeux de vagues – allegro (dans un rythme très souple)*	163 – 193	Activity 2	19
4	Movement 3: *Dialogue du vent et de la mer – animé et tumulteux*	104 – 119	Activity 3	23
5	Movement 3: *Dialogue du vent et de la mer – animé et tumulteux*	211 – 229	Activity 3	23

Learning Activities
Activity 1: Musicology/Composition

Movement 1 Commencement Motives **Score Excerpt 1**:(Bars 1-15) **Audio Excerpt 1**:(Bars 1-30)

"Music should not attempt at direct imitation but rather capture the invisible sentiments of nature."

– Claude Debussy[1]

1. So, this orchestral masterpiece by Claude Debussy is called *"La Mer"*, the Sea. Movement 1 is titled: "From Dawn to Noon on the Sea". Debussy seems to be quite specific about what he is describing but … *"La Mer"* is **not a tone poem** with an outlined or even recognisable **program**.

    a. What, then, can we expect from *"La Mer"* ?

       Discuss this with a colleague using the quote from Debussy which headlines this activity as a point of consideration.

    b. Share your perceptions with the class.

       Hopefully, you are not now expecting music that directly imitates nature, but rather captures a response, a sentiment one has when considering the natural world.

       Interesting Fact: Debussy did most of the composing of *"La Mer"* in land-locked Burgundy! He had quite a limited experience of the sea.

2. We are going to build a **soundscape graph** in several stages (complete the graph on the following page as prompted below).

    a. Firstly, listen to **Audio Excerpt 1** (Bars 1-30) twice **without** following **Score Extract 1** (Bars 1-15). It would be useful to do this with a stop-watch (or look at the timeline on your device) so that your observations in all these activities line up! As you listen, record the **scene impression** you get in your mind as notes on the Sonic Graph.

    b. Listen to **Audio Excerpt 1** (Bars 1-30) (without following the score) **two** more times and record the **mood** changes in the 84 seconds.

    c. Now we get to the most important word for a Debussy soundscape: **timbre**.

       i. Without consulting a dictionary (!) discuss with a colleague the meaning and some examples of timbre. Summarise your discussion.
       ii. Share your ideas with the class.
       iii. Here's an experiment on timbre! Each member of your class will sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, little star" at their own pitch. Each listener will record notes about the timbre of the voices. Discuss your results with a colleague.

          ● Was it an easy exercise, or a difficult one? Why?
          ● Did your descriptions fall into categories? If so, outline them.
          ● Was every voice distinct? Or were there similarities?

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[1] Cited in Timothy Judd, *"La Mer" Sonic Portrait of the Sea*, 2018.

iv.   Listen to **Audio Excerpt 1** (Bars 1-30) again twice (no score!) and record the **timbre** as you hear it.

d.   Listen to **Audio Excerpt 1** (Bars 1-30) once more and make a note of the **instruments** you can hear as you listen.

e.   For the final time, listen to **Audio Excerpt 1** (Bars 1-30) twice **while following the orchestral score**.

i.   Compare your soundscape graph with what you saw on the score.

●   What did you hear right?
●   What surprises did you get following the score?
●   What unexpected combinations of instruments did you hear?
●   Comment on how Debussy creates a "bed" of sound with a distinctive timbre, above which one or more instruments "stick out" with a contrasting or blending timbre.
●   Add notes to your graph with insight gained from the orchestral score.

3.   There is a scientific basis for timbre. It is not a vague, indistinct idea even if it is hard to describe in words.

a.   View the YouTube video: "*Why do instruments sound different? The Science of Timbre*" by Ollie Nash (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsVqb6PAA1k)
N.B. The background music is Debussy's "Claire de Lune".
b.   Note 4 things you learned about the science of timbre.
c.   Arrange a visit to the science laboratory and ask a physics teacher to record the sound of your voice with an oscilloscope and microphone – "*Twinkle, little star*" again!
d.   If possible, obtain a paper copy of your voice for your records and compare your oscilloscope pattern with other colleagues. Discuss your voice patterns with the physics teacher, especially with respect to timbre and it being the result of frequencies, overtones and superposition of sound waves.

4.   **Timbre** is Debussy's aim. He is the Einstein of timbre in the history of music composition.

a.   How does he achieve **timbre**? Use your soundscape graph to inform your answer.
b.   Combine your musical understanding of timbre with your scientific understanding of timbre to comment on the genius of Debussy in **Audio Excerpt 1** (Bars 1-30).
c.   Debussy has been called the greatest rule breaker in the history of music. But he had sounds in his head he wanted others to hear, and no rules of music would stop him!! Can you identify conventions of music he dismissed in this segment in order to achieve the timbre he wanted?

Soundscape Graph

	00:10	00:20	00:30	00:40	00:50	01:00	01:10	01:20
a. Scene Impression								
b. Mood								
c. Timbre								
d. Instruments								

18

Activity 2: Musicology, Composition

Movement 1 End of first section **Score Extract 2**: (Bars 60-77) **Audio Excerpt 2**: (Bars 60-77)

"Debussy was a quiet revolutionary … rather than shock, he seduced them with beautiful sounds outlawed by established laws of harmony and form."

– Calvin Dotsey[2]

In this activity you will investigate Debussy's motives in a short section of the first movement – both the musical elements of each motive and the context. Then you will use Debussy's motives to construct your own "remix" composition!

1. The first two bars of the motives from bars 60-77 are given.
   Examine **Score Extract 2** (Bars 60-77) **without** listening to **Audio Excerpt 2** (Bars 60-77).

   a. If the motive is longer than two bars, write out the whole motive.
   b. On a copy of **Score Extract 2** (Bars 60-77) use different colours to highlight the appearance of each motive as it appears entirely, in part or as a recognisable variant.
   c. Any other motives you noticed not quoted below? Include them!
   d. Next to or underneath each of your written motives indicate:
      i. Instrument(s) that play it (whenever it appears)
      ii. How many times does this appear in whole, in part or as a variant in this excerpt?
      iii. Describe the **sonic background** of the motive
      iv. List any **similarities** or obvious **differences** between the motives.

[2] Calvin Dotsey (2020), "Classical Notes: Debussy's *La mer*". Accessed 21 January, 2022.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5k8z_GafSWU

2. Play each motive several times on a keyboard and comment for each motive on

- Pitch
- Rhythm
- Tonality

3. Following this exhaustive review of motives – which, by the way, all appear in just over a minute! – listen to **Audio Excerpt 2** (Bars 60-77) while following **Score Extract 2** (Bars 60-77) at least twice.

   a. What difficulties did you have following the score?
   b. Did your study of the motives help or hinder the score reading? Explain.

4. Discuss in groups of 2-3 the quote at the beginning of this activity in connection to the investigation you have conducted. Decide whether this is a fair statement or not.

5. Composition: Debussy Remix

   a. Use a suitable software program and **Audio Excerpt 2** (Bars 60-77) to construct a loop of your 3 most favourite motives in this activity, to use in a techno-pop remix of Debussy's morning at the sea!
   b. Use a suitable **sonic background**, either borrowed or constructed by you, over which you can play the motive loops you have made.
   c. Assemble these sound sources into a one to two minute piece. Play your "Debussy Remix" for the class.
   d. Construct a feedback form, assess audience reaction and list the aspects of your composition that were well received and not well received.
   e. Write a summary of how you could improve your Remix.

Activity 3: Improvisation

Movement 2 Near the climax! **Score Extract 3**: (Bars 163-193) **Audio Excerpt 3**: (Bars163-193)

"… much of Debussy's music is thought out exclusively in terms of *texture and timbre* ..."
– Geoffrey Handley[3]

This activity is about Debussy's use of **texture** in his construction of a soundscape. This movement could be viewed as a scherzo, a "joke", "play". In fact, the movement is called "The play of waves", alluding to a scherzo. Also referring to the texture of physical water and waves interacting in a constant "joyful" motion. The whole concept of the movement centres on texture. Find this movement on YouTube and listen to the whole of it. This activity investigates just 40 seconds!

1. Investigating texture: First a game! Work in groups of 3-4.
   - collect five different surfaces:
     - e.g. sand paper, cardboard, plastic, wire gauze (flyscreen)
   - collect five different foods:
     - e.g. yoghurt, water, orange, fries

   a. Blindfold two members of the group and record the texture they suggest when touching each of the surfaces.
   b. Blindfold two members of the group and record the texture they suggest when tasting each of the foods.
   c. Discuss the difficulties in describing texture.
   d. What is it about surfaces and food that determine texture?

2. a. Music has texture. List the features of orchestral music that you think may work together to give music texture.
   b. View the YouTube video: "*What is Texture? – Music Theory*" by Music Matters (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTKTpY6PJL8). Summarise the elements of texture covered in this video.

3. Texture in materials and foods is determined by how particles are organised: their distribution, layering, weaving. In music, texture is determined by how sound is organised and Debussy spent time thinking this through. He decided that texture was a combination of everything: melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre, density, relationship of layers, combinations of instruments, even the balance of dynamics.

   a. List ways that waves in the ocean change and what textures might result.
   b. In groups of 4-5 use a different sound source each and use them to portray the textures of waves you have discussed.
   c. Perform your improvisations for the whole class and seek responses as to what others thought you were conveying about waves.

4. Again, work in the same groups with a copy of **Score Extract 3** (Bars 163-193). Use a pencil to write down textures where you perceive them in sections of the score as you listen to **Audio Excerpt 3** (Bars163-193) (at least 3 times).

   a. Discuss what textures you perceived in different parts of the score.

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[3] Geoffrey Handley ed. "The Larouse Encyclopaedia of Music" (e*mphasis added*).

      b. Did these textures correlate with those you investigated in part 3 of this activity? Give details.

5. Even though Debussy was disgruntled when identified as an impressionist, the label finally stuck!

      a. Investigate impressionism as a style in art by studying a painting of Van Gogh or Monet and listing the observations you make about the way paint is organised on the canvas.
      b. Can you draw any similarities with the way that Debussy has organised sound in "*La Mer*"?
      c. Discuss the assessment of Debussy's music made in the quote at the beginning of this activity. list any evidence you have found to support this in your investigation of "*La Mer*" so far.

6. a. Define "scherzo" by describing its character.
      b. What kind of musical compositions use the scherzo form?
      c. Debussy was famous for absence of form or style, but is there any aspect of Movement 2 which could influence an opinion that it is a scherzo?

7. Debussy's "*La Mer*" is not a tone poem, according to Debussy himself – although some musicologists can't help but see it that way, nevertheless! It is his impression of the sea, the ideas that come into his mind when he thinks about the sea, as distinct from experiencing or watching the sea.

    1. With this in mind, plan a series of images that you think represent the music of **Audio Excerpt 3** (Bars163-193)as a "Play of Waves". Find images on the internet to portray this concept.
    2. Combine the images with sound on a computer or iPad and watch it together in groups.
    3. Discuss the effectiveness of your combination of images and music for **Audio Excerpt 3** (Bars163-193).

Activity 4: Performance

Movement 3 Prominent mid-way theme **Score Extract 4**: (Bars104-119) **Audio Excerpt 4**: (Bars104-119)

"An infinitely flexible conception of acoustical instrumental relationships… a development conceived in feelings and irreducible to a formal classical plan… "

–   Pierre Boulez, French composer, commenting on "*La Mer*"[4]

This assessment of Debussy's music by Boulez may give the impression that Debussy composed in a random manner which paid no heed to any musical convention. This is indeed **not** the case (and it isn't what Boulez was saying!). Every note on the score, every pitch and rhythm, the instruments used as solos, those used as background, and the instrument combinations are thought through with the utmost care and intention to achieve the sound that was in Debussy's mind. He just didn't let convention get in the way of expression.

You are about to discover this directly as you perform a section of the Third Movement, "Dialogue of the Wind and Sea". This is a prominent theme that begins approximately midway through the movement and is repeated at length a number of times (it actually begins in bar 98, but this classroom arrangement is from bar 104).

1. Listen to **Audio Excerpt 4** (Bars104-119) as you follow **Score Extract 4** (Bars104-119) at least three times and in groups of 5 (your working cohort for the performance) discuss together these considerations concerning the musical features:
   a. List some obvious limitations of reducing the score of 14 instruments to just 5. Specifically include a consideration of timbre and texture (with reference to previous activities).
   b. What features of the score appear to be conventional?
   c. What features of the score appear to be unconventional?
   d. List the possible difficulties the full orchestra might have with this performance.

2. Listen to **Audio Excerpt 4** (Bars104-119) while following **Score Extract 4** (Bars104-119) at least two more times and consider these aspects of Debussy's intention with this music.

   a. Think about this excerpt as a dialogue, a "conversation", or interaction, between two different forces of nature. What parts of the excerpt seem to indicate a dialogue?
   b. List some of the qualities of wind and of nature. Draw up a table of **similarities** and **differences**.
   c. When considering similarities and differences in music, we talk of **unity** and **contrast.** Examine the score and see if you can find any indication that Debussy used **unity** and **contrast** to convey a "dialogue" between two such contrasting media as "wind" and "sea".

3. Now listen to **Audio Excerpt 4** (Bars104-119) while following "*Get Talking!*", the classroom arrangement you will perform. The suggestion is that you use keyboards that have sound sources you can select to approximate the instruments represented!

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[4] Cited in Gutmann.

    a. Which instruments of the orchestra are used in "*Get Talking!*" for each of parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5?

    b. Which parts, or sections, may need special consideration in preparation? Why do you think so?

    c. Discuss the importance of regarding articulation and dynamics as of equal importance with pitch and rhythm.

4. This is only16 bars, but Debussy certainly packs it in!

    a. Assign a part to each member of your group and learn your designated line of music thoroughly.

    b. First work at parts 4 and 5 together, and parts 1, 2 and 3 together.

    Then try the full ensemble. Work at it to get it near h= 96 (designated at the beginning of the movement).

5. Once you feel you are competent at this performance, arrange a performance with another music class in a different year level.

    a. Before your performance, briefly outline what you have been learning about Debussy's "*La Mer*" and what musical features the audience should look out for.

    b. When you are finished ask your audience if they could hear some kind of "dialogue" in the music?

    c. Ask the audience what picture they get in their minds as you perform – you might have to perform it again! It doesn't matter if the mind pictures expressed have nothing to do with "wind and waves"!

    d. Play **Audio Excerpt 4** (Bars104-119) for the audience and ask them if your 5-part ensemble compared favourably with the 14-part orchestra (or not!)

6. Back in your own classroom self-evaluate the success of your performance, especially considering:

       1. Your verbal communication in the introduction
       2. Your musical communication in the performance
       3. Your ability to inspire other students, by the response from your audience.
       4. What did you enjoy about this activity?
       5. What did you find difficult in this activity?

Get Talking!

Classroom Arrangement

Activity 5: Composition/Musicology

Movement 3 Dialogue **Score Extract 5**: (Bars 211-229) **Audio Excerpt 5**: (Bars 211-229)

"I have endless store of memories [of the sea] that are worth more than the reality, whose beauty often deadens thought."

– Claude Debussy[5]
–

Claude Debussy had a wood block print of Katsushiki Hokkusai's "The Great Wave". It brought up responses in his mind that he turned into music. He had the publishers print "The Great Wave" on the cover of the score of "*La Mer*". He drew the same inspiration from some of the art of J.M.W. Turner and Claude Monet with respect to the sea.

This is a **composition** activity which will lead to an **essay question**.

1. Listen to **Audio Excerpt 5** (Bars 211-229) while following **Score Extract 5** (Bars 211-229). This excerpt is a little further on in the "*Dialogue of the Wind and Sea*" that was the basis for "*Get Talking!*". It has some other features of the "*Dialogue*".

    a. Write out two motives from this section that make you think of two voices in a conversation.
    b. Write out two motives in this section which provide the elements of the background soundscape.
    c. Label your motives with the instruments that play them.
    d. Describe the mood or emotion evoked by each of the themes (from your perspective) and list the musical features that contribute to this overall mood, especially including **timbre, texture, pitch, rhythm, harmony, tonality**.

2. With these further ideas about a musical dialogue, consider composing a dialogue in the methodology and style of Debussy.

    a. Think of two interacting forces of nature that you have seen in a painting, a movie or a road trip.
        e.g. The mountains and snow; The desert and wind; A forest and rain; A river and its obstacles
    b. Do not do any research, look at a painting or Google! Just use your imagination. How do you respond to these interacting elements of nature? Can you see this as a kind of dialogue?
    c. This activity involves a kind of synaesthesia – experiencing one sensory stimulus while engaged in a different sensory stimulus. For instance, some people "see" different pitches as colours – no kidding!

        I once heard the Australian composer Miriam Hyde say this of herself, and she even wrote a piano piece based on how she "heard" blue, white and gold!

        In this activity, do what Debussy did (good luck!) and try and "hear" your chosen interacting forces of nature as music. Then, with no regard to musical convention, create a 1-2 minute composition that you've heard in your head!

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[5] Cited in Gutmann.

d. Try and represent your ideas on music manuscript so that others could reproduce your dialogue.

3. Conduct a brief self-evaluation of your composition.

   a. Did you succeed in getting what was in your head as sound, written down as music?
   b. What difficulties did you have in this composition process?
   c. Do you think J.S. Bach, W.A. Mozart, Ludwig Van Beethoven or Tchaikovsky had a composition process like this? Do some research. Give reasons for your answer.
   d. Does this composition process work for you? Not everyone is a Debussy! You haven't "failed" if you found this nigh impossible!
   e. Do you think you could improve on this process for yourself and create music in the future?

4. **Essay Topic:**

   Debussy famously derided most music as "invented by frigid imbeciles riding on the backs of the Masters."

   Can music be constructed completely without reference to "the Masters"? Discuss Debussy's statement with reference to your knowledge and experience of music.

Suggested Answers and Teaching Notes

Activity 1: Musicology/Composition

<div style="background:#4472e0;color:white;padding:8px">Teaching Notes: Activity 1</div>

- Debussy's "*La Mer*" does not fit a genre. This is an attempt to get into Debussy's head and understand his intention for the music. This affects the whole study and appreciation of "*La Mer*". That's why it starts not with music, but with Debussy's own words.
- Timbre/tone colour is not perhaps so hard to define, but to hear sounds and put words to timbre is legendarily difficult. Because this is the very basis of the composition of "*La Mer*" (by Debussy's own spoken intention), this activity dives deep into timbre, ending up in the physics lab! A scientific understanding of timbre is most helpful.
- Activity 1 is a multi-lesson, multi-layered investigation of timbre that lays the groundwork for understanding Debussy's brilliance in "*La Mer*". It is not dispensing information, but discovering an area of music often overlooked.

1. a. b. Student Responses

   The aim is to consider that "*La Mer*" is an expression of Debussy's emotive response to the sea, rather than a description of the sea itself. If any students do Visual Arts they might compare this approach to the Impressionist artists (although Debussy absolutely refused this title!)

2. a. Student response.
      Scenic impression may be of the Sea or not. It is the mind picture evoked by the music.
   b. Student response.
      Mood changes. Emotional response evoked by the music
   c. Student response.
      The aim of this simple activity is: to make timbre a definite idea and not something vague; to put descriptive words to heard sounds that describe the sound quality.
      Each person's voice is different – that difference is called **timbre**. This activity is designed to assist students in a vocabulary for timbre.
   d. Student response.
   e. Student response.
      Now it is important to match up what students have been recording in the soundscape graph with the orchestral score. Hopefully, this provokes discussion and inspires interest in listening with discernment.

3. a. Student activity.
   b. Student responses. Summarise while listening to the YouTube lesson.
   c. d. Follow up the scientific basis of timbre – the fact that timbre is not a vague idea, but the result of the scientific principles of sound waves.

4. a. Timbre is achieved through a combination of musical concepts: pitch, rhythm, tonality, harmony, instrument combinations and dynamics. All of these influence sound wave patterns.

 b. The double basses and timpani give a 'misty' atmospheric effect with a low frequency, *pp*/*ppp* 'rumble'. Above this the cellos and violas provide medium frequency ripples which are 'spiked' with the higher frequency 'sparkle' of the effects of two harps. This is a feature of texture as well as timbre. This all happens in bars 1-5!
Rhythm is one convention not contravened here!
But tonality and harmony are undefined. This means a combination of pitches/frequencies we are not used to, so the timbre may be perceived as foreign, threatening, unable to be classified.
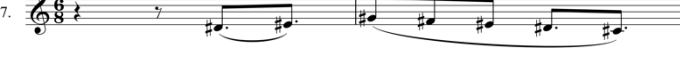
Debussy was not out to shock audiences, but to offer the opportunity to hear his musical response to the sea (it's like Debussy got his 'ear-worm' and made a symphony from it in real time – it has been done!).

Activity 1: Musicology/Composition

Teaching Notes: Activity 2

- An investigation of motives on their own, and in their context to reveal the tools that Debussy used to create his unique soundscape. Students should do this in small groups of 2-4 (so everybody is *really* investigating!). Although his music went from head to page, he still used conventional ways of writing it so others could perform it!
- Debussy's use of motives – short, contrasting, overlaid, simultaneous, consecutive etc. – is reminiscent of how contemporary "Remix" "techno-pop" uses motives, repeated, with rhythm and sonic backgrounds. Students have an opportunity to import some of Debussy's music to contemporary hip-hop style music to create their own "re-mix" using computer technology. This would best be achieved in the same groups that investigated the motives.

1. a. Student activity.
   a. Student activity.
   b. Student activity.
   c. Possible student responses given on following page.

2. Possible student responses given on following page.

3. a. Student activity and responses.
   b. Student activity and responses.

5. Student activity and responses.

6. a. Student activity and responses.
   b. Student activity and responses.
   c. Student activity and responses.
   d. Student activity and responses.
   e. Student activity and responses.

#	Notation	Description	Pitch / Rhythm / Tonality
1		**Instrument(s):** oboe **Appears:** 2 times **Sonic background:** motives from other instruments **Comparison:** rhythmic, pitch similarities to (3)	**Pitch:** descending + ascending by step over a range of a major 3rd **Rhythm:** syncopated **Tonality:** Db major scale with minor 7th
2		**Instrument(s):** violin solo **Appears:** 1 time **Sonic background:** multiple motives **Comparison:** unlike all other motives	**Pitch:** descending major 2nd 'sighs' interspersed with octave leap and chromatic ascending phrase. **Rhythm:** conventional $\frac{6}{8}$ **Tonality:** fractured Db major scale plus minor 7th
3		**Instrument(s):** clarinet, flute **Appears:** 3 times **Sonic background:** multiple motives **Comparison:** similar in part to (1)	**Pitch:** chromatic descending, ascending **Rhythm:** conventional $\frac{6}{8}$ **Tonality:** chromatic
4		**Instrument(s):** oboe, cor anglais **Appears:** 1 time **Sonic background:** strings on dim.7th; $\frac{6}{8}$ + syncopated pulse; flute solo semiquaver motive **Comparison:** a distant connection with solo violin (2)	**Pitch:** step ascending, descending over range of a 3rd **Rhythm:** conventional $\frac{6}{8}$ **Tonality:** Db, but diminished chord accompanying, resulting in atonal quality
5		**Instrument(s):** horns **Appears:** 1 time **Sonic background:** tremolo strings, ascending whole tone "glissando" in winds **Comparison:** no significant connection	**Pitch:** ascending, descending, over range of 4ths **Rhythm:** uneven rhythm **Tonality:** whole tone suggestion
6		**Instrument(s):** upper strings **Appears:** 3 times **Sonic background:** horn motif, winds ascending **Comparison:** pitch pattern slim connection to solo violin (2)	**Pitch:** descending major 2nd phrases tremolo **Rhythm:** conventional (sort of!) $\frac{6}{8}$ **Tonality:** whole tone suggestion
7		**Instrument(s):** muted trumpets **Appears:** 2 times **Sonic background:** full orchestra, strings tremolo, winds semiquavers, horns syncopated **Comparison:** no comparisons	**Pitch:** ascending, descending over range of a 5th **Rhythm:** conventional $\frac{6}{8}$ **Tonality:** C# major-ish

| 8 | | **Instrument(s):** winds, harps, strings
Appears: four times
Sonic background: full ensemble fading to just low strings
Comparison: none | **Pitch:** descending pentatonic fragment in 5ths
Rhythm: treats $\frac{6}{8}$ as $\frac{3}{4}$
Tonality: pentatonic |

Activity 3: Improvisation

- This activity is about **texture** primarily, another featured musical concept in "La Mer". Students investigate this almost scientifically, applying their experience and vocabulary from other mediums to music.

- Having investigated **texture** and its vocabulary, students then investigate the texture of waves and how they could represent these with sound sources in improvisation. This activity to get students thinking about how they might express a natural phenomenon through texture specifically after all of these investigations. Students can discover in an informed and thoughtful way Debussy's orchestral texture and find how he used texture to give his impression of "Waves at Play". Students can compare what Debussy did with what they did.

- Students can then go a step further and find images to go with Sound Excerpt 3 – not as a program, but as a series of impressions, in keeping with the artistic environment of Debussy's day.

1. a. Student response.
   b. Student response.
   c. Student response.
      The purpose of the activity is that we can feel texture on surfaces and sense texture in foods and similarly we can *hear* texture in music.
      Students are given the opportunity for expanding their capacity to *hear* texture and broaden their vocabulary to *describe* texture.
   d. The friction of the surface as we encounter it.
      The projections from the surface – evenness, unevenness, depth.

2. a. Rhythm, pitch, tonality, timbre, harmony, dynamics.
   b. Student response.

3. a. Student response.
   b. Student response. Perhaps a video of waves here might be helpful!
   c. Improvisation activity. Involves sound sources choices, use of the sound source, pitch, rhythm, dynamics.
   d. Student responses.

4. a. Student response.
   b. Student response.
   c. Possible student response for bars 163-168:
      i. Medium of the water, its substance: violins 1 trill on G$^\sharp$, other strings tremolo on ostinatos, significantly no bass to weigh it down.
      ii. Playful child-like melody giving uneven surface feel, uneven surface levels, constantly changing texture play over a shimmering medium.
      iii. Interspersing tones from cor anglais, clarinets and bassoons suggesting uneven texture, as waves rise, fall, come, go.
      N.B. careful observation of waves on a beach can detect all these kinds of movements – waves, with multiple motions of varied kinds.
   d. Student response.

5. a. Student response. A possible response is that these paintings are famously made up of small dabs or dots, the size, the colour of which as you get further away give an amazing image (much like old cathode ray TV tubes!).
    b. Student response. A possible response is that Debussy uses "dabs" and "dots" of sound in motives and sonic backgrounds to create an overall picture in sound. Each sound on its own – nothing. All "dabs" of sound combined – beautiful and brilliant!
    c. Student response. A cursory investigation as in this activity justifies the statement.

6. a. b. Scherzo is an Italian word which literally means "joke" or "prank". In music it refers to playful, light, energetic stand-alone work or a movement of a symphony or sonata. Historically, Beethoven invented it to replace the Minuet.
     c. It is a scherzo by its very nature, but not in formal structure.

7. a. b. c. Student activity and response.

Activity 4: Performance

- This activity takes the leap from "paddling" in observation to "immersion" in performance. Students are given an opportunity to discover what it's like to make the Debussy soundscape with wind and sea in dialogue!

- Students require vigorous collaboration, choosing sound sources, giving music lines according to ability and putting it all together to create a convincing performance.

- Music is about communication. Students are given the opportunity to share with an audience what they have learned about Debussy's music and how they have attempted to achieve his sounds in their own arrangement.
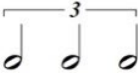
1. a. Limitations could include:

   i. Debussy uses multiple instruments, usually in the same group, to "thicken" textures and strengthen timbres. Reducing instruments to 5 will change texture and timbre significantly (I saw a group on YouTube that reduced a section of La Mer to 3 instruments – "Mission Impossible"??)
   ii. Also some motives, or textural fragments will have to be excluded.

   b. Conventional:
   i. The time signature is and this rhythm is used conventionally, even with triplet groupings combined with even minim/crotchet pulses.
   ii. The violins and violas create an ostinato pattern in harmony.

   c. Unconventional:
   i. The main motive here is in whole tones (more unconventional then than now!)
   ii. Punctuated arpeggiated figures in cor anglais and piccolo also in whole tones
   iii. The theme is eventually (bar 115 on) played by bass winds, strings and the horns above ostinatos from most other instruments (perhaps not so unconventional).

   d. Possible difficulties:
   i. Different rhythms in combinations
   ii. The rhythmic precision required for the punctuated wind figures.
   iii. The rhythmic and pitch precision of the ostinatos.

2. a. Student response. The main theme appears to be "in conversation" constantly with the punctuated wind figures. Another version in horns at bar 108 joins the conversation.
   Perhaps the ostinatos are background, perhaps chatter!

3. Student response. Some responses might include:

	Similarities	Differences
wind	• fluid • movement random or directional	• can't see it, only its effect on things • wind affects water
waves	• can feel it	• can see it • water is affected by wind

4. One voice is constant – the bass main theme repeated here twice (three times since bar 98). This provides **unity**. Other voices – the "random" wind figures – appear closer together as the "dialogue" proceeds interspersed with other voices in oboe and flute. This provides **contrast**.

5. a. 1 – Flute mostly
   2 – Cor anglaise and oboe
   3 – French horns
   4 – Violins 1
   5 – Cellos and double basses

   b. • Violin rhythm in the ostinato

   • Main theme fitting in with ostinato, especially
   • All instruments moving together with the crotchet pulse

   c. Articulation and dynamics give character to the voices in this dialogue.

6. a. b. Student activity.
7. a. b. c. d. Student activity.
8. Student response.

Activity 5: Composition/Musicology

1. Student response, which could include the following:

   a.

   Trumpets "chattering" quietly   Oboes "loudly" interjecting

   b.

   Ascending pizzicato sequence of uncertain tonality plus occasional bass drum and cymbals.

   c. See labels above.
   d. Trumpet theme   *Quiet certainty*: regular rhythm, dense harmony
      Oboe theme   *Nervous*: loud acciaccatura uncertainty, quickly to *p*
      Cellos, basses   Background of rising emotion – ascending, crescendo

2. a. Student response.
   b. Student response.
   c. Student response.
   d. Student response.
   e. Student response.

3. a. Student response.
   b. Student response.
   c. Student response.
   d. Student response.
   e. Student response.
   f. Student response.

4. Student response.

GLOSSARY

Musical term	Definition
a2	Two instruments play the given pitch.
Accompaniment	The part of the music that is not the main theme or tune, but the musical support.
Da capo	From the beginning.
Dissonant	The term describing the sound when notes played simultaneously do not blend together but clash.
Duration	Referring to the rhythmic aspects of music, length of sounds or silence.
Dynamics and expression	Volume and choice of how the sound is made.
Expressive techniques	Ways of playing or articulating a sound often related to the interpretation of a style.
Extended Techniques	When a player is required to play their instrument in an untraditional manner, such as blowing into a trumpet without the mouthpiece or tapping the belly of a stringed instrument.
Forte (*f*)	Loud
Fortepiano (*fp)*	To commence a note loudly and becoming very soft immediately after.
Graphic Notation	A method of indicating pitch, rhythm and dynamics using symbols instead of traditional musical notation.
Legato	Smoothly
Melody	Tune
Metre	The way that the beats are grouped in a piece of music, ie the number of beats in a bar
Orchestra	A group of mixed instruments comprising woodwind, brass, percussion and stringed instruments and usually directed by a conductor.
Ostinato	A repeating pattern – may be rhythm only or rhythm and pitch.
Pentatonic Scale	A scale consisting of five notes only – the most common being the 1st, 2nd 3rd, 5th, and 6th notes of the scale.
Piano (*p*)	A dynamic marking meaning soft.
Pitch	The relative highness of lowness of sounds. Discussion of pitch includes the melody and direction of pitch movement and the harmony (different parts).

Pizzicato	A technique used by string players where the sound is made by plucking the string rather than bowing it.
Program music	Music which is inspired by a story, character, place or atmosphere i.e. it is inspired by a non musical program.
Sequence	A pattern that repeats at a higher or lower pitch.
Sforzando piano (*sfp*)	To accent the start of the note loudly, then become suddenly soft.
Soundscape	Compositions of organised sounds which are describe a scene of a place.
Staccato	Playing a note so that it sounds short and detached.
Structure (form)	The plan underlying the construction or the design of a piece of music. Structure relates to the ways in which sections of music sound similar or different.
Texture	The layers of sound in a piece of music.
Timbre/Tone Colour	The particular features of a sound which distinguish one sound (instrument or singer) from another.
Tuned and Untuned percussion	Tuned percussion refers to percussion instruments which play specific pitches such as xylophones. Untuned percussion instruments include shakers, triangles and other instruments with no definable pitch.