



Lesson Plan – Mercury

Learning objectives

Pupils will –

- Pass a musical idea around a circle
- Create repeating patterns over a steady pulse
- Combine ideas to make a short composition

Key vocabulary

Rhythm: a collection of notes of different duration forming a pattern

Pulse: a steady beat

Ostinato: a repeating pattern

Motif: a small musical idea

Resources

- Mercury performance
- Mercury resource
- Optional: Instruments (classroom percussion, pitched and/or unpitched)

Lesson outline

1. Introduction

Explain that Mercury is the Flying Messenger and so Holst uses the orchestra to pass musical messages around. When Mercury lands she is full of buzzing energy and this becomes a repeated rhythm

2. Task 1: Flying messages

Pass sounds and patterns around the circle

3. Task 2: Excited rhythms

Learn Holst's Mercury rhythm: 'sitting on a beautiful planet, look at me'
Invent new rhythms using sentences

4. Conclusion

Create a short piece by combining these two ideas – the flying messages and the excited rhythms

Assessment

Can pupils work as a team to pass ideas around?

Can pupils clap or play a rhythm to a pulse

Extension

Recreate your piece on instruments. See below

Task 1: Flying messages

1. Holst invents a tiny musical motif to represent Mercury. It is just six notes long –



2. Invent a short motif using body percussion, it could be as simple as 6 claps, and pass it around your circle
3. Try this on instruments, You can use whatever instruments you have and work as a full class in a circle or in smaller composing groups. You don't need to use the same instruments but you do need to try and pass the same pattern.

Task 2: Excited rhythms

1. When Mercury lands she is full of energy and so Holst gives her an excited rhythm. Holst's rhythm is this:



2. Invent your own by following these steps:
 - Ask a simple question such as 'how does Mercury feel?'
 - Gather several answers and decide on the best one (I.e. 'Oh my gosh, this planet is really spacious!')
 - Ask your children to think this answer as you play a steady pulse
 - Now ask them to speak it over and over to the pulse
 - Finally, ask them to clap the answer (clapping each syllable), round and round. By doing this they have created an ostinato
 - Then, transfer this idea onto instruments. If you have pitches just stick to one – that's what Holst does!
3. This is a repeated pattern and should be played over and over. Decide how many times to play it or appoint a conductor to show when to start and stop.

Extension activity: One big piece

- Combine these two tasks to make one big piece. It might be easiest to split into two teams to achieve this. One team works on the 'flying messages', the other works on 'excited rhythms'.
- Hear each group separately and then decide how to put the two ideas together to make one piece. Holst begins with his flying messages before moving onto his excited rhythm. But your children might decide to do something completely different!