

The Alice Sound



FOUND SOUNDS

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT

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LSO London
Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
University of London

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT – FOUND SOUNDS



Wonderland is a noisy place: plates crash, the dormouse shrieks and the Red Queen screams!

One of my favourite chapters in Lewis Carroll's book is No.4 – Pig and Pepper. It describes what happens when Alice meets the Duchess.

Outside the Duchess' house, Alice hears...

"...a most extraordinary noise going on within — a constant howling and sneezing, and every now and then a great crash, as if a dish or kettle had been broken to pieces."

When Alice enters the kitchen, she finds that it is...

"...full of smoke from one end to the other: the Duchess was sitting on a three-legged stool in the middle, nursing a baby; the cook was leaning over the fire, stirring a large cauldron which seemed to be full of soup."

And then...

"...the cook took the cauldron of soup off the fire, and at once set to work throwing everything within her reach at the Duchess and the baby — the fire-irons came first; then followed a shower of saucepans, plates, and dishes."

Inspired by this chaotic scene, I decided to add some unusual instruments into the percussion section of the orchestra, and so I wrote a special part for... a set of pots and pans! They sound really cool – a bit like a hard, metallic drum kit.

This project will challenge young people to make a rhythmic piece of music using unconventional instruments or found sounds. It will work equally well in school with a large group as it will at home with the family.

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EVERYDAY OBJECTS = WONDERLAND ORCHESTRA

1. FIND YOUR SOUNDS.

Explore as many different sounds as you can made by everyday objects. Experiment with pots and pans hit by a wooden spoon. Listen to the bang of a desk drawer, the click of a stapler (empty of course for safety!) or the ripping sound of sticky tape from a roll. Be as creative as you like. Find as many unusual sounds as you can.

If you are working in school, challenge every member of the class to discover a sound. If you are working at home, start by raiding the kitchen cupboards!

A Word of Caution

This activity only works if the sounds you discover are satisfying. Really satisfying. Avoid anything too quiet and anything that is difficult to control. You will have to be able to make your sound easily and on demand. And of course, be safe. Always.

2. ASSEMBLE YOUR ORCHESTRA.

Once everyone has found an 'instrument', listen to each sound in turn, played one after the other. Encourage the children to focus all of their attention onto the sound of this strange collection of instruments.

3. ORGANISE THE INSTRUMENTS.

Now, challenge the children to sequence their sounds. Aim to find the best and most interesting order to play them in.

Can any of the sounds be combined and played at the same time?

Would it work if you start with the quietest instruments and end with the loudest? Or vice versa?

Is there an especially good sound that could be used as a surprise or a shock?

4. MAKE A CURIOUS PIECE OF MUSIC.

Make a short piece of music using only your found sounds. The most important thing to focus on, is devising a logical and easy-to-remember structure to play each piece. Nothing should feel random in this music. And no matter how ridiculous your instrument, ensure everything is played with care and attention.

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A BIG STEP FURTHER – BEAT BOXES

It may be fun to use your collection of found sounds to make a more rhythmical piece of music. The easiest way to do this is by using beat boxes.

1. DRAW THIS CHART ON THE BOARD OR ON A LARGE PIECE OF PAPER.

Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Line 1								
Line 2								
Line 3								
Line 4								

Each box in the chart represents one beat. You simply count through the chart, left to right, line by line. So in the example above, you would count from 1 to 8, four times in a row.

2. FILL SOME OF THE BOXES WITH YOUR FOUND SOUNDS.

Invite each member of the class to choose a single box in the chart in which to play their found sound. Then, write the name of their instrument (or draw it) in the box they've chosen.

TOP TIP

Don't fill every box. Leave two or three boxes empty in each line.
And it is absolutely fine if two or more people choose to play in the same box.

3. PLAY IT.

Challenge the class to count through the chart, saying each number out loud and playing their sound at the correct time.

TOP TIP

Start off nice and slowly, and you must say each number. Take your timing from the second hand on a clock: one tick = one beat.

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4. PERFORM IT.

Once the children can confidently navigate their way through the chart, reduce the volume of their count to a whisper. Then, increase the speed.

As a final challenge, play through the chart without counting out loud at all. All we want to hear is a rhythmical collection of unusual sounds.

FINALLY, HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO DEVELOP THIS ACTIVITY FURTHER:

1. ADD EXTRA LINES TO THE CHART.

We started out with a four-line chart, but feel free to add more lines if you wish. The more lines you add, the more challenging the activity becomes.

2. PLAY MORE THAN ONCE.

Instead of playing only once in the chart, invite each child to find a second place to play – or even a third.

If you are doing this activity with a small group or at home, perhaps each person could have three different sounds to play.

3. CHANGE THE NUMBER OF BEATS IN THE CHART.

If this activity is too challenging, reduce the number of beats to 6 or 4. And if it is too easy, try using an odd number of beats – such as 5, 7 or 9. Each line could even have a different number of beats.

HAVE FUN.

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