

The Alice Sound



MUSICAL MIRRORS

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT

The Alice Sound

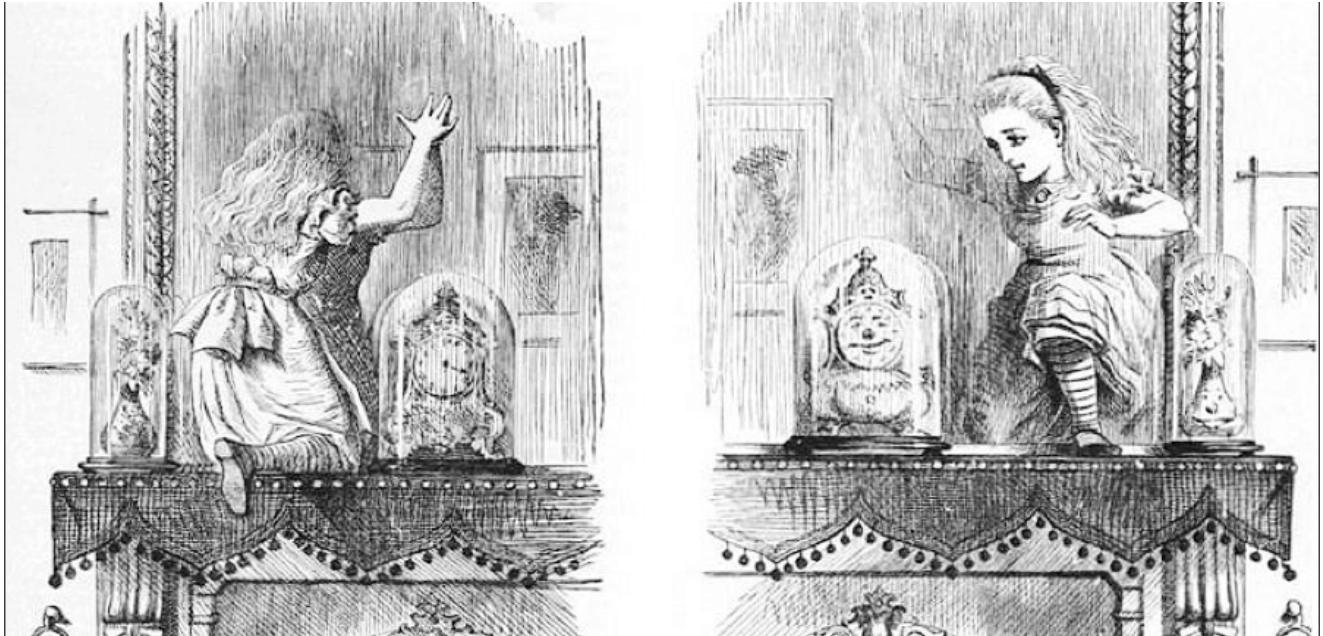
CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT



LSO London Symphony Orchestra

Queen Mary University of London

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT – MUSICAL MIRRORS



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Alice quickly discovers that things are most curious on the other side of the looking-glass. Books are written backwards, pathways lead back to where you are already standing, and it's perfectly normal to think six impossible things before breakfast! Nothing Alice encounters on her adventure is normal, though it's great inspiration for a creative music project.

For centuries, composers have been fascinated by the very same concept that inspired Lewis Carroll's second *Alice* book. Countless tunes have been turned upside-down or played backwards.

Rachmaninoff famously flipped over a theme by Paganini to create the most glorious melody (check out the 18th variation of his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*).

100 years before *Through the Looking-Glass* was first published, Haydn played with a musical mirror in the minuet of his 47th Symphony. It really is amazing, that such an abstract concept can be used to produce music that sounds truly satisfying.

What follows are some fun ideas to explore musical mirrors in class or at home.

1. CREATE A SHORT SEQUENCE OF ATMOSPHERIC SOUNDS (AS A CLASS OR IN SMALLER GROUPS)

This doesn't have to be very complex. The children could simply organise a selection of unpitched percussion sounds. They may even wish to use voices.

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This sequence doesn't have to be very long. 60 seconds will be enough. But it must sound *really satisfying*. So this task is about selecting the best possible sounds and then placing them in the best possible order.

TOP TIP

Think of an emotion to inspire your music. Encourage the children to think carefully about which instruments could represent that feeling. *Can the emotion influence how they play their instruments?*

2. STRUCTURE IS IMPORTANT. VERY.

It is vital that the children can easily recall the structure of their musical sequence.

Their chosen sounds could be played separately (one after the other) or arranged into interesting combinations. They could even overlap with one another. Or they might go for a mixture of all those things!

Challenge the class to organise themselves into the optimum playing positions for their sequence.

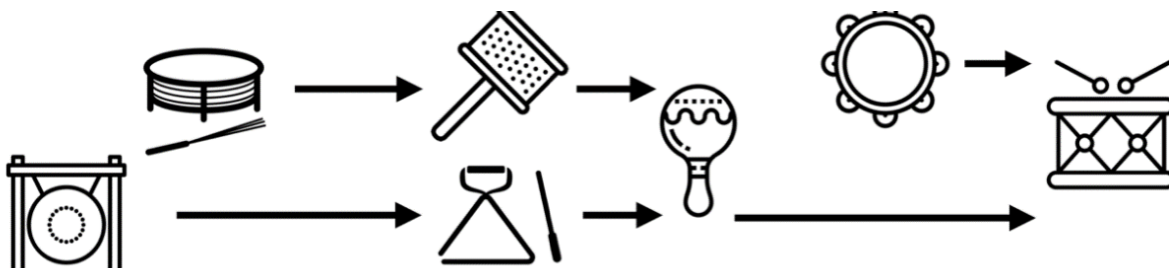
Can their performance positions reflect the structure of the music?

3. THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT THE VOLUME (DYNAMICS).

Shape each sound carefully. Is there a gradual crescendo? Or is the music full of contrast?

4. PERFORM THE COMPLETE SEQUENCE.

It really could be as simple as this:



5. NOW, MAKE A SOUND EFFECT TO REPRESENT A MAGICAL MUSICAL MIRROR.

How can music sound magical?

Is this effect played by a single instrument or is it a combination of interesting sounds?

How long should it last for?

What volume is it played at?

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Explore different combinations of sounds (and/or voices) until the class are happy with the result. The rule is – this music must sound truly *magical*. And if it sounds great – sustain it for as long as you like.

6. USE THE MUSICAL MIRROR TO REVERSE YOUR SEQUENCE.

Add the magical musical mirror onto the end of your atmospheric sequence. Then – given it is a mirror - try playing through the sequence again – but backwards!

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO DEVELOP YOUR MUSIC FURTHER:

1. ADD SOME SHORT MELODIC PHRASES TO THE SEQUENCE.

The phrases don't have to be very complicated – three or four well-chosen notes in each may be enough. However, it is very important the phrases fit with the atmosphere of the music.

Where can they be placed within the sequence?

And importantly, can they also be played backwards after the musical mirror?

TOP TIP

If you make the melodic phrases using chime bars, simply put them in the correct order of the phrase – so they can be played one note after the next – moving in turn from left to right. Then, when it comes to playing the phrase backwards, you simply move back through the line, but from right to left. Easy!

2. ADD SOME TEXT INTO THE MUSIC .

Be careful with this – start slowly, because whatever text you add to the music – you will have to be able to pronounce it backwards too!

Begin with a single word – something chewy with lots of syllables. Try saying it (or even singing it). Add some shape to the word e.g., start softly but get louder – or try playing with its speed. Aim to make one single word sound as fascinating as you possibly can.

Then, reverse it. It is fine to write this out on the board, but try to perform the word backwards.

And if this is fun and works well, can the children develop a short phrase or sentence – that they can perform both ways?

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