

The Alice Sound



THE CHESHIRE CAT

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT

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LSO London Symphony Orchestra

Queen Mary University of London

CREATIVE MUSIC PROJECT - THE CHESHIRE CAT

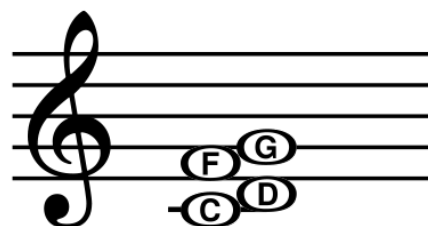
“The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought: still it had VERY long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt that it ought to be treated with respect.”



The Cheshire Cat is surely one of the most famous residents of Wonderland. This project will inspire you to create your own ‘feline’ composition using material taken directly from the *Wonderland Suite*.

THE CAT’S CHORD

Every time the Cheshire cat appears in the orchestral score, he’s introduced by his very own chord. The chord is made up of 4 notes - **C D F G** - all played at the same time.



1. PLAY THE CAT’S CHORD

Using any available pitched instruments, aim to make this combination of notes sound as magical as possible - as if something amazing has suddenly appeared. Choose the best possible instruments to play these four pitches, and don’t forget - you could even sing them.

THREE TOP TIPS

If lots of people are playing notes of the chord together, make sure they all begin at EXACTLY the same time. It will help enormously if you nominate one person to be the conductor.

Why not add some unpitched percussion sounds as well – to make the chord sound extra special?

Think very carefully about the volume of the chord. *Does it stay the same, or does it change?*

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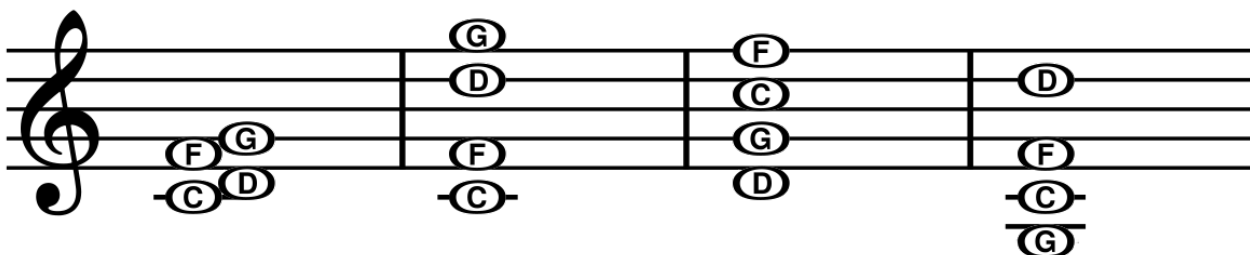
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2. VARY THE ORCHESTRATION.

Experiment with which instruments play the chord. Think very carefully about their range. Are the notes of the chord played by high instruments or low instruments or a mixture of both? Try swapping the four pitches around different instruments, in different octaves. Find out what sounds best.

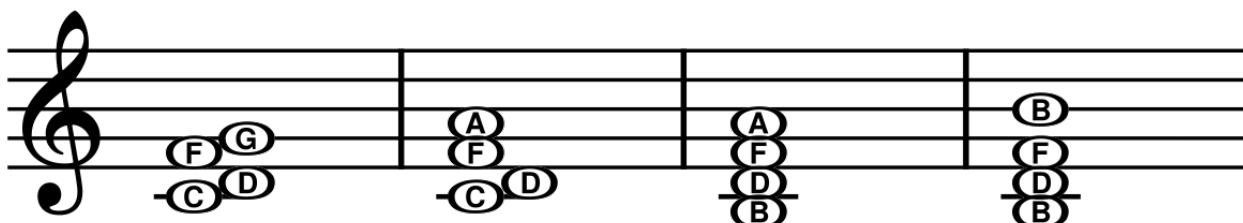
Cat's Chord Variations



3. NOW, MAKE SOME NEW CHORDS.

Why not make some further chords for the Cheshire cat. Use the original cat's chord as a starting point – then change one of its notes to make a new chord. Then change another note to make another chord. And so on, and so on – like this

Chord Progression



4. BUILD A MAGICAL CHORD PROGRESSION.

Organise all these different ideas into a seamless, but very magical sounding chord progression. The challenge is for the class to navigate their way through their series of chords.

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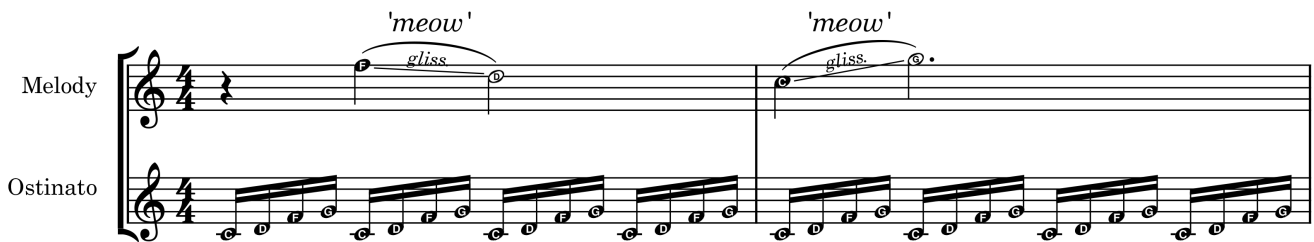
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OSTINATO, MELODY AND PULSE

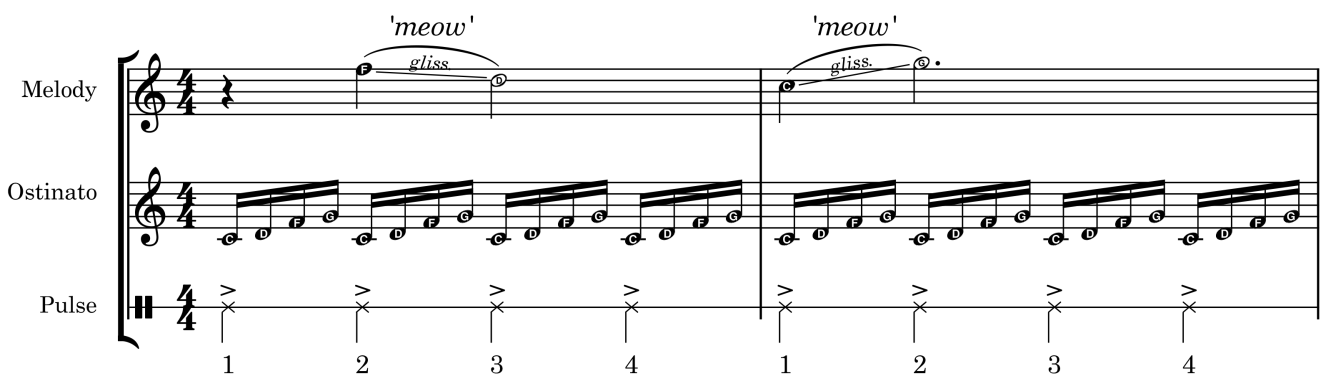
In the *Wonderland Suite*, the four pitches of the cat's chord (**C D F G**) are used to make a fast, repeating pattern – called an **ostinato**. The ostinato simply plays each of the four notes, one after the other, over and over, very quickly.



On top of the ostinato, a simple **melody** appears, sliding from one note to the next, as if the cat is saying 'meow!'.



Finally, metallic sounding percussion instruments lay down a steady **pulse**, which helps to keep everything in sync.



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ADD ALL THESE ELEMENTS TO YOUR MUSIC

1. MAKE AN OSTINATO

Use the cat's chord (**C D F G**) - or any of the new ones you have created - to make an ostinato. The notes can be played in any order and in any rhythm, but they must repeat.

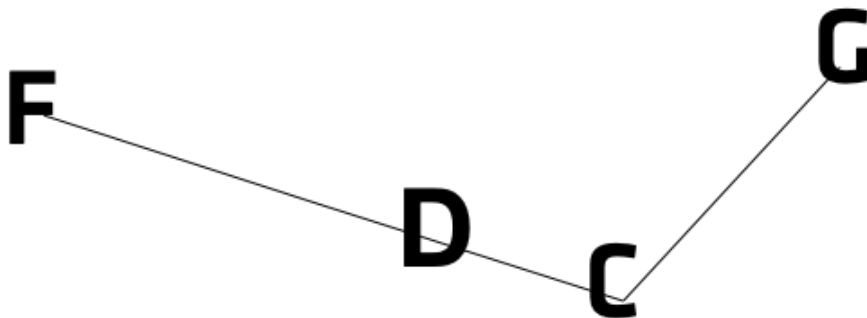
2. MARK THE PULSE

Using unpitched percussion, add a solid pulse to your ostinato. Think very carefully about what instruments to use, this is music about a very magical cat after all!

Does the pulse play at the same time as every note in the ostinato? Or every two notes? Or every four? Experiment with how these two elements fit together.

3. ADD A MELODY!

Use the same four pitches as your chord to make a short melodic phrase. The cat's chord contains **C D F G**, so here is a short phrase built from the same notes:



The trick here is to make your melody sound as 'feline' as possible. Try to make it sound as if it is meowing!

TOP TIP

I make my melody 'meow' by sliding from one note to an other. This is very easy to do on a string instrument – or a trombone. But it is also super-easy to do this with your voice. We call that sliding technique **glissando**.

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HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO DEVELOP YOUR MUSIC FURTHER:

1. HELLO / GOODBYE.

The Cheshire Cat appears and disappears in a flash. He often teases Alice by vanishing very slowly
“...beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin.”

Can you make your cat music appear or vanish in different ways?

TOP TIP

Think very carefully about the volume of your music and pay close attention to the order in which instruments are played.

2. LOOK AT THE BOOK!

It could be fun to incorporate some text from Lewis Carroll's book into your music. It could be spoken before you play – or afterwards – or even in-between different sections of your music.

You could even have a narrator (or several) who speak Carroll's words **on top** of certain parts of your music.

And of course, you may write your own words too, but here are some fun excerpts I found in the book:

"Cheshire Puss," she began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. "Come, it's pleased so far," thought Alice, and she went on.
"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to" said the Cat.
"I don't much care where—" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go." said the Cat.

"Well, then," the Cat went on, "you see, a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad."

"Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin," thought Alice; "but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!"

HAVE FUN.

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