

OPERA NATIONAL CYMRU
CENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

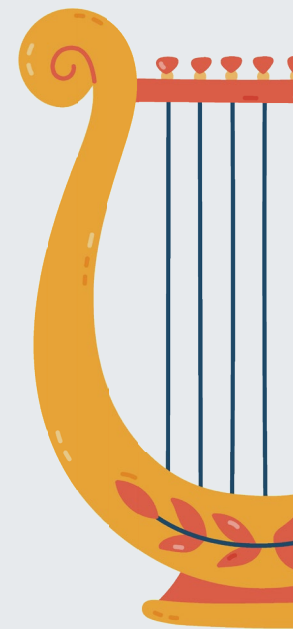


Schools Concert 2026



Marvellous Musical Mythology!

Teachers' Resource



wno.org.uk



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Introduction

Opera is a magnificent artform which combines music, drama, and visual design to create an all-encompassing sensory experience. Our Schools Concert features our world-renowned Orchestra taking centre stage alongside opera singer soloists and a presenter to guide the audience through the performance. The show will last up to an hour with no interval. This year, our theme is the fantastical world of **Greek and Roman mythology!**

This theme offers a great opportunity to turn our one-off Schools Concert into a longer project for your pupils. Have a look through these resources to find tips, ideas, and activities that you can complete with pupils before and after the performance to add depth to the learning journey. We'd love to see some of your work from the classroom by emailing schools@wno.org.uk!



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE



MUSICAL NOTES...

If you see a musical note, there will be a suggestion of music to accompany the task or activity, which can be found on YouTube or other streaming services.



LIGHTBULB MOMENTS!

These are activities big and small, to facilitate with your pupils.



CURRICULUM LINKS

See how activities link to different areas of the curriculum, with suggestions for further extension.

The Music

Here is the repertoire list for our Schools Concert inspired by Greek and Roman mythology. Feel free to have a listen to some pieces before the performance or take a deeper dive afterwards. You can find all of these pieces on streaming services, YouTube, or available for purchase.

Beethoven, *The Creatures of Prometheus*: Overture

Mozart, *Idomeneo*: 'Fuor del mar'

Lully, *Thésée*: 'Revenez, Amours, Revenez'

Holst, *The Planets*: Mars

Cavalli, *La Calisto*: 'Ballo de Orsi' (Dance of the Bears) – Tarquinio Merula, 'Chaconne'

Elwyn-Edwards, 'Gwraig Lleu' (The Wife of Llew)

Handel, *Semele*: 'Where'er You Walk'

Offenbach, *Orpheus in the Underworld*: 'Fly Duet'

Offenbach, *Orpheus in the Underworld*: 'Galop infernal' AKA The Can-Can!



FANTASTIC FABLES

'Gwraig Lleu' or 'The Wife of Llew' by Welsh composer Dilys Elwyn-Edwards tells a story taken from a famous collection of Welsh mythology, the *Mabinogion*. Gareth Glyn's and Anni Llŷn's ***Fantastic Fables*** is a brilliant set of songs inspired by this mythology and composed especially for primary school-aged children. *Fantastic Fables* can be purchased with guide tracks and an accompanying resource booklet full of exciting lesson plans.

You can also read the story of Lleu and Blodeuwedd in Matt Brown's and Eloise Williams's bilingual children's book, *The Mab*.



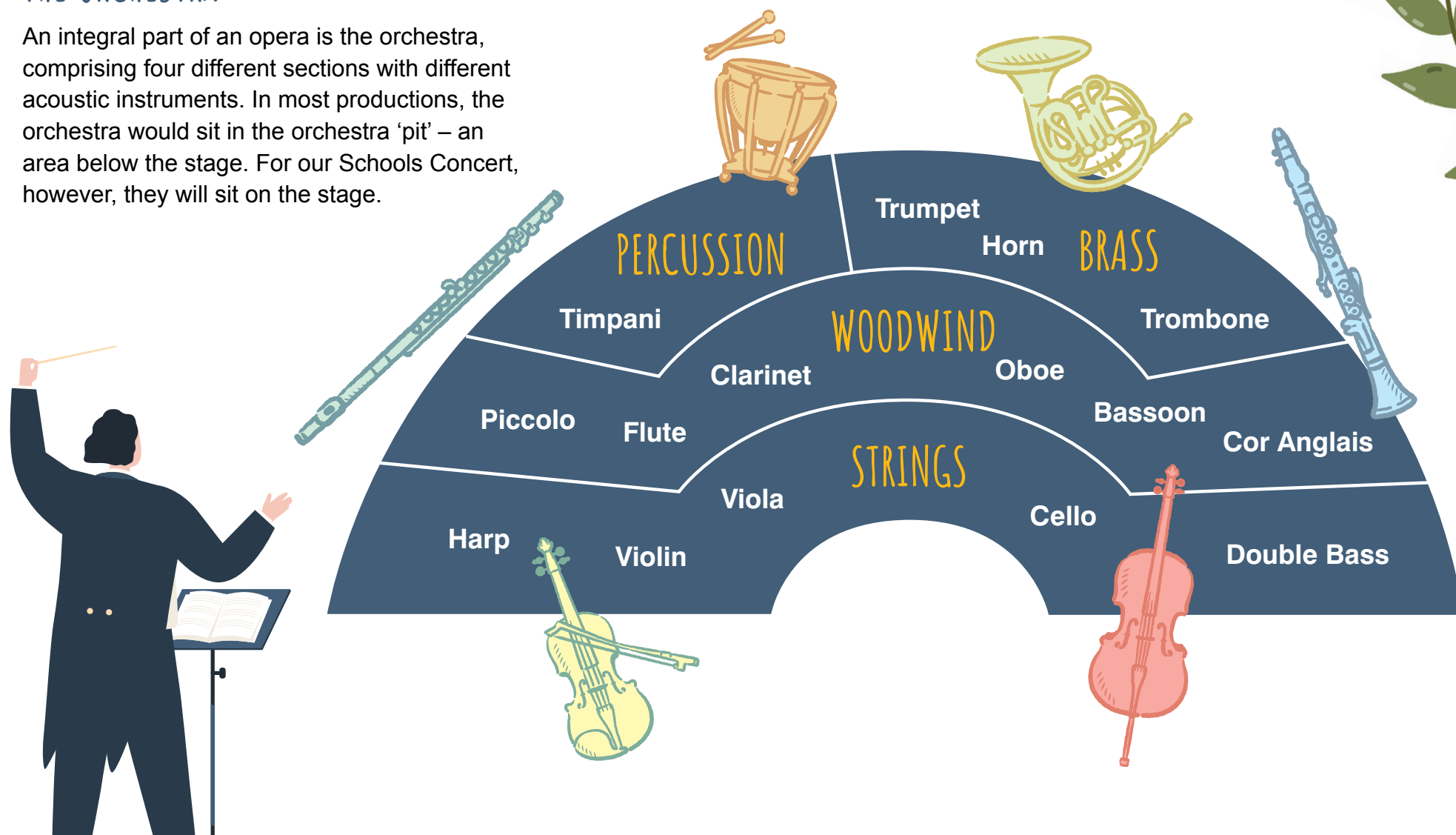
See <https://tycerddshop.com/products/gareth-glyn-fantastic-fables> (score and tracks) and <https://tycerddshop.com/products/gareth-glyn-anni-llyn-fantastic-fables-resource-booklet> (resource booklet).



Meet the Musicians

THE ORCHESTRA

An integral part of an opera is the orchestra, comprising four different sections with different acoustic instruments. In most productions, the orchestra would sit in the orchestra 'pit' – an area below the stage. For our Schools Concert, however, they will sit on the stage.



THE SINGERS

An opera singer's job is to tell the opera's plot through song. They will often wear costumes, wigs, and makeup, and will move about the set with other characters and chorus members.

They train for years to achieve a very high standard of singing and to be able to project their voice over the orchestra and to the back of a theatre.



During the concert, ask pupils to look out for the conductor. This person leads the orchestra and singers in each piece of music, ensuring they're playing the right notes at the right time.

Why do pupils think the percussion and brass instruments sit at the back of the orchestra?

Which instrument do they think plays the highest pitch?

A: the piccolo!

HIGHEST VOICES

SOPRANO



MEZZO



TENOR



BARITONE



BASS

LOWEST VOICES



Classroom Orchestra Layout



Using the orchestra layout on page 5, create a life size version on your classroom/hall floor using masking tape to show the different sections. Then, try out some of these activities:

Do pupils know where different instruments sit, and why? Print out or ask pupils to draw the instruments and section names and ask them to experiment with where they go.

Hint: They should think about how loud the instruments are.

Once sections and instruments are in the right place, play some games:

- 📱 Ask the class to move to different sections quickly (with or without the labels on the ground), e.g.
- ✦ The whole class goes to the STRING section!
- ✦ If you have an A in your name, move to the BRASS!

EXTENSION



Play instrument excerpts and ask pupils to move to the correct section for that instrument. You can find lots of solo instrument or small band excerpts on YouTube or streaming platforms.

Create your own unique orchestra layout using your classroom instruments.

Work as a class, in groups or as individuals and ask pupils to decide where each instrument should sit within an orchestral semi-circle.

- 📱 How loud is the instrument?
- 📱 How big is it? (will it block anyone's view of the conductor?)
- 📱 Should they be grouped in sections? E.g. all the glockenspiels together, all the tambourines, all the keyboards.



Deductive reasoning and decision making
Collaboration and team communication
Exploring to develop knowledge



Meet the Gods!

During our concert, you'll hear about some of the gods from the amazing worlds of Ancient Greek and Roman mythology. While they might have different names, the Greek and Roman gods are more or less the same. That's because the Romans drew inspiration from Ancient Greek culture, basing their own gods on those invented by the Greeks and giving them similar personalities and stories.

These gods are like our modern-day superheroes, possessing incredible strength and powers – and they often got involved with the lives of humans down on Earth! Read on to find out more about just a few of them...



To find out more about the Gods and Ancient Greek civilization, see [KS2 Ancient Greece – BBC Teach](#)



Zeus (Greek)
Jupiter (Roman)

The supreme king of the gods, known for controlling the weather and throwing thunderbolts! He often disguised himself as an animal and could perfectly mimic anyone's voice.



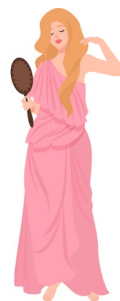
Hera (G)
Juno (R)

Queen of the gods – the goddess of marriage and family, and protector of women. According to Greek myth, Hera created the whole Milky Way galaxy!



Ares (G)
Mars (R)

The god of war. The Greeks thought that Ares was violent and cowardly, but the Romans regarded Mars as honourable and the guardian 'father' of the city of Rome.



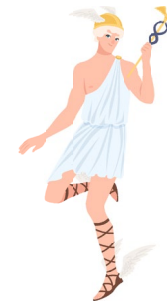
Aphrodite (G)
Venus (R)

The goddess of love and beauty. In both Greek and Roman mythologies, she emerged fully grown from the sea. She also possessed a magical band which could make anyone fall in love.



Poseidon (G)
Neptune (R)

The god of the sea, storms, and... horses. Known for his violent temper, he could cause tidal waves and earthquakes with one strike of his trident (a three-pronged spear).



Hermes (G)
Mercury (R)

The 'winged messenger', known for his incredible speed and mischievous trickery. The god of thieves and rogues. Also invented an ancient musical instrument, the lyre.

The Planets: Characterising the Gods

You might recognise some of the gods' names from the planets in our solar system – that's because all of the planets were named after characters from Roman mythology (apart from Uranus, who is a character from Greek mythology).

In our concert, you'll hear an extract from Gustav Holst's '*Mars*', which is a piece from his **suite** (a collection of music) called *The Planets*. Holst's suite perfectly captures the different personalities of the mythological Roman gods.



For further activities based on Holst's '*Mars*', please see the BBC Ten Pieces page: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/ten-pieces/articles/zf6hsrd>.



Understanding how the expressive arts shape ideas and feelings
Responding and reflecting, both as artist and audience
Exploring work from diverse cultures and societies



ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

- Listen to an extract from each piece in Holst's *The Planets* and ask learners to imagine what sort of character the music is depicting. What features of the music help to create the god's personality? (e.g. major/minor, tempo, rhythm, melody, dynamics, choice of instruments, etc).
- To extend this activity, you could play a game of 'Roman/Greek musical statues' and ask the class to walk around in the style of the god being depicted by Holst's music. When the music stops, pick the best overall actor or best final pose for each piece/god.
- For a further creative exercise, you could ask learners to create their own god and decide on their personality and 'superpowers'; alternatively, they could research one of the Greek/Roman gods and explain their story and key characteristics. Learners could then draw their created or chosen character, write a story about them, or compose a piece of music which demonstrates the god's key traits.

N.B. stories about the Greek and Roman gods sometimes contain 'adult' moments, so it's important to make sure that learners are accessing age-appropriate sources!



Dance of the Bears: Ground Bass / Basso Ostinato

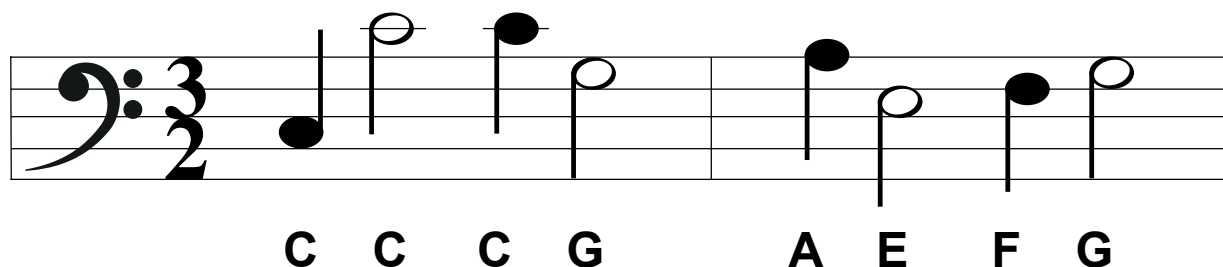
One of the pieces in our concert is '*Ballo de Orsi*' ('*Dance of the Bears*') from Francesco Cavalli's opera, *La Calisto* (written in 1651, almost four hundred years ago). At the end of this opera, the goddess Juno turns the mortal nymph Calisto into a bear!

Confusingly, the manuscript for Cavalli's opera does not include music for certain scenes, including '*Dance of the Bears*' – so we're performing a piece which was chosen for this scene in a 1993 production by La Monnaie in Belgium: a chaconne by Tarquinio Merula.

A chaconne is a dance piece based around a repeated bass line, known as a **basso ostinato** or a **ground bass**. Usually, this bass line is played by a low instrument like a cello or a bassoon. Other instruments then play different melodies over the top, creating variety over a fixed structure.

The most famous example of a basso ostinato in classical music is Pachelbel's '*Canon in D*'. Famous examples of ground basses in modern pop music include Queen's '*Another One Bites the Dust*', The White Stripes' '*Seven Nation Army*', and Billie Eilish's '*Bad Guy*'.

The bass line for '*Dance of the Bears*' is just as catchy as any of those songs, and goes like this:





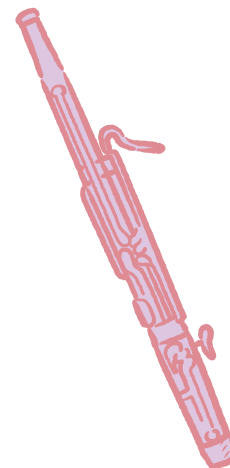
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- ▣ Learn the bass line to Merula's chaconne. Learners could do this individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. They can play this bass line on whatever instrument they choose – but it would probably sound best played low down on a piano or on a bass instrument such as a cello, bassoon, tuba, or bass guitar.
- ▣ Once the bass line has been learned, one person or a small group of people can continue to play it, while others take it in turns to improvise melodies over the top. Merula's chaconne is in C major, which means that if learners stick to the white notes on a keyboard (or the C major scale on other instruments) the melodies will sound good! It might be helpful for one person to keep a steady beat with a percussion instrument – you could also add in additional percussion instruments for some rhythmic excitement (like in our performance).

- ▣ If learners have mastered Merula's chaconne (or if you'd simply prefer for them to compose their own music), they could invent a short bass line and build their own chaconnes around this *basso ostinato* with a variety of melodies over the top.
- ▣ A chaconne is meant to be a dance piece, and our 'Ballo de Orsi' will feature some fantastic bear dancers. One alternative or additional activity could be for learners to create a short dance number to some or all of Merula's chaconne.



Exploring and experimenting with my own and others' creative ideas
 Understanding period conventions
 Respond creatively to challenges with resilience and flexibility



Animal Metamorphosis Playlist

Greek and Roman mythology are full of stories about gods turning themselves (and some very unfortunate humans) into animals. For example, in our concert, during 'The Fly Duet' from *Orpheus in the Underworld* by Jacques Offenbach, you'll see Jupiter transform himself into a golden fly to try and make Eurydice fall in love with him – how odd!



THE SINGERS

Here are a few other listening suggestions for tracks which link to animals in the metamorphoses of Greek and Roman mythology:

SWAN

Saint-Saens, *Carnival of the Animals*: 'The Swan'. Zeus transformed himself into a swan to try and win over the Aetolian princess Leda. This hypnotic piece for cello and piano demonstrates the swan's serene, gliding beauty.

EAGLE

Wagner, *Die Walküre*: 'Ride of the Valkyries'. Swooping strings and a majestic, rising brass melody make this sound like an eagle soaring over mountains. Zeus transformed himself into an eagle (one of his main symbols) to kidnap the Trojan prince Ganymede.

SPIDER

Bartók, *String Quartet No. 4*: 'IV. Allegretto pizzicato'. The scurrying, pizzicato (plucked) strings of this piece sound just like a spider creeping across a floor or weaving a web. The goddess Minerva transformed a woman, Arachne, into a spider for beating her in a weaving contest. We get the word 'arachnid' (spider) from Arachne's name.

BEE

Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*: 'Flight of the Bumblebee'. A fast and darting violin spectacular, which sounds like a bee zooming through the air. Zeus transformed the nymph Melissa into a bee so that she could escape her enemies and give the world honey!

FISH

Debussy, *'Poisson d'or'* (Golden Fishes). This piano piece by the French Impressionist composer uses trills, snaps, and flowing arpeggios to depict water ripples and the fast, unpredictable movement of fish. In Greek mythology, Naïs was a nymph who trapped people by transforming them into fish – until her spells backfired and she ended up as a fish herself! Another fishy piece is Saint-Saens's 'Aquarium' from *Carnival of the Animals*.



WNO Behind the Scenes

As well as the musicians, singers, and conductor that you see in the pit and on the stage, large teams of technicians, craftspeople, and administrators work together to put a full-scale opera on the stage.

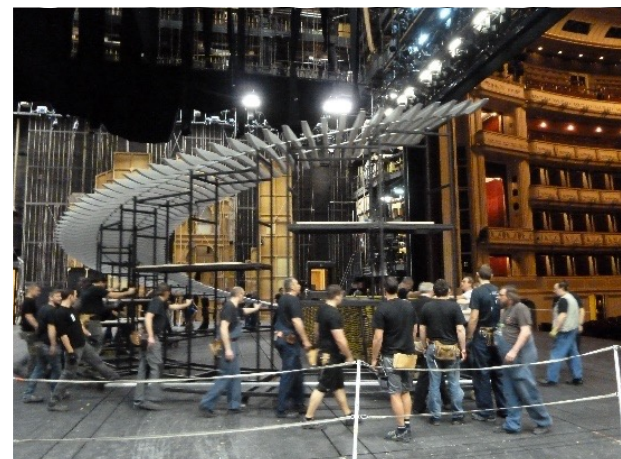
These include: designers; scenery builders, carpenters and painters; electricians; sound and lighting technicians; drivers; costume makers; wig makers; milliners, who make hats and headdresses; hair and make-up artists; prop makers; directors; assistants; and stage managers.



COSTUME & SET DESIGNERS



REPETITEURS & CHORUS MASTERS WIGS & MAKE-UP STAGE MANAGERS & LIGHTING DESIGNERS



Post-performance activity – write a review!

We want to hear what you thought of our Schools Concert – write your review below and email to schools@wno.org.uk to share your thoughts! We'll share as many as we can, and some might even be featured on the WNO webpage!

See how much musical vocabulary you can use in your review.
You might remember our presenter using some of the words below:

***Overture, Dynamics, Soprano, Tenor, Aria, Harpsichord,
Ground Bass, Harp, Duet, Conductor, Orchestra***



Name:

School:

Town/City: