

LISTEN UP!

Suggested Listening Activities for VCE Music Style and Composition

Vignettes

In an extended work for string quartet, we discover a quiet new sound-world, in which tone colour, dynamics, articulation and texture play important roles.

Composer information: [Joseph O'Connor](#) (b.1989)

Date of composition: 2018

Instrumentation: String Quartet (Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola & Cello)

Performers: [Penny Quartet](#)

Duration: 18.00

Background Information

Vignettes can be found at **12.38 – 31.40** in this video of an entire concert by Penny Quartet.

Jazz pianist, improviser, and composer Joseph O'Connor won the 2013 National Jazz Award, and the 2014 Bell Award. He wrote **Vignettes** for Penny Quartet, and each movement is dedicated to one of the four players.

The four movements have evocative titles:

Waking Dream

Choir Loft Maverick

Idle Talk

Filigree

Some observations, and possible approaches to listening to this music

Much of the work features quiet sounds, sparse textures, short musical gestures, and free-flowing rhythms without a sense of a clear underlying beat.

The listener's focus is drawn to changing tone colours, dynamics, and articulation.

We also start hearing a continuously changing and evolving series of conversations – perhaps we are moving through a large room in which we hear different interactions, comments, fragments, words, as we move from group to group.

Instruments sometimes have short, overlapping conversations. Sometimes one instrument has a long solo/monologue, with the other instruments adding brief interjections, or long sustained notes.

Instruments move suddenly from foreground to background, at one moment leading the conversation, at the next moment standing apart to listen, comment, or start a different conversation.

Sometimes disparate, intermittent musical gestures coalesce and build into a united statement.

Perhaps we might be outside in the natural environment – in a forest, or beside a lake – with sounds of birds, insects, rustling leaves, animals... coming and going, following their own patterns and pathways, separate from human schedules, rhythms, and concerns.

At other times we become aware of the changing textures within the music: complex; simple; multi-layered; sparse; disconnected events; tangled lines; fragile; shimmering pads of sound...

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Activities

As you listen to this music (12.38 – 31.40 on the video), immerse yourself in the sounds. Rather than seeking recurring patterns or familiar musical “signposts”, just focus on listening to the subtly shifting sounds, shapes, and textures. While listening, consider some of the possible approaches, as suggested above. Jot down other images, approaches, or observations that might occur to you.

After listening to one or more movements of the work, share your responses and observations with the rest of the class.

Further Explorations

20th Century Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (1881 – 1945) is another musician who sometimes explored quiet sounds, sparse textures, short musical gestures, and free-flowing rhythms without a sense of a clear underlying beat.

Some of his larger works have movements featuring “Night Music”. In these movements, he sometimes added sounds of the natural world at night, eerie chords, and haunting melodies to this hushed sound-world.

Listen to a recording of **Movement 2** from Bartók’s **String Quartet Number 5** (composed in 1934) to hear an example of his Night Music.

Creative Response

You are working with a film director who has asked you to compose a short piece of music for her next film. She has asked you to write for string quartet, and to create quiet, sparse, fragile music for a scene set in a forest at night.

She needs it by tomorrow...



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