



## Overture by Grażyna Bacewicz

### CLASSROOM RESOURCE FOR KS2

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

*Written by Rachel Leach*

#### *Background*

**The composer:**

**Grażyna BACEWICZ (1909–1969)**

- Polish composer and violinist
- One of the first Polish female composers to achieve international recognition

**The music:**

**Overture**

- Written in 1943, during World War 2. Bacewicz was writing her music in secret at this point and giving underground concerts
- Bacewicz had to wait until the war was over to hear this piece
- An overture is a short, often exciting piece that acts as an opener to a concert or an opera
- This overture begins with secret messages in Morse Code and then becomes an exciting burst of energy

**Trailblazer:**

Polish composer, Grażyna Bacewicz, wrote music at a time when being a female composer was very unusual, during the Second World War.

## *Learning outcomes*

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- create their own piece of music using instruments and voice
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

Curriculum checklist:

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

Glossary of music terms used:

<b>Coda</b>	the 'ending'
<b>Crescendo</b>	gradually getting louder
<b>Fanfare</b>	a short, often loud, flourish of music
<b>Graphic score</b>	a visual, often diagrammatic, representation of music. There are no rules for graphic scores, the composer (i.e. you!) invents them
<b>Orchestrate</b>	choose which instruments perform which parts of the music
<b>Overture</b>	an, often exciting, opening piece in a concert, an opera or a play
<b>Pitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars, etc.
<b>Unpitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourine, etc.

*Glossary terms can be found underlined throughout.*

Resources required:

- classroom percussion instruments
- paper and pens

*This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.*

## The six lessons at a glance

### Lesson 1:

Activities: Watch the film, listen to the performance  
Write a story

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians  
Develop an understanding of the history of music

### Lesson 2:

Activities: Use Bacewicz's rhythms to create an introduction

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

### Lesson 3:

Activities: Learn about Morse code and use it to transform words into musical motifs

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Develop an understanding of the history of music

### Lesson 4:

Activities: Learn about fanfares and structure musical motifs into a piece

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

### Lesson 5:

Activities: Make graphic scores  
Invent a sad melody

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Develop an understanding of the history of music

## **Lesson 6:**

Activities: Structure sections of music into a bigger piece  
Perform in a concert

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

# LESSON 1

## Watching and listening

### 1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a six-week music project focusing on a fantastic piece of music by a composer called Grażyna Bacewicz. Explain that she was one of the first famous Polish female composers and she wrote her music during a very difficult time.

### 2. Watch the BBC Ten Pieces Trailblazers film and have a class discussion about what you have seen.

### 3. Listening task

Give out paper and pens. Explain to your class that Bacewicz's piece is an Overture. Originally, overtures were played at the beginning of an opera or a play. They were written to sum up the story of the piece that followed, rather like the opening music for a film. As you listen to the full orchestral performance, ask your children to imagine that this piece is describing an exciting story that's about to be told. Ask them to write down their ideas under these headings:

- **Character/s**  
*(i.e. two teenagers called Billy and Jed)*
- **Place/s**  
*(i.e. The London Olympics)*
- **Scenes, what happens?**  
*(i.e. they are running the 1000m Billy faints, Jed helps him)*
- **Ending**  
*(i.e. Billy wins the race)*

### 4. As you continue to listen, ask your class to shape their ideas into a short story.

### 5. FINALLY, choose a volunteer to read out their story to the class and discuss it. There will probably be many different and conflicting ideas. Hear as many versions as you have time for.

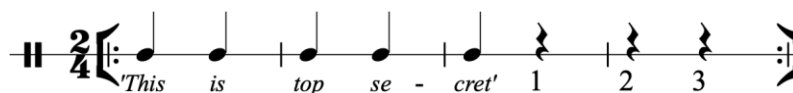
## Lesson 2

### Exciting beginning

1. **Warm-up**

Remind your children about Bacewicz and the work they did during the last lesson. Ask them to sit in a large circle and pass a clap around to get some focus.

2. **Demonstrate** this simple rhythm by tapping your knees five times and encourage the class to join in:



*Whispering the words and counts will help with the rhythm*

Ask the class to decide how many times to repeat this (perhaps give them a limit, such as 'between five and 15 times'), and practise performing the rhythm with one confident person being the 'counter'

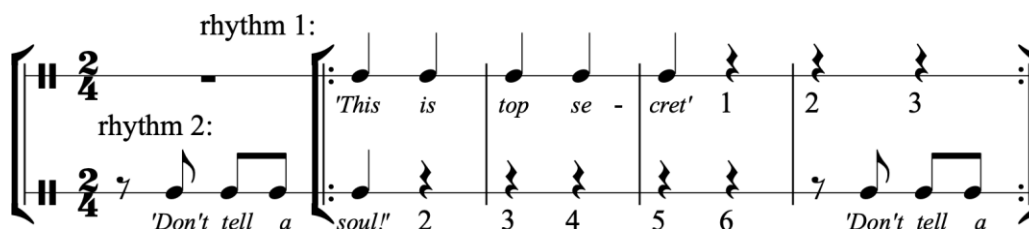
Challenge the class to gradually get louder as they repeat the pattern over and over. Explain that this is called a crescendo.

3. **Next, demonstrate this rhythm -**



*Bacewicz borrowed this rhythm from Beethoven. It features throughout his Symphony No. 5. Visit Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 on the BBC Ten Pieces website for more warm-ups and games using this iconic pattern.*

When the class can clap this neatly, split the circle in half and try putting these two rhythms together. They fit like this:



4. **Orchestrate**

Ask your children to choose which instruments they would like to play each rhythm. Bacewicz uses the open strings of the cellos for rhythm 1 so if you have beginner string players in class they can do the same thing. For rhythm 2, she uses two pitches played by the big timpani drums so perhaps you could use two contrasting unpitched instruments.

5. **When this is decided** slowly give out instruments rewarding the children who are performing well on body percussion or showing good focus, and make a class version of these two rhythms, with a crescendo. Can you also add a constant shimmering sound to it just like Bacewicz's scurrying strings?

*(You can also use body percussion and voice if you are short of instruments)*

6. **FINALLY, perform your piece** one last time. Explain that this is going to be your 'introduction' and it is the same as Bacewicz's introduction. Write down what you have done and who played what. If you have time, listen again to the beginning of Bacewicz's piece and play along.

# LESSON 3

## Hidden messages

1. **Warm-up**

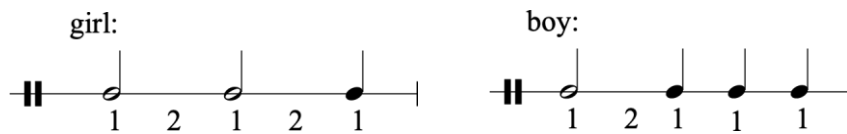
Start with your class sitting in a circle and remind them, without using instruments, of the rhythms you worked with during the last lesson.

2. **Explain** that you are going to make a piece of music by ‘reading’ the circle. As you look at the children around the circle one by one, you are going to clap two quick claps to represent each girl and three claps for each boy. Like this:



3. **Encourage your children to join in**, clapping and ‘reading the circle’ in the same way.

4. **Now try these two patterns:**



When your class can do this well explain that the patterns are Morse code. The ‘girl’ pattern is **G** in Morse code, the ‘boy’ pattern is **B**. By turning the patterns of Morse code into rhythmic patterns you can place secret messages in your music, and that’s exactly what Bacewicz did in her overture. The patterns you learnt and worked with last week were Morse code!

5. **Show this Morse code diagram to your class:**

A	. -	‘dit dah’
B	- ...	‘dah dit dit dit’
C	- . - .	‘dah dit dah dit’
D	- . .	‘dah dit dit’
E	.	‘dit’
F	. . - .	‘dit dit dah dit’
G	- - .	‘dah dah dit’
H	. . . .	‘dit dit dit dit’
I	. .	‘dit dit’
J	. - - -	‘dit dah dah dah’
K	- . -	‘dah dit dah’
L	. - . .	‘dit dah dit dit’
M	- -	‘dah dah’

N	- .	‘dah dit’
O	- - -	‘dah dah dah’
P	. - - .	‘dit dah dah dit’
Q	- - . -	‘dah dah dit dah’
R	. - .	‘dit dah dit’
S	. . .	‘dit dit dit’
T	-	‘dah’
U	. . -	‘dit dit dah’
V	. . . -	‘dit dit dit dah’
W	. - -	‘dit dah dah’
X	- . . -	‘dah dit dit dah’
Y	- . - -	‘dah dit dah dah’
Z	- - . .	‘dah dah dit dit’

... and explain that Morse code features two sounds, a long sound and a short sound. These are pronounced as ‘dah’ and ‘dit’. Each letter of the alphabet is a combination of long and

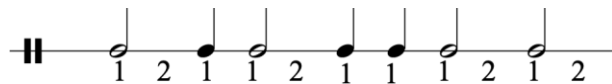


short sounds. You could clap these sounds or choose two different body percussion sounds or two instruments to represent them.

6. **Demonstrate** how to change words into Morse code using this simple method:

- Choose a short word (for example, 'cat')
- Write the word as Morse code (for example: -.-. .- -)
- Say it (for example: dah dit dah dit dit dah dah)
- Clap it
- Play it (perhaps using two different sounds or instruments)

*Notated, 'cat' could look like this:*



*Or, if using two pitches like this:*



7. **Split into small groups** – perhaps for this task your children could simply work in pairs. Challenge each group or pair to turn a short word (no more than four letters long) into a Morse code pattern and play it.

*You could simply use the children's names or ask them to select random words but it is thought that Bacewicz used Morse code to hide messages in her music. She was writing during WW2 when supplies were scarce and people were scared so you could use words such as 'help', 'food', 'army', 'war'. You could even write a short class message, divide the words amongst the group and translate it.*

8. **FINALLY, bring the class back** together, hear each group one by one. Ask the pairs to carefully notate what they have done and perhaps record some of the best patterns and rhythms. You will need to remember them for use in the next lesson.

# LESSON 4

## Morse code music

### 1. Warm-up

Repeat the 'reading the circle' activity from last week and remind the class of their Morse code patterns. To do this, ask children to sit in their groups or pairs from last week and clap their patterns to each other and then to the class. You could easily turn this into a call and response game.

2. **Explain** that you are going to use the Morse code patterns to make some exciting music just like Bacewicz did. Explain further that you can quickly change a Morse code pattern into a short fanfare (i.e. a short, flashy flourish of rhythm). Bacewicz does this by repeating her patterns with a short gap in between each repeat. Choose one pattern with which to demonstrate and ask the class to tap a steady, soft pulse to play against.

For example:



*This sounds particularly impressive if the pulse is quite fast!*

3. **Explain further** that Bacewicz often has three things going on in her music at once:
- Morse code fanfares (with gaps in between)
  - A pulse
  - Continuous fast scurrying sounds (like you used in the introduction, lesson 2)
4. **Split the class into small groups** and ask them to make a short, exciting piece using these three ingredients. They must first select which of their Morse code patterns to use – they only need one – then decide which instruments to use, who plays the pulse and who plays the 'scurrying'. If using pitched instruments, encourage your players to stick to the white notes only.
5. **Bring the class back together** and hear each piece one by one, encouraging the listeners to give some feedback after each one. You might like to split into groups again and give everybody five minutes to make improvements before challenging the full class to structure their group pieces into one big exciting piece.
6. **FINALLY – fix this structure**, write it down (or record it) and end the session with a quick performance of it.

# LESSON 5

## Sad solo

### 1. Warm-up

Begin in a large circle with a quick focusing activity and spoken reminder of what happened during the last session. Talk through the various sections you have made so far:

- a. The introduction with crescendo
- b. The Morse code fanfares

### 2. Remind your class of the story behind the composition of Bacewicz's overture. It was 1943, Bacewicz was living in a country that was taken over by war. She was writing in secret and putting codes and hidden messages into her music. Listen to the opening of the full orchestral performance again and ask your children to pay particular attention to the sad flute solo around 1'00. Stop the recording at around 2'00 and have a discussion about the mood of this solo, perhaps it describes Bacewicz's sadness during this time of war.

### 3. Give out paper and coloured pens and as you listen again, ask your class to draw the shape of this flute solo. The rules for this activity are simple, they must choose a colour that matches the mood and draw a wavy, wandering line to represent the flute's melody. They must not take their pen off the page until it is over.

### 4. Look at the resulting artwork. Explain that these are graphic scores, i.e. visual representations of the music. Split the class back into its smaller groups and ask each group to choose its favourite 'score'. Their next task is to make a short piece to represent it. This piece should feature:

- a. A wandering melody
- b. Sad sound effects and shimmers underneath

### 5. Bring the class back together and hear each group one by one. Can they join them together to make one, big sad section?

### 6. FINALLY, make a list on the board of all the music you have made during this project and ask the children if they can come up with an order for their ideas. Bacewicz's Overture has this shape:

- Introduction and crescendo
- Fanfares and scurrying sounds
- Sad flute solo
- Fanfare and scurrying sounds again
- Big ending

... but your piece doesn't have to have this structure, your children may choose something else!

# LESSON 6

## Performance time!

1. **Prepare your class**

Sit the children in a circle and recap all of the elements you have created so far, using just voices and body percussion. You should have:

- Introduction with crescendo using rhythms 1 & 2 (lesson 2)
- Morse code music using fanfares, pulse and scurrying (lesson 4)
- Sad solo section

Also, talk through the overall structure that you came up with at the end of the previous lesson.

2. **Get the instruments out** and split back into groups. Give the class just five minutes to remember their ideas and put the group sections back together.

3. **Hear each group** and put back together the larger sections, then slowly stagger through the full structure.

4. **Rehearse this full piece** fixing any issues that might arise until your music is confidently and neatly performed.

5. **Decide on an ending** (the technical term for this is 'coda'). Bacewicz's piece ends with an upward flourish and then one long note. You can borrow her idea or maybe come up with another solution. When this is decided, practise your full piece one last time adding the new 'coda' onto the end.

6. **FINALLY**, invite another class to hear your music. Tell them about Grażyna Bacewicz and her secret, coded music.

# TAKING IT FURTHER

## Cross-curricular activities

- **MUSIC:** Many other composers used codes within their music to pass on secret messages. Bach and Shostakovich wrote their names within their pieces. Alban Berg used numerology in his music particularly his Violin Concerto, and Edward Elgar's whole [Enigma Variations](#) features a mysterious puzzle that is still unsolved. Bach, Shostakovich and Elgar are all composers featured in BBC Ten Pieces.
- **RESEARCH:** Bacewicz was writing during World War 2 in Nazi occupied Poland. Research what day-to-day life must have been like for her and her friends and family at this time.
- **LITERACY:** Write and perform the story you invented in lesson 1 inspired by Bacewicz's overture or write a story about her fascinating life. When she wasn't composing, she was travelling the world as a very, very famous violinist.
- **UPLOAD:** Show us what you've created! Submit your creative responses using our [Uploader](#) for a chance to be featured on the Ten Pieces website.