



Music for 18 Musicians (excerpt) by Steve Reich

CLASSROOM RESOURCE FOR KS3

For:

- Key Stage 3 in England and Wales
- Third/Fourth Level, S1-S3 in Scotland
- Key Stage 3 in Northern Ireland

Written by Rachel Leach

Background:

The composer:

Steve REICH (b. 1936)

- American composer – one of the most famous and well-respected composers alive today
- Began his career as a percussionist and was fascinated with repeating patterns
- Is known as the ‘father’ of minimalism

The music:

Music for 18 Musicians (excerpt)

- Written in 1974
- One of Reich’s first pieces for large ensemble
- Features an ensemble of clarinet, bass clarinet, violin, cello, voices, marimbas, vibraphones, metallophones, xylophones, pianos and maracas
- Minimalism is a type of music that features just a few short ideas and a lot of repetition

Trailblazer:

Experimental composer Steve Reich helped to create a whole new form of music – minimalism

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:

- listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
- play and perform confidently in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using voice, playing instruments fluently and with accuracy and expression
- improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, genres and traditions

Glossary of music terms used:

Crescendo	gradually getting louder
Diminuendo	gradually getting softer
Dynamics	the term used for louds and softs/volume
Ostinato	a repeating (often rhythmic) pattern
Pitched percussion	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars, etc.
Tempo	Speed
Unpitched percussion	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers, woodblocks, tambourines, etc.

Glossary terms can be found underlined throughout.

Resources required:

- musical instruments – a mix of pitched and unpitched
- paper, 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
Analyse Steve Reich's music

Curriculum link: Listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
Identify and use the interrelated dimensions of music expressively and with increasing sophistication, including use of tonalities, different types of scales and other musical devices
Develop a deepening understanding of the music that they perform and to which they listen, and its history

Lesson 2:

Activities: Learn to play an alternating pulse and orchestrate it

Curriculum link: Play and perform confidently in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using voice, playing instruments fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, genres and traditions

Lesson 3:

Activities: Create and manipulate ostinatos

Curriculum link: Play and perform confidently in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using voice, playing instruments fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, genres and traditions

Lesson 4:

Activities: Invent and sing/play melody

Curriculum link: Play and perform confidently in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using voice, playing instruments fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, genres and traditions

Lesson 5:

Activities: Structure motifs into sections. Perform without a conductor

Curriculum link: Play and perform confidently in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using voice, playing instruments fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, genres and traditions

Lesson 6:

Activities: Structure sections of music into a bigger piece
Perform in a concert without a conductor

Curriculum link: Play and perform confidently in a range of solo and ensemble contexts using voice, playing instruments fluently and with accuracy and expression
Improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, genres and traditions

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 an American composer called Steve Reich. Explain that Reich 'invented' a type of music called minimalism which is made up of small ideas that repeat a lot.

2. Listening task

As your students listen to the full performance of Music for 18 Musicians (excerpt), ask them to make a list of the instruments they can hear. Try to avoid watching the images at this stage for obvious reasons. If they don't know the name of an instrument they can simply describe the sound that it makes instead (i.e. for vibraphone they might write: bright sound, high pitched).

Before you listen for a second time tell your students that although the piece is called 'Music for 18 Musicians' during this section, there are just nine different types of instrument. Can they spot them all?

3. Write their ideas on the board before revealing the list below:

- i. Clarinets
- ii. Maracas
- iii. Xylophone
- iv. Vibraphone
- v. Marimba
- vi. Piano
- vii. Voices
- viii. Violin
- ix. Cello (very tricky to hear because it is playing high in its range and close to the violin)

4. Watch the BBC Ten Pieces Trailblazers film and the full performance have a class discussion about what you have seen.

5. As you listen and watch the performance again, ask your students to make a list of the 'events' and changes they hear in the music. You might like to put a stopwatch on the screen too so that they can note down exactly when they occur. You are looking for a list such as this one:

- Fast pulse with shakers, repeating rhythm on marimba
- second repeating pattern enters
- Long, floating notes on vibraphones, etc.

6. Have another discussion about their ideas and write up your definitive class structure on the board. Explain that often there is no conductor for this work and no fixed number of repeats. The musicians cue themselves and the long notes last as long as the musicians can hold them for. This gives the players a lot of ownership over the music and it is different every time.

7. **FINALLY**, watch or listen one more time and ask your class to look out for moments when the musicians are cueing each other or communicating through eye contact. Can you add these moments onto your list of the structure?

LESSON 2

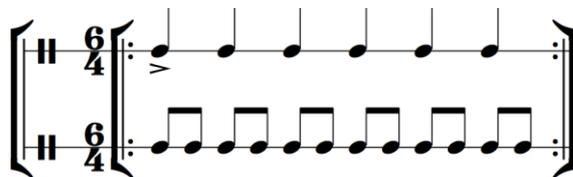
Alternating quaver pulse

1. **Warm-up**

Remind your students about Steve Reich 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. **Explain** that Reich's piece is in six and has a quaver pulse running all the way through it. Clap a steady pulse and encourage half of the circle to join in. Ask them to emphasise the first beat of every six.

3. **Ask the other half of the circle** to join in double time – i.e. by performing quavers against the crotchet pulse, like this:



Encourage them to use whatever body percussion they like but to try and keep the pulse neat and steady.

4. **Explain that Steve Reich's quaver pulse** is often played by maracas. Give out as many maracas, shakers and cabasas as you have and challenge the players to keep an even quaver pulse as everyone else continues on body percussion. To keep this together you might like to give someone the job of just playing the first beat of each bar on a drum or woodblock.

5. **When this is achieved** explain further that Reich uses four-note chords throughout his piece. Reich divides his chords between pairs of players and asks them to quickly alternate back and forth thus creating between them, the quaver pulse. For example,



6. **Ask the class to quickly suggest four pitches** and in pairs, using whatever instruments you have, challenge your students to use these notes to create an alternating pulse like the one above. The body percussion and unpitched version can continue too.

7. **Split the class into six groups.** These groups will work together for the rest of the project so choose people who work together well but also have a mixture of skills and instruments.

Each group must:

- Decide on four pitches (these should be playable by all members with a pitched instrument)
- Divide the notes between pairs
- Create an alternating quaver pulse, like above
- Include at least one shaker throughout

Check that each group has selected, if possible, different four-note chords so that later on in the project you will have shifting harmony as you move from group to group.

8. **FINALLY**, bring the class back together and hear what they have created. Encourage the rest of the class to give gentle feedback concentrating on how 'neat' and 'steady' the pulse is. Did they speed up? Was it even? Put the groups in an order and challenge them to move from group to group keeping the pulse steady and constant and as it moves around the room. To do this, they must use eye contact and non-verbal signals only.

LESSON 3

Expanding and contracting ostinatos

1. Explain

Steve Reich's music uses ostinatos (repeated rhythmic patterns). In *Music for 18 Musicians* (excerpt), he uses just one ostinato that gradually lengthens and then shortens over the course of the movement. Lead the full class through these simple steps to explain:

- Ask a simple question: something related to this or another topic area you are studying, or just ask a random question like: 'What's your favourite food?'
- Hear several answers and choose a simple one to work with. For example: 'I like pizza'.
- Challenge the class to say this over and over to your pulse:



- When this is achieved, add something on to the end and practise saying this around in rhythm:



- Add something else:



- Add one more thing:



This is your expanding/contracting ostinato. Write all of the words on the board.

Don't worry about how many beats the patterns last or the time signature – Steve Reich doesn't! He likes it when things shift, collide and phase in different ways.

- Structure your ideas.** Steve Reich doesn't fix how many times his patterns repeat and he doesn't ask his musicians to count. In his pieces, often one player is in charge of when the changes happen. So, appoint a 'conductor'. This person will signal when to shift to the next pattern by holding up his/her arm on the last pattern before the shift and then pointing downwards on the first beat of the new pattern, like this:

pattern repeats around conductor raises hand to signal the last time conductor points at beginning of new pattern

I like piz za *I like piz za* *I like piz za and choc-late*

3. **Demonstrate** how these patterns might transfer onto the four-note chords. It is important when doing this that the beginning always remains the same. For example, using the chord of C, E, F, B:

I like piz za ...could expand to:

I like piz za and choc-late *I like piz za and choc-late spag-he-tti*

4. **When everyone understands this concept**, ask them to get back into the same groups as last time and recreate what you have just done using their four-note chord from last week and their own expanding and contracting ostinato. Challenge them further to make sure that at least two people in the group are still performing the alternating pulse.
5. **FINALLY**, end the session like last time, by hearing each group and giving gentle feedback.

LESSON 4

Floating notes

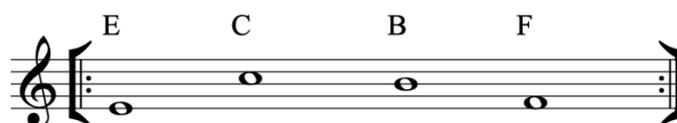
1. Vocal warm-up

This lesson includes some singing so lead a quick vocal warm-up, as follows:

- Ask your students to sing a song that everyone knows really well ('Happy Birthday', for example)
- Ask everyone to close their eyes and sing it again
- Ask the class to choose their favourite word from the song and when they sing again, stretch out this word every time they come to it. Demonstrate this by singing a phrase on your own

During this last sing through, naturally the students will have chosen several different words and so the song will stretch out in many different ways at once causing clashes and unexpected harmonies. Some will finish before others. This is exactly what you are aiming for.

2. **Explain** that you are going to add some singing to your minimalist piece, just like Steve Reich did. Quickly select four pitches to use and lead the class in singing each pitch to a long 'do' sound. Encourage them to aim for a lovely, round sound. It doesn't need to be loud. Anyone who doesn't wish to sing can keep the pulse.
3. **Ask the class to choose an order for these pitches** and practise singing them in this order to an agreed number of beats (something easy like four or six beats). The easiest way to do this is to simply move up or down in pitch order, but it will be more fun to move around more randomly. Practise this until everyone can sing the order confidently. Something like this:



4. **Explain** that in Reich's piece, the singers and clarinettists perform the long, floating notes. They simply play or sing each note for as long as they can and then stop. Steve Reich doesn't tell them how long, it all depends on how much breath they take and how long they can do it for. Have a go at this. Ask your singers to sing the first note of the pattern until their breath is beginning to run out and then stop. Encourage them to stop before the sound is compromised!
5. **Appoint a conductor.** S/he will signal the start of the note and then the singers will sing until their breath runs out. After a short gap, the conductor will signal the next note. The pulse group should play whilst this is happening.

Wind and brass players should play a note until their breath runs out. String players should play until their bow runs out. If you have metallophones or glocks, the length of the notes can be until the sound has faded on its own. Players just hit the note quite hard once and let the sound ring until it dies naturally.

6. **Control the volume**

Explain that each long, floating note in Reich's piece has a 'swell' of dynamics, i.e. it gradually gets louder (crescendo) and then gradually fades away (diminuendo). Ask your conductor to indicate this swell by raising and lowering his/her hand during each long note. Practice using the order you agreed above with the notes lasting as long as the breath and the pulse group keeping time.

To make this sound really authentic, singers and playing may try pulsing their note thus playing quavers or singing 'do do do do' in time with the quaver pulse. Again, they must do this until their breath or bow runs out.

7. **Split back into groups** and ask each group to add some floating notes into their piece. They must use the same four pitches as their ostinatos. The resulting piece should now have three ingredients:

- Alternating quaver pulse
- Expanding/contracting ostinato
- Long, floating notes with 'swell' (cresc./ dim.)

8. **FINALLY**, end this session with a quick catch up on how everyone is getting along. It doesn't matter at this stage if they haven't finished and if the music is a bit messy, next lesson is when things will become more fixed.

LESSON 5

Sections

1. **Begin this session** by talking through all of the elements your students have explored so far:
 - Alternating quaver pulse
 - Expanding/contracting ostinato
 - Long, floating notes

... and cover any confusion by practising these elements using body percussion/voice as a full class.
2. **Explain** that these are all of the ingredients in Steve Reich's piece. As they heard during lesson 1, Reich doesn't always have all three things going at once. Ideas move in and out as the quaver pulse remains constant. Explain further that Reich's full piece lasts well over an hour and cycles through 11 four-note chords. Your students just heard one of these sections.
3. **Split back into groups** and ask each group to finish their 'section'. Like Steve Reich, they don't have to have all three ideas going at once but the pulse must be constant. Any changes must be signaled by eye contact and gesture – no words. Before your groups get to work, as a full class agree on the tempo (speed) of the quaver pulse so that everyone is the same.
4. **Allow the rest of the session for this**, floating between the groups and giving feedback. Make sure that at the end of the session, each group has a finished 'section'.

LESSON 6

Performance time!

1. **Start this session back in groups**, and allow five minutes for each group to put their music back together so that it is roughly the same as it was at the end of the last lesson.
2. **Hear each group** one by one and encourage the rest of the class to give feedback. Particularly pay attention to the tempo of each piece and try to get everyone playing at the same speed.
3. **Ask your students** to come up with an order for their groups/sections. Explain that the finished piece will aim to move seamlessly from group to group without a pause or gap in the pulse. They can choose this order randomly, based on logistics (i.e. if groups are sharing the piano they should perhaps not be placed next to each other) or musically (i.e. which group has a good beginning, which group has a good ending, etc.).
4. **When this is decided**, practise the full piece and fix/tweak anything that doesn't work.
5. **Invite an audience** in to hear your finished piece or record it.
6. **FINALLY**, challenge the class to perform their sections in a new order, invented during the performance on the spur of the moment. To do this they really do have to use clear eye contact and simple physical gestures!

TAKING IT FURTHER

Cross-curricular activities

- **MUSIC:** Steve Reich's music was a huge influence on another BBC Ten Pieces composer – [John Adams](#). Adams' music is minimalist but it also often tells a story. See 'Short Ride in a Fast Machine' for more details.
- **ART:** Steve Reich envisaged a kaleidoscope with gradually changing colours when he wrote this piece. Many artists have been inspired by the 'colour' they perceive in music. Listen to the Reich again (or your own piece) and think about the colour of each section. Research the abstract paintings of Kandinsky or use other BBC Ten Pieces music to inspire your own abstract artwork.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Steve Reich's early pieces were made using loops of tape. He would record sentences onto different lengths of tape and then loop these tapes around listening to how the recordings repeat and collide in different ways. You can now replicate this experiment easily using software such as Garage Band, Audacity or BandLab.
- **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.