

Introduction – Mighty River

Watch the film about this piece, and answer the following questions by ticking the correct answer:

1. What was the transatlantic slave trade?

- A) A trade of goods between Africa and Europe
- B) The forced capture and transportation of African people
- C) A system where people voluntarily moved to America

2. When was the transatlantic slave trade abolished in Britain?

- A) 1750
- B) 1807
- C) 1850

3. How does Mighty River represent the journey of enslaved people?

- A) Through a mix of flowing water-like sounds and darker, threatening tones
- B) By using only African instruments
- C) Through a happy and upbeat melody from start to finish

4. What well-known melody is played at the beginning and end of Mighty River?

- A) Skye Boat Song
- B) Ode to Joy
- C) Amazing Grace

5. What instrument plays Amazing Grace at the start of the piece?

- A) Flute
- B) Solo horn
- C) Violin

6. What new instrument joins the Amazing Grace melody at the end of Mighty River?

- A) An African talking drum
- B) A violin
- C) A harp

7. What is an ostinato?

- A) A solo performance in a piece
- B) A repeated rhythm or pattern in music
- C) A type of African drum

8. What is the overall message of Mighty River?

- A) The joy of sailing on rivers
- B) The human spirit's endurance and journey to freedom
- C) The importance of playing music

Mighty River – musical features

Watch the performance of this piece and complete the ‘map’ of the Mighty River by putting the information underneath the image into chronological order in the boxes below.

- Near the end, the horn and djembe have a duet – representing Europe and Africa
- The piece begins with a solo horn playing Amazing Grace
- The trumpets and violins add a new layer - fragments of Amazing Grace
- The double basses, trombones and timpani add a layer of slow sinister music
- A piccolo and clarinet join the horn, like voices coming together
- The harp begins the layered texture that spreads through the orchestra

Mighty River – creating overlapping melodies and ostinatos

Errollyn Wallen uses overlapping melodies and ostinatos (repeated patterns) to create the feeling of flowing water. Here is the start of a piece of music for horn, clarinet, and djembe based on Mighty River. The same music is shown in two different ways.

Graphic score activity:

1. Continue the ostinato by copying the Djembe's pattern three more times across the page.
2. Continue the overlapping melody by copying the Horn's patterns onto the Clarinet line, but one box to the right so that the patterns overlap.

Horn:				
Clarinet:				
Djembe:				

Notation activity:

1. Continue the ostinato by copying the Djembe's music notation into each empty bar.
2. Continue the overlapping melody by copying the horn's music notation onto the clarinet stave, but starting one bar later.

Horn

Clarinet

Djembe

Extension: compose a new ostinato for the Djembe, using shapes or notated rhythms. For the music to be an ostinato, each box should contain identical patterns!

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Mighty River – creative responses

WRITING – Errollyn Wallen’s piece contrasts the free-flowing movement of the water with the people sailing on it, who were not free at all. Write a poem or short story that explores this contrast. One verse or paragraph could be written from the perspective of an enslaved person, and the contrasting verse or paragraph could be written from the perspective of a free person - perhaps a fisherman, an explorer, or even a holiday maker on a cruise ship.

HISTORY / RESEARCH – Errollyn Wallen is in the ‘Top 20 Most Performed Living Composers’ and in August 2024 was appointed Master of the King’s Music. Find out more about her career and her music, and present your findings as a poster, as a spoken presentation, or written in the form of an interview.