

The Orchestra's Secret Formula

For 1st-4th grades





Lesson 3 — Composing a Story

Objective

Students will make connections between music composition and narrative writing to better understand how stories can be told through music. They will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of music vocabulary while listening to varied music selections, and through writing their own musical story.

Suggested Materials

- Audio recordings
 - LALO SCHIFRIN Theme from *Mission: Impossible* 
 - MILAD YOUSUFI "Freedom" 
- Behind the Music excerpt (provided)
- My Musical Story worksheet (provided)

New York State Arts Standards

MU:Cr1.1.1a-4a MU:Re7.2.1a-4a VA:Cn10.1.1a
MU:Cr2.1.1a-4a MU:Re8.1.1a-4a
MU:Pr4.2.1a-4a MU:Cn10.1.1a-4a
MU:Pr4.3.1a-4a MU:Cn10.1.1c-2c
MU:Pr6.1.1a-4a MU:Cn10.1.1d-4d

New York State English Language Arts & Literacy Standards

Reading, Standards 1 & 2
Writing, Standards 3 & 4
Speaking & Listening, Standards 1, 2, 4 & 6
Language, Standards 1, 2, 3, 4 & 6

New York State Social Studies Standards

Standard 2: World History

Procedure

- 1) Music and storytelling often go hand in hand. Authors create stories by building upon words and ideas. They develop characters, thoughts, and themes that generate images in our mind as we read; and they repeat certain words and phrases throughout the story to emphasize the ideas they're trying to communicate.
- 2) Composers can build their own stories through musical themes and repetition, too. In music, a theme can be a recognizable melody or rhythmic pattern, and may represent certain emotions, people, or places. Composers drive a story forward by repeating a musical theme. We call this repetition, *ostinato*. An *ostinato* may be a simple repeated rhythm, or even a repeated melody. An *ostinato* is easily identifiable and can be used to build tension or excitement in the musical story.

Lesson 3 — *Composing a Story* (continued)

Procedure

- 3) Play the theme from *Mission: Impossible* for students and have them write down answers to the following questions.
 - a) Identify the instruments or instrument families playing.
 - b) Is the tempo fast, slow, or medium?
 - c) Are the dynamics loud, quiet, or a mixture?
 - d) How does the music make you feel? Can you use any adjectives to describe the music?
- 4) Morse Code is a system of electronic communication using rhythm. It uses dots, dashes, and spaces to represent letters, punctuation, and numbers. The symbols are arranged to spell out a message. A machine called a telegraph converts the symbols into electrical signals and sends them across a wire to their destination. The signals are then converted back into the message by the telegraph that receives them. Morse Code and the telegraph allowed people to receive information sent from far away in just minutes.
- 5) It has been suggested that composer Lalo Schifrin used Morse Code as a starting point for the *Mission: Impossible* music. The Morse Code for “Mission Impossible” is two dashes followed by two dots _ _ . . , exactly matching the theme’s underlying rhythm



- 6) This rhythmic ostinato helps create a feeling of forward drive and excitement in the music; it keeps the story going. Have students listen to the entirety of *Mission: Impossible*. The Morse Code rhythmic ostinato remains constant, weaving in and out of different voices throughout the piece. Have students clap or tap the ostinato in their feet as they listen. Ask students to identify what instruments they hear playing the ostinato at different points in the music.
- 7) Have students read the Behind the Music excerpt. After reading, have students listen to Milad Yousufi’s “Freedom”.
Questions for discussion:
 - a) The music begins with a rhythmic ostinato performed by a solo instrument. What instrument family does the instrument belong to?
 - b) What instrument family or individual instruments join in the rhythmic ostinato?
 - c) What mood or emotions do you think the composer is trying to illustrate by including the rhythmic ostinato?
 - d) What other musical elements help tell the story throughout the piece? (i.e. dynamics, tempo, articulation)
 - e) What do you think Yousufi felt or experienced as a refugee coming to the United States that is reflected in the music? How does the music communicate these feelings?
- 8) Using the provided worksheet, have students create their own musical story. This can be done individually or as a class.

Lesson 3 — *Composing a Story* (continued)

Extended Learning

Students may compose a rhythmic or melodic ostinato that helps to tell part of the story. This exercise can be done as a whole class or in small groups. Students can use classroom instruments or body percussion and movement to compose the ostinato.

BEHIND THE MUSIC

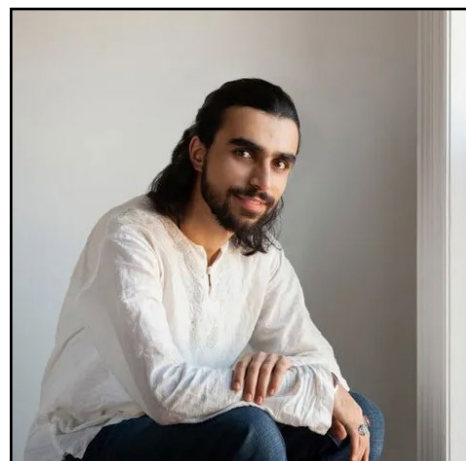
MILAD YOUSUFI (b. 1995)

Milad Yousufi is a pianist, composer, conductor, painter, calligrapher, and poet who was born during the civil war in Afghanistan in 1995, when music was banned under the Taliban rule. At two years old, Yousufi would draw keys and play an imaginary piano, as well as play drums on his pillow. At age four, his father enrolled him in a calligraphy course, which was the only artform allowed in the country at that time. After the Taliban rule was lifted, Yousufi began studying piano at the music school in his hometown of Kabul. After only four years of formal piano training, he was accepted into a music program in Denmark and began touring Europe.

Upon his return to Afghanistan, Yousufi taught piano and music theory at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music. In 2011, Yousufi joined the newly formed Afghan Youth Orchestra as pianist and then became the first Afghan conductor and arranged music for their performances.

Yousufi came to the United States as a refugee in 2015 and was awarded a full scholarship to attend Mannes School of Music to study piano. He was also able to connect with the Refugee Orchestra Project- an organization working to unite refugee musicians and raise awareness. After graduating from Mannes, Yousufi continued on to receive his masters degree in composition from Brooklyn College in 2022. His dream is to make a difference in the future of music and culture in Afghanistan.

“Freedom” was commissioned by New York Philharmonic’s Very Young Composer’s Program. Inspired by the world refugee crisis, “Freedom” represents the effects of the war in Afghanistan, and, in the middle of the piece, hope. There is a sense of anxiety in the music that expresses the anxiety and depression that many refugees experience. Yousufi’s works express his complex feelings toward his birth country- feeling abandoned, and yet longing to return to it.



Lesson 3 — Composing a Story *(continued)*

MY MUSICAL STORY

STORY TITLE:

WRITE ONE OR TWO SENTENCES THAT DESCRIBE YOUR SCENE OR STORY. WHAT IS THE MOOD?

WHO ARE YOUR CHARACTERS? WHAT INSTRUMENTS WILL BE PLAYED TO REFLECT EACH CHARACTER?

WHERE DOES THE STORY TAKE PLACE? HOW WILL THE INSTRUMENTS REPRESENT THE SETTING?

**WHAT HAPPENS IN THE STORY? WHAT TYPE OF OSTINATO (RHYTHMIC OR MELODIC)
WILL YOU USE TO DRIVE THE STORY FORWARD? WHAT DOES THE OSTINATO SOUND LIKE?**

DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR STORY:

