

Franz Liszt - *Les Préludes* (Topic: 19th Century, ELECTIVE)

Lesson plan ideas by Rachel Hocking

About: *Les Préludes* is a popular programmatic orchestral piece from the Romantic period (or 19th Century music). Program music is often a good 'way in' to understanding orchestral music as the structure is based on a story. This piece is quite obvious in its expression and uses appealing orchestration, memorable themes, some stirring, powerful, and some quite beautiful.

Musical Elements: *Expressive Techniques/Dynamics*

A large range of expression is used in this work, typical of the Romantic period. It would be worth going through the score and identifying all expressive markings (along with their meanings) and then listening to the music to see how these expressive markings sound. Each section of the work has its own expressive qualities which could be compared and discussed. The preface that Liszt gave to the work is "What else is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown Hymn, the first and solemn note which is intoned by Death?" This is a good example of the overly-dramatic sentiment that was typical of this period, and it would be good to discuss expression in light of this.

Musical Elements: *Structure*

This work is divided into eight sections, with some sections featuring clear musical characters such as a march and a storm. It is worth analysing these large structures through the musical concepts to find how each section's character depends on how these concepts are used. In addition, the melodic content uses one basic motif which is transformed throughout the work. It would be ideal to analyse this to demonstrate to students successful 'economical' composing (which in turn can help their own composing).

Teaching Activity: *Creativity/Composition - Thematic Transformation*

Ask students to choose a theme from one of the following works:- Chopin's *Nocturne Op 9 No 2*; Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*; Brahms' *Lullaby*. Ask students to notate the theme (four to eight bars total). Ask students to transform the theme four times:- once through changing the rhythm; once through changing the tonality or pitch; once through changing the tempo; and once through using a combination of these. Ask them to choose their favourite as a possible motif for a larger composition.

Teaching Activity: *Aural - Become a Romantic Student*

Using the example of Berlioz, explain how music students would attend concerts and notate the music they heard by ear. Also explain how composers would use their students as notators or would copy out other composers works in order to study them. In this context, have students aurally notate some of the main themes from *Les Préludes* (see appendix).

Teaching Activity: *Musicology - Many Hands Make Light Work*

Using the score, show students each section of the work and listen to it carefully. Identify all features in the score that need further understanding. Divide students up into eight groups and assign a different section in the score to each group. Ask each group to assign a different musical concept to each group member. Each group is then to analyse their section of music, each group member contributing information about the concept they are using to analyse the piece. Ask each group to present their analysis to the class. Quiz the class by playing excerpts of each section and asking which section it is.

Teaching Activity: *Performance - Romantic Recording Artist*

Ask each student to prepare a Romantic period piece for presentation. The piece needs to be from the 19th century but can be re-interpreted on their instrument. Give advice about possible pieces, YouTube examples, available scores, and other resources that may help. Allow class time for practising. Have students record their performance (rather than live performance) and upload these to YouTube for peer review.