

Mendelssohn Hebrides Overture

Teacher Resources

Activities in this pack:



Information



Activity 3 **Create**



Activity 1 **Listen**



Activity 4 **Create**



Activity 2 **Learn**



Activity 5 **Learn**

Introduction

Title of Work: The Hebrides Overture

Composer: Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Focus Concepts: Instrument timbres, tone colour and texture.

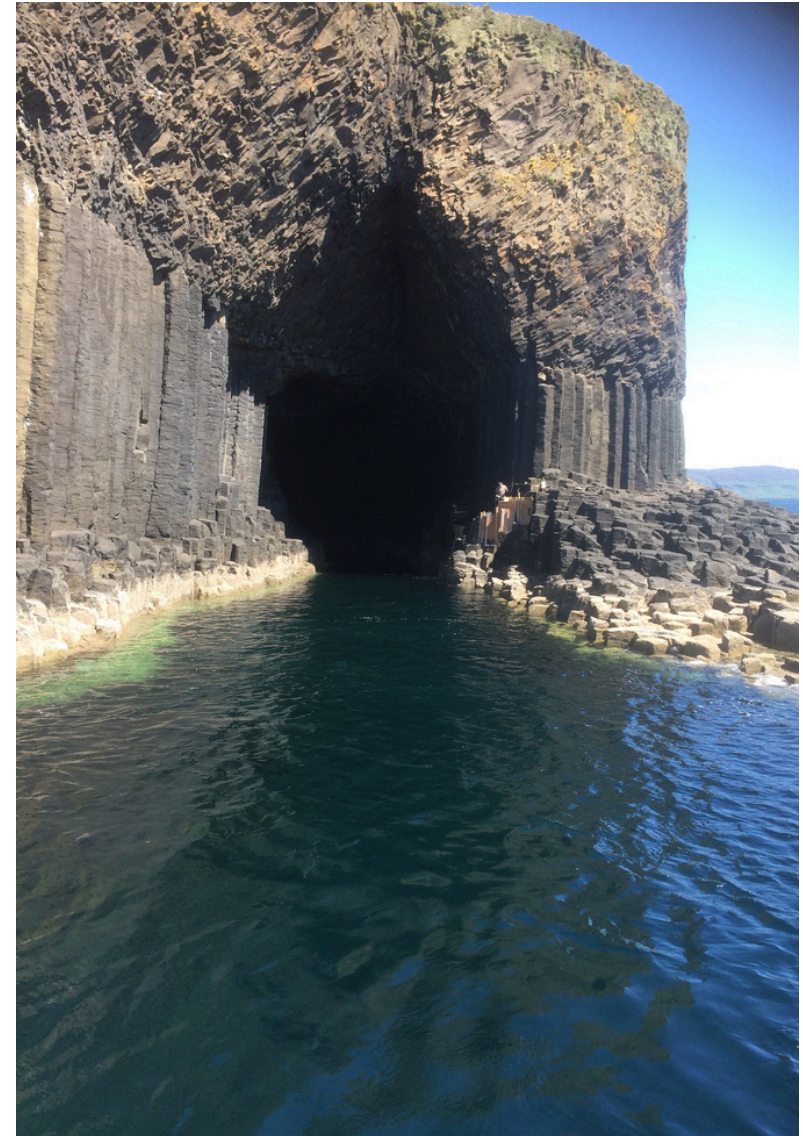
Genre: Overture

Introduction:

This piece was written after Mendelssohn made a trip to Scotland. During his travels he wrote a number of musical post cards, and this one is of Fingal's Cave in Scotland.

In Mendelssohn's day this unusual geographical feature was considered a health spa, where the water would assist in curing all manner of issues. He made a trip to the island of Staffa to see it, and, despite getting extremely seasick, he was inspired to write a 10-minute orchestral piece.

NB. Do not tell the class the name of this work before listening.





Listen to the Hebrides Overture

Draw up these questions on the board and listen to the first 4 minutes of the piece while the students take notes on their answers to each question:

- The music made me think of:
- Adjectives that describe the mood of the music:
- The instruments I heard were:
- Musical techniques or terms that apply to this piece:

After the first playing ask the class for some of their thoughts and add them on the board.

Play the piece again asking them to focus on the 4th box with musical reasons for what they heard.





Become a music professor

Ask the students to pretend they are going to give a public lecture on national TV. They are asked to discuss how Mendelssohn has created a musical postcard in his Hebrides Overture. Things to consider include:

- What is the music about?
- What instruments perform this piece?
- The music is in 3 main sections beginning – middle and end. How would you describe the overall mood of each section?
- How does the composer create these moods with the music? E.g. In the beginning there are repeated short phrases followed by longer notes with sudden increases in volume (crescendo). There is tension and release, like a wave building then breaking on the shore.
- How does the composer use the orchestra to imitate the movement of the ocean and the depth of the sea?
- Why do you think this is one of Mendelssohn's best known work?

Useful information: Mendelssohn's original motif of a descending 6 note pattern is heard throughout the piece. Its rolling melodic outlines and atmospheric, shimmering accompaniment conjures an instant vision of the sea. It contrasts with a warmer rising theme first played by cellos and bassoons, but both motifs undergo many changes throughout the "journey". A storm blows up in the middle section, but calm is restored despite a slight squall just before the end.





The Hebrides - The Movie

Imagine you have been tasked by a film director to find images which can be used to describe the different sections of the piece. It does not have to be a piece about the sea – but this would make the task easier.

To do this activity students need:

- Access to a computer to collect a series of images
- Access to software like iMovie in which they can create their audio visual mix
- An MP3 recording of The Hebrides Overture





Composing

Use the words in the text box to inspire a short composition about the sea.

The work should be in ternary form so the words for the A section should contrast with the words for the B sections.

Swirling mysterious playful rolling
running rocking still crashing
powerful gentle dark cold
splashing rocking lapping swell
shimmering sparkling rushing
rising falling flowing dangerous
majestic deep blue



Cross-Curricular ideas

1. On a map of Scotland find the Island of Staffa. Why do you think the island is uninhabited by man?
 - What can you discover about the things that do live on Staffa?
 - What marine life can be found around Staffa?
2. Watch this short boat trip depicting a real excursion to Fingal's Cave set to Mendelssohn's overture.
[WATCH HERE](#)
3. Think about the physical and geographical features of Fingal's Cave. Do some internet research to discover why the rock formations are so unusual. Many artists have been inspired by the cave, and it features in Jules Verne's story *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*.
4. Search online for the poem *Staffa the Island, Fingal's Cave* by John Keats. What descriptive words and phrases are used by Keats to depict this unique place?
5. Write a short description for a tourist guide about Fingal's Cave and the boat journey to get there.

