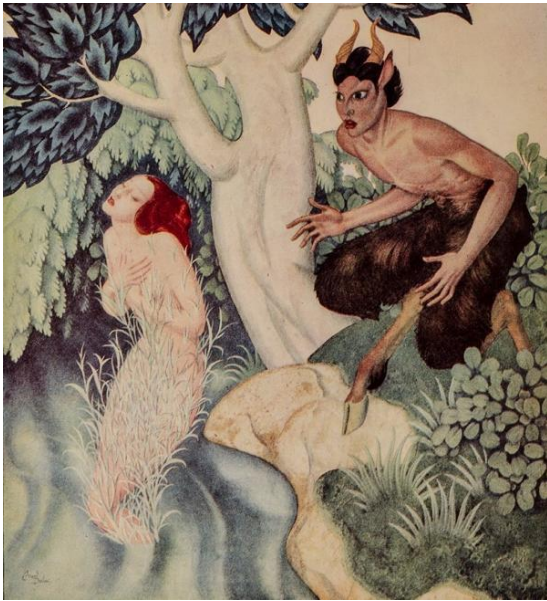# Syrinx

In 2018, **Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG)** commissioned a series of new pieces inspired by the French composer **Claude Debussy** at part of a festival of his music in Birmingham. Each composer was asked to respond to Debussy's music in their own way. Here is the Korean composer **Jungeun Park** talking briefly about her new composition, *Tombeau de Claude Debussy*:

https://vimeo.com/261514393

In this activity you will use *Syrinx* by Debussy as the inspiration for improvising and composing your own music. Debussy composed Syrinx for **solo flute** in 1913. The piece tells the story, from ancient **Greek mythology**, of the god **Pan** and **Syrinx**, a water nymph who transforms into a reed pipe which Pan plays.

Listen to this performance of *Syrinx* by Juliette Hurel.

https://open.spotify.com/track/1wx824UBNhJcZcQTwMFd5r?si=u6fstGc-SN-Lkej_7t-Fbw

Look at this extract from the score and **notice** the **repetition** of **rhythms** and **melodic ideas** as marked on the score.

Syrinx begins with a two-bar phrase (see and hear below). It uses a range of note lengths and a repeated rhythmic cell. You will be using this later to improvise with·


Your Turn!

For many composers, **composing starts with improvising** at the instrument. Not only is improvisation a great way to get started composing, **practising** improvising is really rewarding as it develops your ability to **multitask**, builds your **musical memory** and vocabulary, allowing you to enjoy and be more in **control** of the **creative process**. In this activity you are going try some improvising exercises before composing a music for your **own story**.

Warm-up exercise - noodling!

Without thinking too much, start to play your instrument, improvising and exploring the range of sounds you can make. Musicians often describe this as **noodling**. It's like doodling, where you let your mind wander and allow yourself to explore musical **shapes** and **patterns**, experimenting with how you can **connect** ideas and sounds.
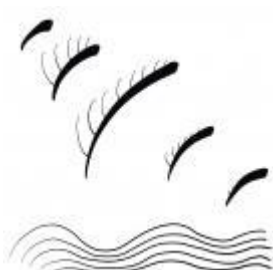
It might help to **draw** doodles to inspire you:

Listen again to *Syrinx*. Did you notice the range of expression in the performance? Using **dynamics**, changes in **articulation** and **techniques** like vibrato can really bring a performance to life. Try another musical doodle using as much **expression** as possible in your improvisation.

Questions and Answers:

Making a **structure** for your solo improvisation can be challenging. Try this improvisation **game** to create a **musical conversation**.

1. Play a **short musical idea** on your instrument – this is the **question**.
2. **Repeat** the question. It could be an **exact** repeat or **varied** in dynamic, tempo, articulation, or even transposed.

3. Now, **answer** the question. This could be a single note, a new idea or something related to the initial idea e.g. retrograde (backwards) or inversion (upside).
4. Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3. Try to develop new questions and answers each time. If you get stuck, repeat questions and answers.

Record yourself using your mobile phone or another device. **Listen** to your performance.

- How did you do?
- Were the repeats effective?
- Could you remember what you played?
- How could you develop this way of working?
- Try it again

Rhythmic patterns:

Previously we saw and heard the first two bars of Syrinx: Starting with one note on your instrument, choose 2 or 3 of ideas from A, B and C. Improvise a rhythm. It might start something like this:
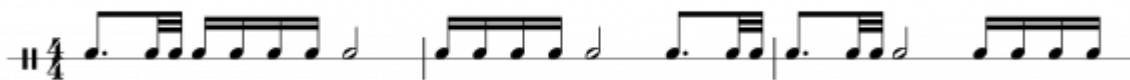
Choose the **tempo/speed** carefully. You could:

- **Reverse** rhythm A
- **Contract** and **expand** rhythm B
- Try **different versions** but only use the same given material
- **Experiment** with the articulation, tempo and duration
- Introduce **other pitches** to your rhythm

As Debussy did, choose your own **characters**, **story** and compose a piece using some of the techniques explored above: **noodling**, **repetition**, **questions** and **answers**, **expression**, **rhythmic structures**. Can you **notate** your ideas?

Please send any music you create to learning@bcmg.org.uk