



Bird song

The French composer Olivier Messiaen was fascinated by bird song and used it in many of his compositions. You can find recordings on the internet. *Oiseaux Exotiques*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtUzAIDsRg> and *Des Canyons aux Étoiles - II. Les Orioles*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grJCyW6KZ2A>

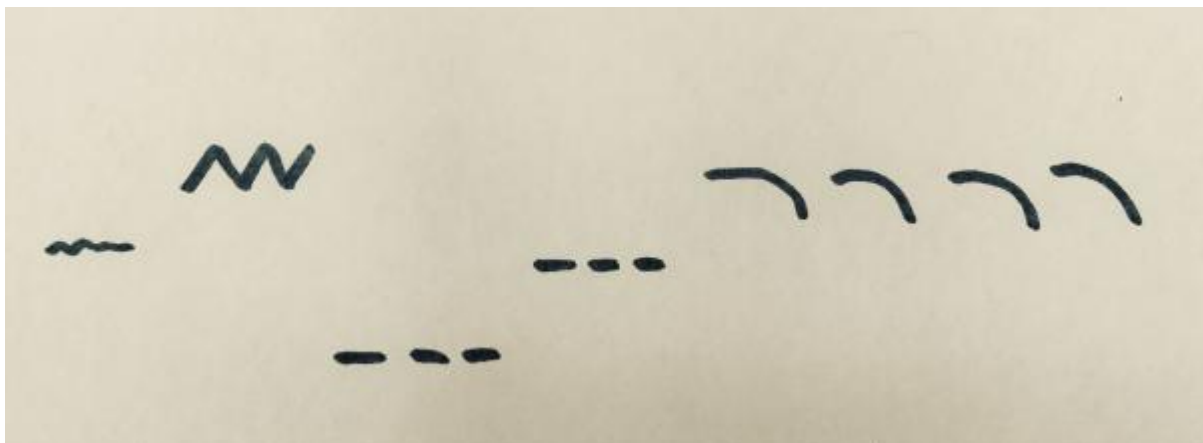
More recently, composer Shiori Usui used bird song in her piece *The Silent Forest*, composed in response to climate change. Here, in *Dawn Chorus*, the violin is asked to improvise using pitch and rhythm ideas. Even if you don't read music notation, you can get an impression of the character.



Your Turn!

Listen to some birds from <https://www.british-birdsongs.uk/alphabetical/> or from The British Library <https://soundcloud.com/the-british-library/sets/british-bird-sounds> or listen in your garden. **Pick a bird song** that you like. Listen carefully to the shape of the song. Does it go high or low? Listen to the rhythm. Are there any repeated notes? Is there silence or gaps?

I listened to the song of a Tree Pipit. This is how I drew its song:



Now try and **draw the shape** of your bird song or skip this bit to immediately try and imitate it on your instrument. Try to show how the pitch and rhythm changes with your drawing. I was surprised how difficult this was and how many times I needed to listen. Don't worry about getting it exactly right - that is not important - you just want to find an interesting shape. Listen to a few before deciding which to do. Some are very complex whilst others are much simpler repeating ideas.

Once you have drawn your shape, try to **play it using your instrument**. Try to show the ups and down and different rhythms. Again, it is not important to be exact but to use the bird song as a starting point.

Once you have created your short melody, you can start to play with it by:

- **Stretching** (make longer) or **squashing** (make shorter) some or all of the notes
- Playing with the **dynamics** - how loud or soft it is
- Stretching or squashing the **intervals** (the distance between two consecutive notes)
- **Faster** and **slower** versions or getting faster/getting slower versions
- **Repeating** some of the pattern two or more times
- Making it more 'red, green, azure, yellow, shiny' etc.

You could **make a longer melody** from the different ways you have found to play your bird song, or you listen to more bird songs and do the activity again. Then you could make a longer piece of music by using your different bird songs.

In Shiori Usui's piece *The Silent Forest*, the bird song becomes lower in pitch as the piece progresses with more silence in between each idea. Shiori found out that when deforestation happens, not only are there fewer birds, but also the bird's songs have been found to be lower in pitch. You could use this idea in your music too.

PLEASE SEND YOUR MUSIC TO learning@bcmg.org.uk