



## Clowning Around

In 1914 Russian composer **Igor Stravinsky** composed **Three Pieces for String Quartet**. A string quartet is a music group (ensemble) made up of **2 violins**, a **viola** and a **cello**. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement, was inspired by the music hall performer and clown **Little Tich** and his **Big Boots** routine. Stravinsky said this about his music:

*'the jerky movement, the ups and downs, the rhythm – even the mood or joke of the music - was suggested by the art of this great clown'*

Watch Little Tich here: <https://youtu.be/MFB4oHajwGw>

The piece is **constructed** from **just five musical gestures**. A musical gesture is a musical idea that you can **recognise** more by its **shape** and **character** than by its melody or rhythm. **Listen** to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement (see link below) and see if you can **hear** the five different gestures. It could also be fun to **move** around your space **imagining** you are the clown in the music.

<https://youtu.be/uxYYCr9Vkv4?t=55>

The 5 gestures could be described like this:

1. The opening loud **slide down**
2. Plucking the string (**pizzicato**)
3. A short **lyrical melody** going up then down
4. Loud **dramatic stabs** with grace notes
5. Frantic **fast semiquavers**

**Listen** to Maja demonstrating the 5 gestures on the violin. You could try drawing the shape of each one. <https://youtu.be/-wH-06ZD2-U>

## Your Turn!

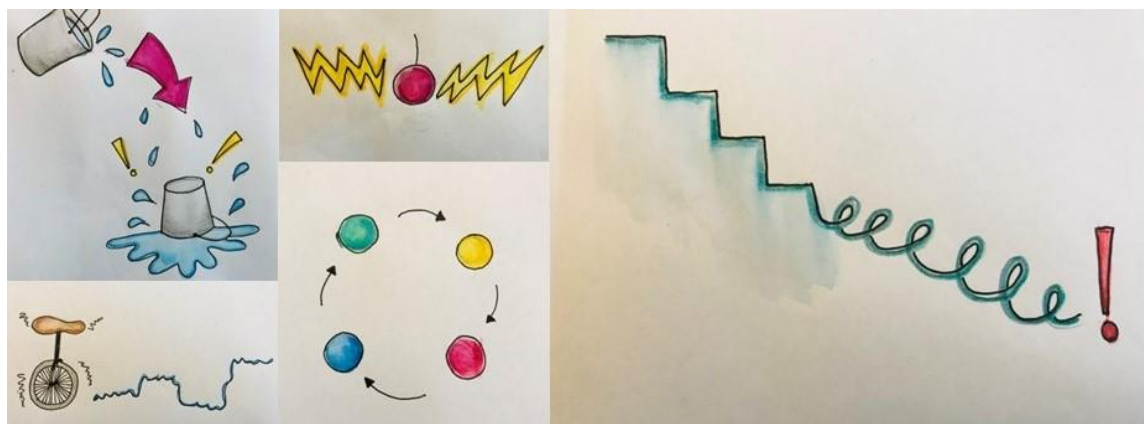
In this activity you are going to compose your own music inspired by clown like movements. Instead of composing a quartet, you are going to create a **solo piece** for you to play. First of all **create** and **mime** five short clown movements e.g.

1. Juggling
2. Walking down steps and tripping over
3. Wobbly unicycle
4. Honking nose
5. Knocking over a bucket

Thinking about the **shape** and **character** of your mimes, see if you can **transform** each of them into a **short musical idea** on your instrument. Take time to find **interesting sounds** on

your instrument - maybe playing it in an **unusual way** - and make sure each of your ideas is **distinct** and **contrasting**.

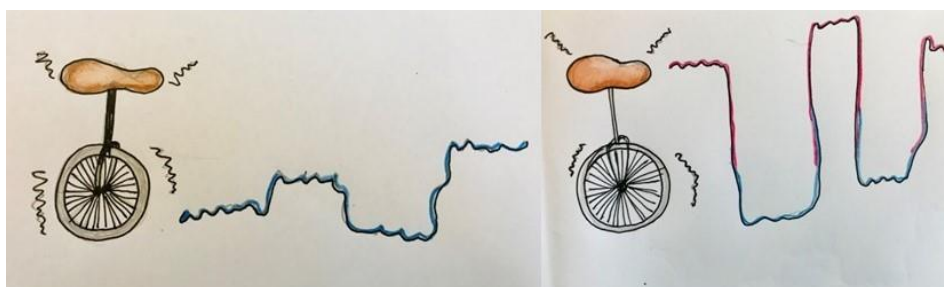
When you have five musical ideas inspired by your 5 movements/mimes, try **drawing an image** or **symbol** to remind you of each one. This will help you create a music score of your music later. Make sure your drawings remind you of the shape of your musical ideas. Here's Jenny's drawings - can you **guess** which is which?



**Listen again** to the Second Movement. Do the five gestures always sound the **same**? If **different**, how are they different? You might notice that sometimes:

- The notes are higher or lower
- Something new is added to the end of a gesture
- A different articulation or way of playing is used
- The musical gesture is repeated

When something is **similar but different** in music, we call it a **variation**. Play around with your musical gestures using the ideas above and any other variations you noticed. Draw new images/symbols to show how the ideas are similar but different:



Now **decide** on what **order** you would like to play your ideas. This is the **structure** of your music. You can **repeat** ideas and **revisit** ideas. Stravinsky liked to put contrasting ideas next to each other. You could create a secret **narrative** or **story** to help you **organise** your ideas. Use your images/symbols to help you plan and structure your piece. You can **move them around** to try out different structures. Make multiple copies if needed. Decide which version you like best and perform!

Please **send** any music you create to [learning@bcmg.org.uk](mailto:learning@bcmg.org.uk)