



**sydney symphony orchestra**

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# Bite-Sized Music Lessons

**A series of F-10 music lessons for  
implementation in the classroom**

## **Conditions of use**

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# Thunderstorm – from Pastorale Symphony (1808)

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## Ludwig van Beethoven

Duration: approximately 3 minutes and 46 seconds

### Year levels: Years 5-6

Written in the language of the Australian Curriculum in the Arts these resources include activities in each of the music learning areas: performing, composing and listening and identify the key competencies reinforced in each activity.

Lesson	Page	Focus Activity
1	<a href="#">5</a>	Listening
2	<a href="#">6</a>	Reading and performing
3	<a href="#">8</a>	Listening and performing
4	<a href="#">10</a>	Composing

### Lesson Index

- Lesson 1:** This listening activity focuses on how Beethoven has used the elements of music to paint a picture in sound. Students then compare the treatment of the elements of music at different points in the piece to see how they have been manipulated to show the varying intensity of the storm.
- Lesson 2:** Here students learn the main themes used by Beethoven to represent the parts of the storm. Simple score reading activities are included before a full listening to the whole movement of the symphony.
- Lesson 3:** Explores how drama is created by manipulating texture and dynamics and how musical ideas are communicated using symbols.
- Lesson 4:** Here students in groups will compose their own piece describing in music something from the Australian environment using a mixture of acoustic sounds and technology to source the material they use in their composition.

## Composer biography: Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Beethoven carried a sketchbook with him at all times. He jotted down ideas as they came to him. Some themes in the *Pastoral Symphony* (No.6) were written five years before Beethoven finished the work. Beethoven was a master of noting down a good idea and using it years later. He wrote a great deal of music and was deaf by the age of 46 and by the time he wrote this piece. He struggled with his deafness, and once wrote:

*“What a humiliation when someone, standing beside me, heard a flute from afar off while I heard nothing, or when someone heard a shepherd singing and again I heard nothing!”*

He craved the sounds of bird calls, rustling water and even a thunderstorm.

## Thunderstorm – from Pastoral Symphony

Beethoven called this a “Characteristic Symphony” which means it is programmatic music or music which depicts a scene, place, object, person or mood. While elements of nature are clearly present in this symphony, Beethoven did not intend to catalogue and present “sounds of nature.” He used the sounds and inspiration of nature to inspire his musical material. Each movement was given a descriptive subtitle of a scene:

- Movement I: *Awakening of happy feelings upon arriving in the countryside*
- Movement II: *Scene by the brook*
- Movement III: *Joyous gathering of country folk*
- Movement IV: *Lightning, Thunderstorm*
- Movement V: *Shepherds’ song*

### Movement IV. Lightning, thunderstorm

*Suddenly, the skies darken as a thunderstorm approaches and the peasants scurry to their homes. The atmosphere of an impending thunderstorm is vividly depicted in the opening bars of the movement. Without warning, the wind begins to blow violently, lightning and thunder are everywhere. Eventually the storm passes, and the grateful peasants intone a chorale of thanks to God. This music segues into the finale.*

This movement is representative of one of the brilliant orchestrations from this era. Beethoven uses many instruments in ways that are quite unusual. For instance, the celli and basses are asked to play very rapid notes in their lowest range. In no way will this, based on the capabilities of the instruments, be heard cleanly. What one hears, instead, is a deep rumbling resembling distant thunder. We see the brilliant flash of lightning in the rapid ascending notes of the violins, and hear the rain and swirling winds in the arpeggiated tremolo string writing. It was also for this movement that Beethoven saved the special timbres of trombones, piccolo, and timpani for extra punch and fuller orchestral sound.

## Instrumentation

### Woodwind

Piccolo  
2 Flutes  
2 Oboes  
2 Clarinets  
2 Bassoons

### Brass

2 Horns  
2 Trumpets  
2 Trombones

### Percussion

Timpani

### Strings

Violins 1  
Violins 2  
Violas  
Cellos  
Double Basses

### Key musical concepts contained in this work

- Use of the elements of music to create a picture in sound.
- Texture – manipulating and identifying layers of sound.
- Instruments of the orchestra with a focus on timpani and piccolo.

### At the conclusion of the activities students should be able to:

- discuss how the elements of music can be used to represent an image or scene (program music).
- discuss what they hear in the music.
- apply this knowledge to a composition activity.
- create a score (graphic notation) to communicate ideas.
- aurally identify the instrumental characters in each scene.

### Resources

A recording of *the Thunderstorm* from Beethoven's *Symphony No.6 (Pastoral)*

This recording is from the album *Günter Wand: Orchestral Recordings*, in a performance by the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, conducted by Günter Wand.

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/track/4qTCR3g49zvm72nKglubF2>

# Listening Guide

See [the resources](#) for a link to a recording.

Audio Cue	Features
0:00–0:26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction – storm on the horizon.</li><li>• Cello and Double Bass tremolo storm in waiting.</li><li>• Violin 1 play two melodic lines that rise in pitch sequentially.</li><li>• Violin 2 and Viola represent small raindrops.</li></ul>
0:27–0:46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thunder claps from Timpani (first time percussion is heard in this symphony).</li><li>• Trumpets add texture and timbre to the storm.</li><li>• Full orchestra plays <i>ff</i> (fortissimo – very loud).</li><li>• Three descending melodic phrases followed by three chords.</li></ul>
0:47–1:28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear descending melodic phrase from the string section and bassoon, repeated three times.</li><li>• Emphasis from Timpani and Trumpets continues.</li><li>• Strings maintain the tension of a storm with tremolos.</li></ul>
1:29–1:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First glimpses of the sun heard in Violin 1 with a countermelody in the clarinet.</li><li>• Conversation between woodwind and strings follows, crescendo to:</li></ul>
1:46–2:02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trumpets herald a rolling arpeggio (broken chord) in the string section</li><li>• Rising melodic shape adds tension and anticipation ending when a piccolo plays a high G natural (cue 2:02)</li></ul>
2:03–2:44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Descending chromatic scales in Violin 1 and Cello are accompanied by sustained notes in other parts.</li><li>• Storm's last fury with descending melodic lines.</li><li>• Held chords mark a change in the weather (cue 2:27).</li></ul>
2:45-end	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arpeggios in the strings.</li><li>• Slow diminuendo (gradually getting quieter) to calm the storm.</li><li>• Cadences (a progression of chords that mark the conclusion or punctuation of a phrase) rumble the last of the storm (cue 3:12-3:26).</li><li>• Oboe shines the sunlight (cue 3:27).</li><li>• Final flute line leads straight into movement V.</li></ul>

# Sequential Classroom Activities

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## Lesson 1: Listening

1. As a class identify the sounds you would hear in a thunderstorm and list them on the board.
  - a) How would you represent the above elements of the thunderstorm with graphic notation? Brainstorm the way you could communicate those sounds using graphic notation that would represent the elements of the storm. These can be used as a reference later during activity 3.
  - b) Predict how Beethoven might include these elements within his composition (relate discussion to pitch, dynamics, tempo, duration, texture, timbre).
  
2. Consider the images on [page 11](#) while listening to the three short excerpts from Beethoven's symphony.
  - a) What picture might best represent each excerpt?
  - b) What did you hear in the music to make that decision?
  
3. Consider each of the elements of music in your discussion and use the table below on the board under the headings pitch, dynamics and expressive devices, rhythm, texture, instruments and tone colour to collect your answers.

	Start of the storm	Height of the storm	Calm after the storm
Pitch			
Dynamics and expression			
Rhythm			
Texture			
Instruments			
Tone colour			

4. Extension: listen to or watch the storm scene from the opera *Peter Grimes*  
<https://safeshare.tv/submit?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D8co9sGSuSNo>  
 Compare the composition ideas and techniques that a composer from the Twentieth Century used to those used by Beethoven two hundred years earlier.





## Lesson 3: Listening and performing

### 1. Warm up activity:

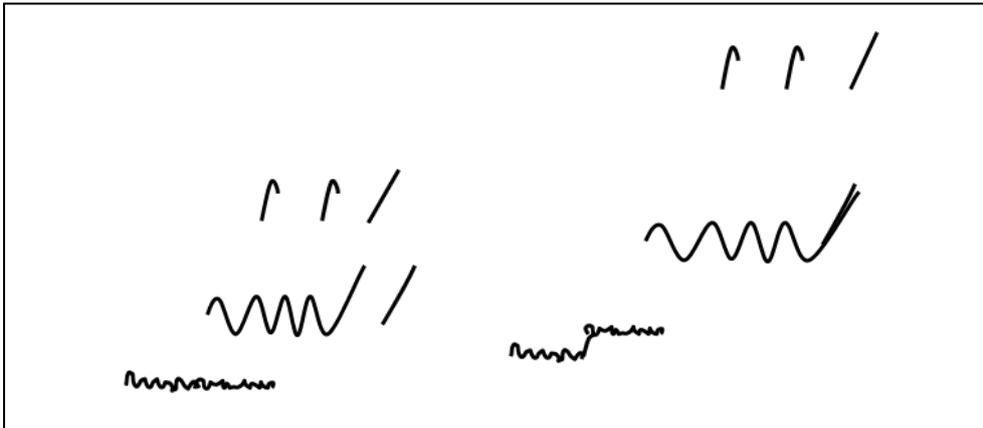
- Seat the group in a circle (or semicircle if that suits you better), begin at one end and encourage each student to snap their fingers in an irregular pattern as the teacher walks past them. They continue doing so until you pass them again and give them a new sound to do. The sound increases in dynamics and energy as you pass each person, and the sound accumulates (like terrace dynamics).
- When you return to the first student transfer the snapping to a clap using finger tips, and pass this around.
- Then transfer to a clap using the whole hand.
- Then tapping chest with alternate hands.
- Then patsching with alternate hands (patsching is a term for slapping your legs just above the knee).
- Then add alternate feet stamping to the patsching so they happen simultaneously.

Encourage the group to increase the intensity of the sound on their knees and feet to a dramatic crescendo. They are experimenting with dynamics.

- Then go backwards: remove the sound of stamping feet as you pass each person.
- Then patsching knees,
- Then tapping chest,
- Whole hand claps,
- Finger claps,
- Snapping fingers, finishing with one person making the sound of an irregular finger snap.

You will find you have a storm being built up from a few raindrops to a full thunder storm and back to the calm after a storm has passed... magic!

2. Below is a graphic score of the first 26 seconds of this piece. A graphic notation represents sound that is heard. Cue 0:00-0:26 has three main sections – a tremolo in cello and double bass, violin 2 and finally violin 1 with raindrops. Listen to the score and identify each of these sections as they occur.



3. Play through this score and then create your own graphic score of the sounds in one or more of the following sections of the piece on a large sheet of paper or cardboard.
- Cue 1:29-1:45
  - Cue 1:46-2:44
  - Cue 2:45-3:45

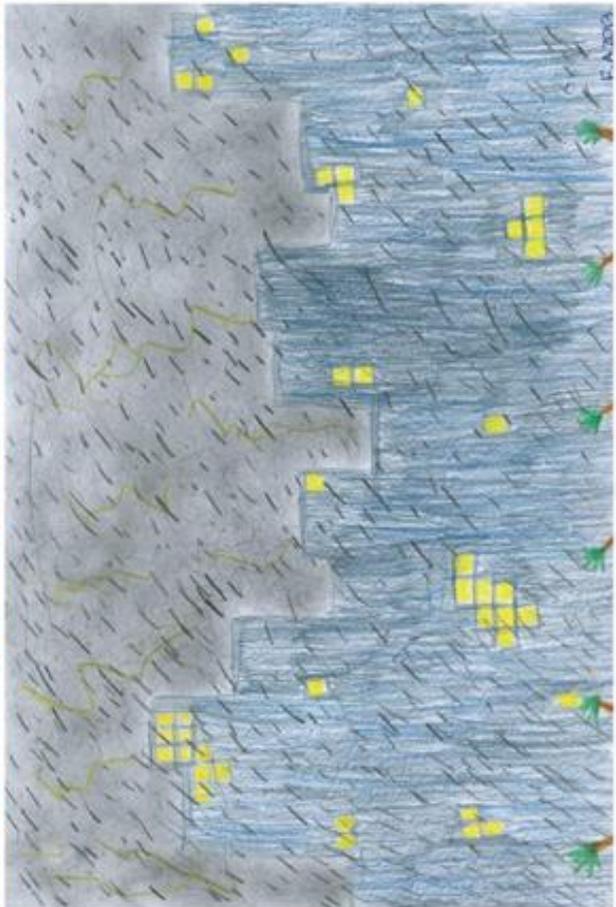
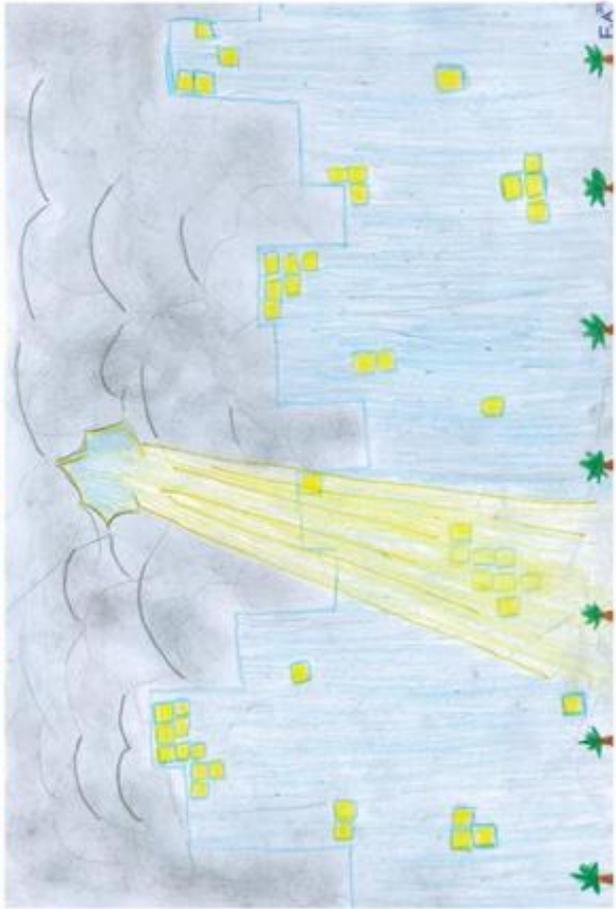
Once these are completed rehearse them and try performing them on available sounds and instruments found in your classroom. This may include voices, body percussion, instruments and everyday objects. Evaluate and compare graphic scores by using words such as tone colour, texture, dynamics, tremolo, chromatic, descending.

## Lesson 4: Composing

1. Beethoven never set foot in Australia. This great composer would have been amazed at the sights and sounds of our country, especially the bush. If you had to be Beethoven's tour guide in sound, how would you compose your tour?

Find some pictures of Australian storms in the countryside (not a city) on the internet. Divide the class into groups and have them form an ideas bank of sounds that they might use to capture some of these images.

2. Work in groups of between 4-6 to compose your own thunderstorm.
  - a) Consider five or six features of the Australian bush and include a thunderstorm as one of these elements.
  - b) Use available sound sources (instruments, voices, body percussion) or technology to devise ways of creating these features of the bush.
  - c) If there is access to technology (computer programs, sound bites from the internet, or sounds of nature recorded by the students and brought to the lesson), students might use that to select a series of sounds that can be used for this task and combine them with acoustic sounds.
  - d) Compose a theme for each of these elements. Remember to consider tone colour, texture, changing dynamics, rhythm patterns, and ascending and descending pitch patterns.
  - e) Consider how you can use symbols or traditional notation to communicate your ideas. How would you indicate to a performer the following notation?
    - Length of sound
    - High and low pitch
    - Volume
    - Texture (i.e. the layers of sound)
    - The order in which the sounds are heard and combined in your piece
  - f) Create your score, giving enough information so that other players could perform your music without you having to give additional information.
  - g) Play from your score and rehearse your piece as a group.
  - h) Perform your composition to the class.



Images drawn by Freya Andersson, 2013.