



Libretto Music

PRESENTS

HOBBIT DAY

A MUSIC
APPRECIATION
LESSON BASED
ON TOLKIEN'S
WORKS

Thank you for downloading the free Libretto Music
Hobbit Day music appreciation lesson!

Libretto Music,
a program whose purpose is to help
students and families of all ages order their affections
and foster a love of Classical Music
by making it more accessible
through simple and easy to use resources.

A Libretto is a little book and also what the written lyrics of an
Opera is called. With the help of stories I want families to have
access to classical music and the history it highlights.

I pray that the method I employ with my six little ones
will give you the confidence and tools you need
to make the great works of music approachable
with your own students.

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All Music has a story to tell...

Every piece of music tells a story. It is the story of what each composer wanted the listeners to feel and be reminded of when the music was played, it also imparts the story of what a composer was going through during that time in their life. Additionally a musical work can reveal a forgotten narrative from a specific time in history. But the notes of the music at their base tell a greater tale. They share the story of our Creator because music is a language of God.

God uses music to communicate characteristics about Himself to humanity. In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, “Music is the exaltation of the mind derived from things eternal, bursting forth in sound.” As such one can find very few arguments against the beauty of music as a whole. And perhaps the most clearly visible characteristics God displays through music is both His beauty and His love for beauty. God shows us this love for beauty by the mere existence of beauty and music in the world. They are His gracious gifts for to us, not only to share Himself with us but also for our enjoyment.

Through music we can also see the unchanging nature of God. A note will always have the same sound frequency. The A nearest to middle C, called A4, is 440 hz. If the note played by an instrument is not 440 hz., by definition that note is cannot be A4. This motif can be expounded further in that even the alteration of one note in a chord or phrase of music creates a new harmony or melody. With both God and music we can have comfort and reassurance in that constancy.

Finally, music also expressed God’s love of order and organization. Music is comprised of patterns and similar groupings. God has given music the structure of a language to help us understand it more fully. The individual notes of a piece are the words and the motifs (musical thoughts) are the phrases

that combine into melodies and make sentences. Movements of a larger piece are its chapters, that in the musical work's entirety compose a tome.

Music Appreciation made easy as ABC

It is a fallacy that one must have extensive knowledge of music theory to delight in classical music, so please don't let knowing little to nothing about the constituting elements of music be an impediment to your family's pursuit of the enjoyment and learning of the subject. If one can recognize when a segment of music is the same or different from the last, then one can glean worth in listening to classical music. And the seeds sown by an early introduction to this form of ear training will yield a bountiful harvest for your family culture with memories and conversations for years to come.

We use the following framework for structured listening at least once a week for music study in our homeschool, and as part of liturgical living on our family's favorite feast days. Our method is a procedure of three steps (A, B, & C) that consists of listening to a piece of music only a couple times in a row while having a different task – purpose – each listening. The whole process is done in one sitting and takes, on the long side 15 -20 minutes depending on the piece chosen for study and length of conversation. For younger children it can be quite short. And do not hesitate to include the littlest ones in your home. My 13 month old son just dances around to the music - which is perfect for laying the foundation for the love of music at that age!

I purposely created this method to have freedom, flexibility, and adaptability in its implementation because with all our growing boys it is a necessity. Use this method the way that benefits your family the most and works best with the current ages of your children.

Our Easy ABCs of Music Appreciation are:

- A – Attentive Listening
- B – Bodily Movement
- C – Conversation

You can use the following background on the piece as a script or pull out what is appropriate for the ages of your students during the Conversation part of our ABC's. We play the piece at the beginning so it can have the first word and speak for itself:

For today's lesson we will be listening to "Bilbo's Last Song" composed by Donald Swann in 1978. The text was originally a poem pinned by J. R. R. Tolkien in 1966 as a gift to his long time secretary Joy Hill. It has gone on too be set music by multiple composers. One of these other popular versions is by **Stephen Oliver**.

Donald Swann was a Welsh composer of the 20th century. He wrote popular songs as well as operas. One such opera was *Perlandra* based on the second novel of C. S. Lewis' Space Trilogy.

The poem of "Bilbo's Last Song" has three stanzas that Swann made into three verses for his song. Like many church hymns, Swann uses the same music for each verse. In the language of music this repetition lets us describe the piece's form as "strophic." You or your students can now read through the whole text using the sheet at the end of this guide. There is also a **beautiful book version of "Bilbo's Last Song"** illustrated by Pauline Baynes.

Strophic - using the same music for every verse of a song.

Form - the structure or organization of a musical piece.

Other examples of strophic songs that may be familiar to your students are many hymns and folk songs like *Amazing Grace*, *Mary Had a Lamb*, *Old McDonald Had a Farm*, and *Bingo*.

Now on to the ABC's! For this lesson your students will listen to the piece at least twice.

A - Attentive Listening

For this first listening of the piece have your students sit as silently as possible. For younger students it may help to have them close their eyes and fold their hands. As for the youngest of students, a snack can help greatly. My favorite Music Education professor used to say, "Silent Coyotes!" and make the animal with one of her hands. I carry this on with my children.

B - Bodily Movement

Now during the second listening we will have some movement in while the piece plays. This step taps into the area of kinesthetic learning and the connection between movement and memory. This is especially important for the brains of boys. We are making the abstract more concrete, more tangible.

From the following options, choose an activity that fits the ages of your students.

- pat the music's tempo (speed) and dynamics (the way the notes are played, volume, smooth, jump)
- dance in your seats

- make a music collage by painting or drawing the story or parts heard in the music. A sheet for this is provided at the end of this guide. This can be as detailed or abstract as they like. There is no wrong answer here.
- draw or paint the piece's texture (the few or many parts making the music)
- act out the playing of the instruments heard: voice and piano here.
- use clay, playdoh, or wax to make what we are hearing
- conduct the the tempo (speed) of the piece

C - Conversation

In this last step, you can listen to the piece or just go ahead and start talking together about what was heard. During this conversation, explain what strophic is giving some well know examples. I use the music terminology and define each term as I go along. When speaking about a musical concept at a child's level, I make a point to introduce the proper term when explaining the concept. Every time that concept is relevant again, I remind my boys of the definition and term as an inseparable pair. For example: "Did you hear how each verse had the same music? We that happens we call the form of the piece strophic." Music has a language all its own and, like any foreign language, it takes time and exposure to gain fluency.

All that being said, the last thing I want to do is make you think a familiarity with musical terms is a requirement to begin. **It is definitely not!** Many meaningful connections can be made with the music, and each other, when we use our own descriptions to explain the music we hear. The fact that a concept is being observed in the music is more important then what one calls it, so please go ahead and begin. The unique family lexicon created in the process is an added gift that will help everyone make greater lasting connections when the terms are introduced.

Step C is also the time to share the age appropriate historical information about the composer and piece from the section above. This would also be good opportunity to play **Stephen Oliver's version** of “Bilbo’s Last Song” for comparison. Which version do you and your students like best?

Some older children are able to volunteer their observations with few prompts and the music itself, while other older children may not required a third listening in order to relate what they heard.

Given my sons’ young ages, right now I ask a lot of open ended questions. You can choose from the following examples for your students and add any of your own.

Questions to ask about the piece:

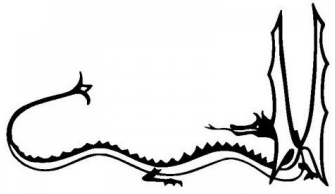
- What instruments do you hear (orchestration)? Piano and voice
- Are there few or many instruments making the music (texture)? **Thin texture because it is made up of few instruments**
- What is the speed of the music (tempo)? **Fast or slow?**
- Do you hear any parts of the music repeating? (motive, themes, form) **Repetition of the music at each verse making the form Strophic**
- What does the music sound like to you? How would you describe this part? Is it calm or smooth or loud or jumpy? (Here for the dynamics, I just go through several adjectives for them to choose from. Older children can provide these on their own.)
- How does the music make you feel? What kind of story is the music telling? Is it happy, etc? (I use more describing words here. In musical terms the way a piece makes an individual feel is called the mood/tone.) Share your owns thoughts with your students.
- What do you hear in the music?

- Does the music remind you of anything or paint a specific picture in your mind?

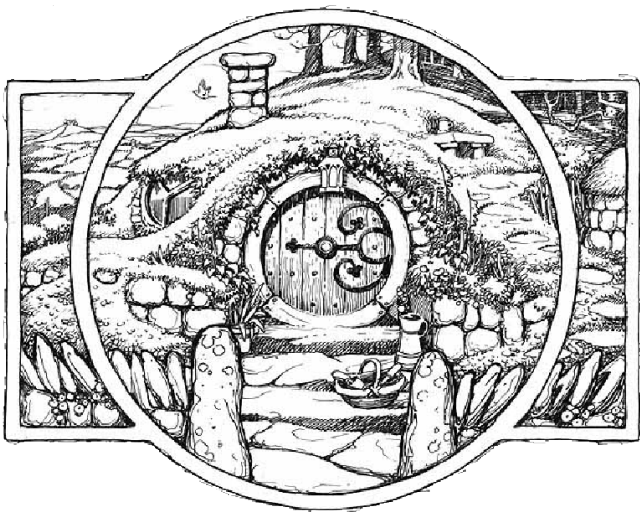
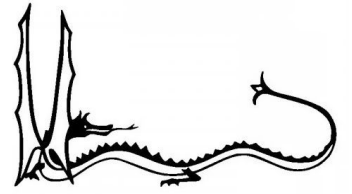
You don't need to ask every question each time, or even expect older children to recognize all the elements of music mentioned above. That discernment will grow with every future listening. The more one practices listening with purpose the easier and more comprehensive it will become. I encourage and applaud any comment. With fast music, one of my son's usual descriptions is that it sounds like, "little mice running around." These creative observations are valuable in the early days of ear training as they reinforce the child's attentive listening and confidence.

For older children: A written narration of the composer's life and the heard specifics of the music could be done during the conversation as well. These narrations would be a lovely addition to the child's music notebook/ listening journal. You can use the sheet at the end of this guide for that as well.

Finally, if everyone is well into the enjoyment of the piece, we will play it again just for the fun of it – an extra bonus listening time and a little closing dance party as we transition to our next subject of the day.



What do you hear?



"Bilbo's Last Song"

J. R. R. Tolkien

*Day is ended, dim my eyes,
but journey long before me lies.
Farewell, friends! I hear the call.
The ship's beside the stony wall.
Foam is white and waves are grey;
beyond the sunset leads my way.
Foam is salt, the wind is free;
I hear the rising of the Sea.*

*Farewell, friends! The sails are set,
the wind is east, the moorings fret.
Shadows long before me lie,
beneath the ever-bending sky,
but islands lie behind the Sun
that I shall raise ere all is done;
lands there are to west of West,
where night is quiet and sleep is rest.*

*Guided by the Lonely Star,
beyond the utmost harbour-bar,
I'll find the heavens fair and free,
and beaches of the Starlit Sea.
Ship, my ship! I seek the West,
and fields and mountains ever blest.
Farewell to Middle-earth at last.
I see the Star above my mast!*