Ancient Forest

Alexandra N Botham
Forest Soundscape

Making music in the woods

Alex Botham.
The forest has many sounds; the wind in the trees, the crunch of walking on autumn leaves, rain splashing on leaves, birdsong, running water, a crack of a dry twig trampled and rustling leaves. This is the forest’s natural soundscape.

Introduction

Listen to the soundscape made by Alex and her group as they explore the sounds of the forest using found objects and their voices.

Music file  Listen to the forest soundscape

Film file  See how the soundscape was made

Make your own Forest Soundscape

On the following pages you will find:
• A list of activities to build the piece of music
• Instructions on how to use the score
• The ‘Form’ – a skeleton structure for the piece
• Sound cards – a set of cards with motifs for each person or group
• A poem, 2 “Rainsongs” and a “Magic Names” sheet
• Audio recordings

Activities

Collect “Woodland Treasures” that you can use to make sounds: rustling leaves, jingly pebbles, tapping stones, scraping bark… Now try using these “Woodland Treasures” to act out the sound cards – which materials sound most like a scurrying mouse or a faery bell?

Try creating a “Rainsong” Experiment by tapping the palm of your hand with your fingertips or tapping pebbles together. Does the rain sound more convincing with slow, steady tapping, fast tapping or random tapping?

Now create two contrasting “Rainsongs” (A and B) and fit them into your piece. If you get stuck, you can use the “Rainsongs” provided.

Experiment with building chords

Person 1 begins by singing a long note, then Person 2 can build a different note on top. Experiment by building notes on top of each other in this way to build chords.

The group can create a magical, ghostly effect by starting with a very quiet chord and gradually making it louder.

Write a “Woodland Treasures” poem about all of the beautiful treasures in the woodland – the owls that silently drift through the trees like forest spirits, or the tiny acorns, like little gems, preciously gathered on the forest floor… Or you can use the poem provided.

Use the “Magic Names” list Can you find an old gnarled oak tree, or hear a chiff chaff in the woodland? Each of the animals, plants and insects that you can see and hear around you have scientific Latin names. A lot of these Latin names sound very grand and magical. Look at the “Magic Names” sheet and try to find them in your own woodland – if you can’t find them or aren’t sure what they are, use a guide to help you.

Create your “Mystical Melody” Create a short memorable tune that the whole group can sing. You could also use a tune that you all know (a short line from a Christmas Carol would work very well), or use the example from the audio online.
How to use the score:

The Form sheet gives you a basic structure for the piece – it is divided into ‘Harmonic Motifs’, parts 1-4, and a ‘Structure’ that relates to the poem and Rainsongs. The duration of the piece should be roughly between 3 and 5 minutes. The Form follows the outline of a poem – you can use your own or use the poem provided and the quotations on the Form sheet to guide the piece. Use the descriptive words to help guide your music.

The Sound Cards are written for 4 people (or 4 groups). Each person has 9 cards and may choose to use all of them or just one of them. These cards can be separated and used in any order as many times as you like throughout the piece. On the Form sheet, there are specific indications to certain performers where a card should be used (see numbers in square boxes). Each card should take between 1 and 5 seconds to perform each time, but it can be repeated.

The straight and wavy lines on the Sound Cards indicate a rough melody. When the line is at the top of the box, the melody is high and when the line is nearer the bottom, it is low. Use the line as a guide to move between higher and lower notes. You should also use this rule when interpreting the Harmonic Motifs on the Form sheet.

Try out the activities to help you begin work on your piece and don’t forget to look at the ‘Key’ so that you understand what the symbols on the Form sheet mean.

Key

MM  Mystical Melody starts here – create your own or use one from the example audio
CH  build a chord – see Activity sheet
MN  insert a name from the Magic Names sheet here – or use one of the Latin names that you discovered yourself.
POEM  a poem is spoken at this point. This can be done by any person/group.

<  getting louder

>  getting quieter
Poem

A tiny gem, still green
Buries itself in the gaping earth and is swallowed.
The earth knows what to do
It calls forth the magic name, "Quercus robur!"
The wind whispers the name all night
And the rain knocks on the grey earth – wake up!

Now a root, and a stem, and a leaf.
Shoots burst upwards, hungry
For the light that has warmed the earth’s gentle bed.
Happily, the sun stretches down
To guide the young shoots.

Peacock and Purple, Admiral Red and Lunar Yellow glow
With featherless wings, create a dramatic stained glass window.
Now new scents of berries and fruits attract
A flock of singing acrobats!

A loud shudder in the belly of the earth
A nightmare flash that wakes the dreamers
The spirit world disappears, and its magic with it.

Burnt fingers of trees bend and snap
As the wind tries to stretch them into waking
They groan and cry with the gentle drops
Of tears that fall from an unwashed sky.

Distantly now, the folks and children drift,
The woodland only stares, black and white, scar-faced
And aching
All colour drained as blood, sapped,
All used up. Empty now, and hollow.

2 Rainsongs

Each ‘group’ must choose a rain sound:

- tapping the palm of your hand with your fingertips
- whispering the word ‘puh’
- whispering the word ‘duh’
- making a tutting sound
- using pebbles or stones to tap together

There are 4 groups and each group has a line (marked 1, 2, 3, 4). Each ‘○’ represents one rain sound. Listen carefully to the rest of the group.

e.g. In Rainsong 1, after group 1 has made their first rain sound (○), there is a slight pause and then group 2 make a rain sound. Then straight after that, group 3 makes three rain sounds – and so on.

The Rainsongs are split up into 8 boxes to help you to keep track of where you are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rainsong 1</th>
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<th>Rainsong 2</th>
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<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
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<td>○○○</td>
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<td>○</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Rainsong 1
Play this once very slowly.
Repeat 1 – gradually get faster
Repeat 2 – very fast
Repeat 3 – gradually getting slower and quieter

Rainsong 2
Play this once quickly
Repeat it a second time very slowly and clearly
**Magic names**

Each of the animals, plants and insects that you can see and hear around you have scientific Latin names. A lot of these Latin names sound very grand and magical. Do not worry about the ‘correct pronunciation’ of these words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trees</th>
<th>Birds</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English oak</td>
<td>“Phylloscopus collybita”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yew</td>
<td>“Garrulus glandarius”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>“Luscinia Megarhynchos”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crab apple</td>
<td>“Sitta europaea”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crack willow</td>
<td>“Strix aluco”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>“Dendrocopos major”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>“Dendrocopos minor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver birch</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flowers</th>
<th>Other animals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog rose</td>
<td>“Muscardinus avellanarius”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herb Robert (Bloodwort)</td>
<td>“Meles meles”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild strawberry</td>
<td>“Sciurus carolinensis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nettle</td>
<td>“Plecotus auritus”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foxglove</td>
<td>“Natrix natrix”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Vipera berus”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Anguis fragilis”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Zootoca vivipara”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Bufo bufo”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Rana lessonae”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Bufo calamita”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Triturus cristatus”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insects</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garden spider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodlouse spider</td>
<td>“Araneus diadematus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown hawker dragonfly</td>
<td>“Dysdera crocata”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue damselfly</td>
<td>“Aeshna grandis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange and black sexton beetle</td>
<td>“Enallagma cyathigerum”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacock butterfly</td>
<td>“Nicrophorus vespillo”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red admiral butterfly</td>
<td>“Aglais io”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Emperor butterfly</td>
<td>“Vanessa atlanta”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small tortoiseshell butterfly</td>
<td>“Apatura iris”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat moth</td>
<td>“Aglais urticae”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunar yellow underwing (moth)</td>
<td>“Cossus cossus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Noctua arbor”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You should just use the Latin words as though they were words in a spell – give the words a sense of magic in the way that you speak them.
### Sound cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>“Soo-swee soo-swee soo-swee” (Chiff chaff)</th>
<th>“Bufo Bufo”</th>
<th>Low, rumbling sound</th>
<th>Dramatic narration: “Empty now and hollow.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Aglais io” with a sense of nobility</td>
<td>COPY a sound that you can hear in the woodland</td>
<td>“Vipera berus” in a hissing tone</td>
<td>Make a sound using Woodland Treasures that you have gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Wooo, woo-woo-wooo” (Tawny owl)</td>
<td>“Strix aluco” gently, like an owl</td>
<td>“Apatura iris” with a sense of nobility</td>
<td>Make a nibbling sound, like a squirrel or a mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Strix aluco” A soft “ahhh” sound, like a soft, sighing breeze</td>
<td>COPY a sound that someone else is making</td>
<td>“Meles meles” with a low grumble</td>
<td>Dramatic narration: “Wake up!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Apatura iris”</td>
<td>“Meles meles” Dramatic narration: “Drained as blood, sapped”</td>
<td>“Bufo Bufo” croaky, like a toad</td>
<td>Make a rustling sound that gradually gets louder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Tawny owl”</td>
<td>“Strix aluco” A soft “ahhh” sound, like a soft, sighing breeze</td>
<td>“Meles meles” with a low grumble</td>
<td>Dramatic narration: “Empty now and hollow.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Warbling, melodic whistle</strong> (Nightingale)</td>
<td>“Araneus diadematus” whispered, sinister spidery voice</td>
<td>COPY a sound that someone else is making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Make a soft hammering sound, like a woodpecker</td>
<td>“Vanessa atlanta” with a sense of nobility</td>
<td>A soft “ahhh” sound, like a soft, sighing breeze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dramatic narration: “Happily the sun stretches down”</td>
<td>“Cossus cossus” in a whispered voice</td>
<td>Dramatic narration: “The woodland only stares”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Low whistle</strong> (Green woodpecker)</td>
<td>“Fraxinus excelsior” croaky, like an old tree</td>
<td>COPY a sound that you can hear in the woodland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dramatic narration: “A tiny gem”</td>
<td>“Noctua orbona” with a sense of nobility</td>
<td>Make a low creaking sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Make a sound using Woodland Treasures that you have gathered</td>
<td>“Natrix natrix” in a hissing tone</td>
<td>Dramatic narration: “tears that fall from an unwashed sky.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Edits to Ancient Forest materials

Ancient Forest

Notes for teachers and group leaders

This soundscape is suitable for anyone of any age or musical ability. This is a starting point, feel free to choose which parts of the pack you use.

Learning objectives:

- “This tree was seventy years old!” “What is an acorn?”
  This activity pack aims to encourage groups to discover special things about the woodland for themselves.
  Teachers and group leaders might use the pack as an extension of classroom activities whilst students are learning about the lifecycle of plants, food chains, biodiversity…
  Teachers working with music groups will find these activities useful for those starting to compose and for students who are more advanced composers.
- “We need to protect our woodlands.”
  This activity pack has a conservation message and aims to help groups to discover why the woodlands are important places to them.
- Woodland memories
  The activity pack is designed to be a different creative experience that is treasured by the group.

Useful skills:

- Teamwork
  The group are encouraged to discuss their ideas together, developing the musical ideas and writing expressive poems.
- Leadership
  Activities like ‘building chords’ offer an opportunity for the group to have a go at conducting each other. The chords can be built up as someone in the group points to the next person to sing, or a person can direct the dynamic of a chord (how loud or quiet it is) simply by raising and lowering their hand.
- Creative thinking
  Each activity demands that the group contribute their own ideas to shape the piece; from talking about things that they think are special about the woodland, to thinking about how to make croaky toad noises and rain sounds!
- Confidence building
  This activity pack is designed so that anyone can take part and everyone’s contribution is valued. Music teachers might like to use the activities as an informal session for students who are learning to compose.

Helpful resources:

- Guide book about plants and animals

Key words:
Conservation, plants, animals, composing, play, creativity, investigation, student-led.
2 Rainsongs

Each ‘group’ must choose a rain sound:
• tapping the palm of your hand with your fingertips
• whispering the word ‘puh’
• whispering the word ‘duh’
• making a tutting sound
• using pebbles or stones to tap together

There are 4 groups and each group has a line (marked 1, 2, 3, 4). Each ‘o’ represents one rain sound. Listen carefully to the rest of the group.

e.g. In Rainsong A, after group 1 has made their first rain sound (‘o’), there is a slight pause and then group 2 make a rain sound then straight after that, group 3 makes three rain sounds – and so on.

The Rainsongs are split up into 8 boxes to help you to keep track of where you are.

Rainsong A

Play this once very slowly.
Repeat 1 – gradually get faster
Repeat 2 – very fast
Repeat 3 – gradually getting slower and quieter

<table>
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Rainsong B

Play this once quickly
Repeat it a second time very slowly and clearly

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Form Sheet

Harmonic Motifs

1

2

3

4

Structure

"A tiny gem..."

"Now a root..."

"Peacock..."

"Now, new scents..."

POEM

POEM

POEM

POEM

RAINSONG A

(Growing)

(Gentle, nurturing)

(A sense of wonder)

RAIN ONLY

CH

CH

CH

MM

MM

CH

Sudden loud grating chord

BIRD SONG

1

1

2

2

3

3

4

4

MN

MN

High pitched solo

As before

Cracking, rustling, breaking

WM

Sighing, weeping melody

MM

MM

As before

WM

POEM

POEM

POEM

RAINSONG B