

Meridian Music of the Week!

Issue No. 155 (based on previous Newsletter No.100 – October 2022)

Each week ALL our children will be listening to a piece of music as part of our music lessons. We'll be talking about it in class and discussing what we like, what we don't like and what it makes us think about. Parents/carers/family - why not join in and listen for yourself at home! All music is available **free** on YouTube as well as paid services such as iTunes and Spotify.

This week's music...



'The Tempest'

by Thomas Adès (2004)

A collection of scenes from the opera (featuring Audrey Luna) [HERE!](#)

News report about Audrey Luna breaking a singing record at the Metropolitan Opera in New York [HERE](#)

A really cool (and short!) cartoon & rap version of 'The Tempest' story can be found [HERE](#)

The full, eight-episode (!) animated 'BBC Teach' version of the story can be found [HERE](#)

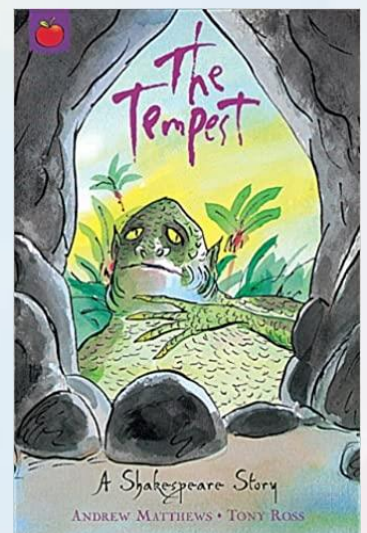
Remember this one?

It's been 18 months since we last looked at this piece of music – but it's one of mine (and the Meridian children's) favourites! It's the most modern of the pieces of music to feature in our Meridian Newsletters – it's based on a great Shakespeare story, has crazy music AND our favourite opera singer ever – Audrey Luna. If you've never heard her before... you're in for a treat!

"Oh, brave new world that has such people in it!"

This well-known quotation is taken from a Shakespeare play – '**The Tempest**'. And an opera based on this play is the inspiration for this week's newsletter. When we first ever listened to this music, I was quite excited because it was something I'd never heard before – and didn't really know anything about - until I read about it on the internet!

We've looked at (and listened to) some Shakespeare-inspired music before in our newsletters. We listened to the 'Wedding March' from **Mendelssohn's 'Midsummer Night's Dream'** and also to 'The Dance of the Knights' from **Prokofiev's 'Romeo & Juliet'** (the one that's used for the theme tune to 'The Apprentice'!) Shakespeare's plays have such good stories that it's not surprising that they have also been used for operas for hundreds of years – but, as far as I know, no-one wrote an opera based on 'The Tempest' until relatively recently – the British composer Thomas Adès wrote this in 2004.



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The Story

There's lots of really good children's version of the story available (see picture above for a good example) but, basically, it goes like this...



Prospero in the 'BBC Teach' animated version of 'The Tempest'.

The story is set on a Mediterranean island over 500 years ago. On the island lives a kind of wizard called Prospero with his daughter Miranda. He used to be the Duke of Milan, but after his wife died, his brother, Antonio, plotted against him. He removed Prospero from power and set him and his daughter adrift in an open boat on the sea. He assumed that Prospero would drown and then he would be the new Duke of Milan. But Prospero and Miranda survived! They were washed up on a secret island that was ruled by a magical witch called

Sycorax. Prospero studied Sycorax's magic books and then used the magic himself to destroy Sycorax and take over the island for him and his daughter.

Then later, Prospero uses his magic to bring his wicked brother to the island on a ship. As it approaches the island, Prospero magically creates a storm which wrecks the ship and scatters all the people on board into the sea. However, Prospero doesn't want to kill them – he wants **revenge** on his brother. So, he gets his fairy slave Ariel to fly over the shipwreck to make sure no-one is harmed and that they are all washed up on the beaches of the island. But they all wash up in **different places** so they all think that they are the only one who has survived the disaster.

By the way, the slave fairy Ariel is very faithful to Prospero – but can also be very naughty. Most people believe that the character of Ariel was more or less stolen for the character of Tinkerbell in Peter Pan!

Anyway, that's just the **beginning** of the story! You'll have to find a copy of the book to find out what happens next – but it's exciting stuff – and features a horrible monster called Caliban who is also Prospero's slave, but plans to get rid of Prospero, marry his daughter and become king of the island himself!



An actor playing Caliban in a stage performance of 'The Tempest'.

So, what about the music?



Audrey Luna – amazing opera singer!

As I said before, I didn't know anything about this opera until I researched it – but there's some amazing music in it. But the thing that I thought was the most incredible was the singer who plays the part of Prospero's slave fairy – Ariel. The singer's name is Audrey Luna and she's astonishing! I've never heard opera singing like it. She sounds completely crazy and sings some amazingly high-pitch notes! Even though the words of the opera (the **libretto**) are in English, it's often almost impossible to understand what

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she's singing because the **pitch** of the notes is so high. Not only that but, if you watch the video in the link above, you'll see that she's also really physically fit – almost a gymnast. It must take enormous talent to be able to move like that and sing like that at the same time! In fact, Audrey Luna is a kind of record holder! She became famous in 2012 for her singing in 'The Tempest' because one of the notes she sang was a G above a High C. This was very rare and not many singers could sing that high. But, three years later, in another opera called 'The Exterminating Angel' at the New York Metropolitan Opera House, she went one better and sung the next note further up the scale – an A above High C.



Experts agreed that this was the highest note that had ever been sung in the 137-year history of the New York opera! The New York Times newspaper called it 'monumental' and Audrey Luna herself said...

"It took me a while for me to even understand how to sing it. It definitely pushes me to my limit!"

The even stranger thing is, once when the opera was played on the radio, lots of listeners tweeted online that their pet dogs had got frightened and started barking when they heard the high notes! Dogs can hear much higher sounds than humans (have you ever tried blowing a dog whistle?) and it seems that Audrey Luna's voice affected them in a strange way.

So, that's 'The Tempest'. Some strange music, some crazy singing, and possibly the only opera to have ever to be a problem for dogs!



Listen & enjoy...

Mr. Mole

Music Teacher

