

ABRSM Pathways through the Oboe Syllabus

This poster showcases exciting pieces from the new syllabus, grouped by theme and colour-coded for clarity. Most selections are fresh, lesser-known works chosen for their strong teaching potential. Use the poster in your lessons, to inspire lesson planning, explore new repertoire, and introduce engaging, topic-based pathways to your students.

Grade 1

A2 The Happy Hippo by Rachel Broadbent

A lively con moto tempo and plenty of contrast in the articulation and phrasing characterise the cheerful hippo in the title. It features the F major scale, and there is some detail in the dynamics to practise.



A3 Pavan: The Earle of Salisbury by Byrd

The Pavan was a stately dance popular in the sixteenth century. It was often accompanied by an ostinato rhythm on the tabor (drum) in a minim-crotchet-crotchet pattern. It was originally composed for the harpsichord or virginals (the early keyboard instrument heard in this recording).



A6 Maggots on your Toes by Jemima Oosthuizen

This vibrant piece has contrasting forte and piano dynamics. Accented notes depict the foot stamping (to shake off the maggots!) in the middle of the piece, and the detached notes throughout offer the opportunity to teach tongue control. The rests need to be counted carefully!



B7 Elizabethan Lament by Robert Hinchliffe

In music, a Lament expresses grief or sadness. Laments were common in the Renaissance period, particularly in Elizabethan England, which this gentle piece evokes.



B10 Feather Theme by Alan Silvestri

Focus on creating a beautiful tone to communicate the nostalgic sound quality of this film theme.



B13 Takeda no Komoriuta, Trad. Japanese, arr. Oosthuizen

Takeda no Komoriuta is a Japanese folk song with a beautiful lyrical melody. It comes from the Kyoto region and tells the sad story of a young girl sent away to work, looking towards her home village beyond the mountains. Really controlled quiet playing is needed to capture the melancholy mood of this gentle lullaby.



Grade 2

A1 Marching Mongoose by Rachel Broadbent

This short piece has lots of rhythmic character. It's useful for teaching crisp tonguing and dexterity in the left hand thumb when moving to the first octave key, with clean articulation required up to a top G.



A8 The Birdcatcher's Song by Mozart, arr. Lawrence

This aria comes from one of Mozart's most famous operas, *The Magic Flute*. It is sung in the opera by the character Papageno, a birdcatcher who dresses in a costume of feathers and plays the panpipes to attract the birds. The sound of Papageno's pipes is evoked in the fast rising scales in the accompaniment.



B10 Oh my beloved Papa by Puccini, arr. Denley

This is a famous soprano aria from Puccini's comic opera, *Gianni Schicchi*. Its lyrical beauty makes it one of the best-loved pieces in the opera repertoire, and it lends itself well to the range and expressive character of the oboe.



C9 Quirky Quails by Mike Mower

Quirky Quails is a humorous piece with a playful character. The repeated notes and interval leaps need careful tuning. It's useful to practise these sections slowly and listen to each note to encourage precise intonation.



C10 Bregeiro by Nazareth, arr. Oosthuizen

Ernesto Nazareth was a celebrated Brazilian composer. This duet arrangement of his well-known piece, *Bregeiro*, is full of Latin American energy. The staccato articulation needs to be crisp to capture the lively mood, and there is also some syncopation to tackle, which will bring this piece to life.



Grade 3

A4 Tower Hill by G. Farnaby, arr. Craxton

The English Renaissance composer Giles Farnaby (c. 1563-1640) is best known for the works for early keyboard instruments that he contributed to the famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. *Tower Hill* was originally written for the harpsichord, and in one manuscript, Farnaby gives it the title "Gigue", which suggests a lively dance-like style.



B5 Una Furtiva Lagrima by Donizetti

This lyrical aria has a lilting waltz-like character. In the opera, the aria is sung by a tenor, Nemorino, who believes a love potion has worked. The phrases need to be expansively shaped to create the romantic mood, and the slurred pairs help to develop finger dexterity. The bassoon plays this melody in Donizetti's original scoring.



B12 Serenade by Schubert

This is an arrangement of the fourth of fourteen songs (usually called *Lieder* - the word for songs in German) from Schubert's song cycle *Schwanengesang* (swansong). This poignant collection was written at the end of the composer's life, and their musical character is particularly heartfelt.



C7 In the Owl's Turret by Lehmann

Liza Lehmann is well-known for taking inspiration from birds in her compositions. In the Owl's Turret is fun to learn, with several shifts in pace and dynamics to create contrast and variety. The hooting of the owl is depicted by separated long notes approached by a chromatic grace note.



Grade 4

A5 Sarabanda and Gavotta by Corelli, arr. Barbarolli

These two movements are a perfect introduction to the concerto genre for intermediate oboe learners. Like many Baroque concertos, this work by Corelli draws on dance styles. The Sarabande is typically a slow movement in triple time, with its emphasis on the second beat of the bar. The Gavotte is a more agile dance with lively semiquavers and a brisk tempo.



A9 Waltz by Grieg, arr. Francis & Grant

This lilting waltz by Grieg is also a grade 4 piano piece! Edvard Grieg was inspired by folk music from his native Norway, and these influences are evident in the chromatic notes and triplet rhythms in the melody line.



B2 Habanera by Bizet, arr. Lawrence

This is probably the most famous aria from Bizet's opera, *Carmen*, sung by the title character when she first enters the stage in Act 1. The characteristic habanera rhythm, originating from Cuba and influenced by older Spanish traditional music, is heard as an ostinato in the accompaniment. It is less well known that Bizet also borrowed the melody line from a cabaret song called *El Arreglito* by the Basque composer Sebastián Yradier (1809-65).



B7 Sea Anemone by Gipps

Ruth Gipps captures the rippling movement of a sea anemone underwater in both the oboe and piano parts. The gentle swells of the tide are represented in the ebb and flow of the hairpin dynamics. If you enjoy learning this, look out for another movement from the *Sea-Shore Suite* on the Grade 5 syllabus!



C9 Drum Kitten by Joan Swift & Marjorie Smale

Drum Kitten is full of rhythmic character and hugely rewarding to learn. It is useful for teaching agility and precision in playing semiquavers with varied articulation, and there are one or two tricky finger patterns to navigate. Accidentals and a tempo change add interest.



Grade 5

A7 Giga by N. Chédeville

If you're looking for something a bit different from the oboe sonatas written by Italian Baroque composers such as Besozzi and Geminiani, try this elegant Giga by the French composer Nicolas Chédeville (1705-82). Chédeville was an oboist himself, so this movement sits nicely under the fingers.



B4 Nemorino's Romance by Donizetti, arr. Kolman

This arrangement of one of Donizetti's most famous operatic arias is more challenging in key and register than the version set for Grade 3. It also includes more decorative ornamentation of the melody line.



B8 Prairie Song by Cecilia McDowall

When describing what this piece means to her, Cecilia McDowall said, "a piece filled with blue sky and open air". She achieves this spacious atmosphere with graceful legato phrases and scalic figuration in 6/8 time.



C4 Gulls by Gipps

The sound of seagulls is characterfully recreated in the oboe in this movement!



C6 Red Hot Polka - Richard Kershaw

The polka originated in nineteenth-century Bohemia, now part of Czechia. It is a steady but rhythmic dance in 2/4 time, characterised by crisp syncopation in the melody over an um-cha accompaniment in the piano. The Red Hot Polka is in Bb major, the Eb indicating the use of forked F fingering. The rests in the middle need careful counting to ensure all the oboe entries are precise.



C7 Latin Dance by Douglas Mason

Douglas Mason's stylish Latin Dance combines broad cantabile phrases in the oboe melody with lively syncopated rhythms and colourful harmonies in the piano accompaniment. There is plenty of contrast and detail to bring out in the music, as well as some cross-rhythms within the duo writing.



Grade 6

A9 Allegretto by Krenek

The Austrian composer Ernst Krenek (1900-1991) composed in a variety of styles, representing many important twentieth-century ideas. He visited Paris in the 1920s and was influenced by hearing the work of Stravinsky and Les Six. This reworking of themes by the Baroque composer Handel comes from Krenek's neoclassical period.



B7 Gabriel's Oboe by Ennio Morricone

In the 1986 film, *The Mission*, this was originally scored for oboe and orchestra. It has a soaring melody that has made it a favourite concert piece among oboists and audiences alike.



C2 Sparkle by Cheri Baster

This is a terrific showpiece is written in a jazzy style not always associated with the oboe. Cheri Baster is a contemporary female composer whose writing for wind instruments is always full of colour and excitement.



Grade 6 C8 Wise Owl by Eddie McGuire

The composer explains that this atmospheric piece was inspired by a night trek led by a National Trust Ranger in Scotland, where his calls enticed the owls in the wood. Eddie McGuire writes, "The memory of this inspired Wise Owl, with music suggesting the quiet footsteps, the calling, the swooping of the owl and the return of the magical near-silence of the forest at night".



Grade 7

A6 Dawn Chorus by John Frith

Are you looking for a contemporary alternative to a concerto or sonata movement in list A at Grade 7? If so, John Frith's playful evocation of the birdsong that marks daybreak is a great option. The distinctive calls of different birds are woven into this characterful summer sketch. The varied articulation needs dexterity, and the trills need neat execution to bring the world of the dawn chorus to life.



A8 Affettuoso and Allemanda by Loeillet

Although not explicitly given a title from the Baroque dance suite, the lilting 12/8 *Affettuoso* of Loeillet's sonata is in the style of a Sicilienne, with characteristic dotted rhythms. The semiquaver passagework and ornamentation of the lively *Allemanda* require precise finger dexterity and neatly articulated tonguing.



C3 Italian Dance by Dring

The spirited rhythms of the southern Italian tarantella inspired this lively showpiece. Full of bounce and elegance, it showcases the oboe's agility and flair.



C10 Midnight Blue by Julia Usher

This expressive piece features some lovely interplay between the oboe and piano, characterised by rich harmonies rural setting at dusk, the composer writing that she wanted, "to capture the atmosphere of hiding among the bluebells, listening to the nightingales singing their strange arias as evening falls". The nightingale call is depicted by repeated tenuto high pitches several times during the piece.



Grade 8

A11 1st Movt by Joby Talbot

This is one of 200 new works commissioned by the Royal Academy of Music in London in 2022 to celebrate its bicentenary. Porphyry is a type of hard rock that contains shimmering crystal deposits, and these contrasting qualities are evoked by the fast-paced 12/8 metre with constant tempo changes and robust momentum, but also its delicate ornamentation. Joby Talbot uses the full range of the instrument and dynamic colour.



B7 Oblivion by Piazzolla

Be whisked away to the streets of Argentina by this hauntingly beautiful piece. Originally written for bandoneon, piano, and bass, *Oblivion* has lent itself to multiple adaptations for different instruments and ensembles, such as this version for oboe with a tango septet.



C3 A Rag for Niamh by Annabel Connellan

A Rag for Niamh has a warm and lyrical opening, lots of rubato, and the opportunity to capture a beautiful tone. It relaxes in a lilting ragtime-inspired waltz with gentle syncopation and characteristic melodic inflection. Faster and more virtuosic towards the end, there is engaging dialogue with the piano accompaniment throughout.



C5 Showpiece by Dring

If you're looking for a showstopper to learn from list C, look no further than the aptly named *Showpiece* by Madeleine Dring (1923-77). Dring was a pianist and composer, but she married an oboist, Roger Lord, who was principal oboe of the London Symphony Orchestra for over 30 years, and wrote several oboe pieces for him, including this *Showpiece* from a longer Suite. Look out for Dring's spirited Italian Dance on the Grade 7 list.



C6 The Piper of Dreams by Gipps

This piece is an evocative piece, capturing a pastoral mood with flowing melody lines. It is based on a painting of the same name by Estella Canziani.



KEY

- Music about Animals
- Dance Music
- Music about Birds
- Renaissance Music
- Film and TV Music
- Opera Arias
- Lyrical and Atmospheric Music
- Showpieces
- Latin American Music