

Ngapa William Cooper



“SYDNEY”
“SYMPHONY”
“ORCHESTRA”

Learning &
Engagement

This resource is a sample preview of the Australian Music Centre’s forthcoming music education resource kit, *Ngapa William Cooper: A song cycle for 2 voices and symphony orchestra* by Nigel Westlake, Lior Attar and Dr Lou Bennett, written and compiled by Dr Joanna Drimatis.

[Sign up to receive an email notification when the education resource kit is released.](#)

Suggested activities for the music classroom

Prepared by Dr Joanna Drimatis

Tone colour

A distinctive feature in the music of Nigel Westlake is the way he uses orchestral instruments to express the story. Westlake's innovative exploration of tone colour is evident when we hear the different instrumental timbres, the solo voices with the ensemble, the varying ranges of pitch and/or register or the interplay amongst the instruments within the ensemble itself. This version of the seminal work *Ngapa William Cooper* for this performance is scored for Tenor Voice, Alto Voice, Piano, Violins 1(4 players), Violin 2 (4 players), Viola (3 players), Cello (3 players), Double Bass (2 players) and Percussion.

The Percussion section includes a wide variety of instruments that are effective in key moments throughout the work. For example, at the end of the last movement *At the End of My Days* there is a beautiful musical conversation or 'call and response' between Dr Bennett's expressive vocal line and the waterphone over the delicate violin 2 accompaniment. The music here and in other examples throughout this work evoke the text sung by the vocalists. This is known as 'word painting'. Further examples of significant moments in the score where percussion is featured are listed in the table below.

Featured percussion:

Crotales: <i>The News, The Silence, The Meeting</i>
Anvil: <i>The News</i>
Waterphone: <i>The News, The Silence, At the End of My Days</i>
Bush Leaves: <i>The Silence, At the End of My Days</i>
Wind Gong: <i>Yakapna – Nuk</i>

Questions to share with students:

1. What instruments do we hear in this performance? What do they look like?
2. What do we mean by the term orchestration? **The way the music is arranged for the orchestral instruments. How the instruments are used in the music to tell the story.**
3. Describe the tone colours of the instruments you hear. For example, which words best describe the sound of a violin, piano, viola, drum? Consider the following words: bright, mellow, warm, high, soft, loud etc...
4. Ask your students - what is their favourite instrument and why?
5. Could you design and make your own percussion instrument.

Activity 1: Tone Colour and Texture

In the following excerpt, the alto sings the word 'Gambinan' which means 'it rises, rises, rises..' and the tenor sings 'it grows, it grows...'. The developing intensity in the music is reflected in the active ascending and descending figures in the strings and piano enhanced by the effects of the shaking gum leaves and kick drum.

Bars 78-80, *The Silence*

The musical score shows three measures (78, 79, 80) in 4/4 time. The drum part features a consistent kick drum pattern, with three specific notes circled in red. The piano part has a complex, rhythmic accompaniment. The alto and tenor parts have lyrics: 'gan - bin - an' and 'it grows'. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass) play active, ascending and descending figures. A blue box at the top is labeled 'Gum Leaves' with an arrow pointing to it. A red arrow on the left is labeled 'Kick drum'.

1. How many lines/parts do you see?
2. Notice the instrumental parts that follow each other. It is as if the instrumental parts are having a conversation. Ask the students- how do they chat when they have lunch together or catch up before school in the morning? Do they talk all at once or wait for each other to tell their 'news'?
3. Map the above excerpt. If you drew this score as a picture what would it look like? Would you use clear lines or shading? What colours would you use?
4. Once the students have mapped the excerpt, ask them to create their own composition with their map. They can use classroom instruments or the instruments that they may already play.
 - Students may work in small groups, pairs or as individuals depending on the class.
 - Write a short melody for the instrument of your choice.
 - For example, it could be 4 bars, in C major, in 4/4 with a simple rhythmic set.
 - For more advanced students, give them 8 or more bars, in either 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/8. Give them a choice of tonality, C major, D minor, G major or maybe a mode.
 - Encourage stepwise or simple triadic movements using the notes of the scale or give them a chord progression to use. Scaffold to the level of your students.