

Classics for Kids



The William Tell Overture

Gioachino Rossini
Born: February 29, 1792
Died: November 13, 1868

Gioachino Rossini the most famous Italian composer of his time. In his day, no one wrote operas better than he. Like many musicians, Rossini learned about music from his parents. His father played the horn and the trumpet; his mother was an opera singer. Rossini learned to sing and to play the piano and horn at an early age. Because of his parents, he also learned a lot about opera. As a young man, he also studied composition and counterpoint, courses that prepared him well for opera writing.

An opera is a grand stage production in which the story is told entirely with music. Dramatic plots, beautiful costumes and elaborate scenery and props are

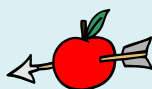
all part of an opera production. Professional performers take the parts of the main characters and sing all their lines.

Rossini wrote his first opera in 1810, and, all told, composed 40 such works. Among his most famous are *The Barber of Seville*, *La Cenerentola (Cinderella)* and *An Italian in Algiers*. His last opera, *William Tell*, was written when he was only 37 years old. This work is based on the legend of a Swiss hero (see the story below).

After *William Tell*, Rossini, for reasons that are unknown, simply stopped composing operas. During the rest of his lifetime, he wrote only a few other minor works for his friends and the church. He eventually retired to Paris, where he enjoyed celebrity status and retirement. He died there at the age of 76.



Gioachino Rossini



William Tell



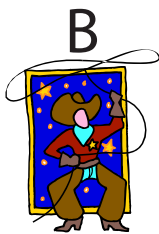
According to legend, William Tell was an expert with a bow and arrow who lived in the mountains of Switzerland.

At the time, Switzerland was under the control of Austria and a nasty ruler named Gessler. Gessler thought he was so important that the citizens should salute him even when he wasn't there. So, he put his hat on a pole in the center of town and commanded the citizens to bow down to it whenever they passed it.

William Tell arrived in town one day with his son and refused to salute the hat. Gessler was very upset, but instead of killing William Tell right there he challenged him to shoot an apple off his son's head with one shot. If he succeeded, William Tell could remain free.

William Tell did shoot the apple off his son's head with a single arrow. But Gessler noticed that before he tried, Tell had taken two arrows out of his quiver and asked why. William Tell answered, "If I had missed, that second arrow would have been headed your way." Eventually, William Tell did kill Gessler, an act that started a Swiss uprising that ultimately forced the Austrian invaders from Switzerland.

After the first trumpet call introduction there are five main themes that come and go. See if you can find them while you listen to the Overture. Do any of them repeat? Listen closely!



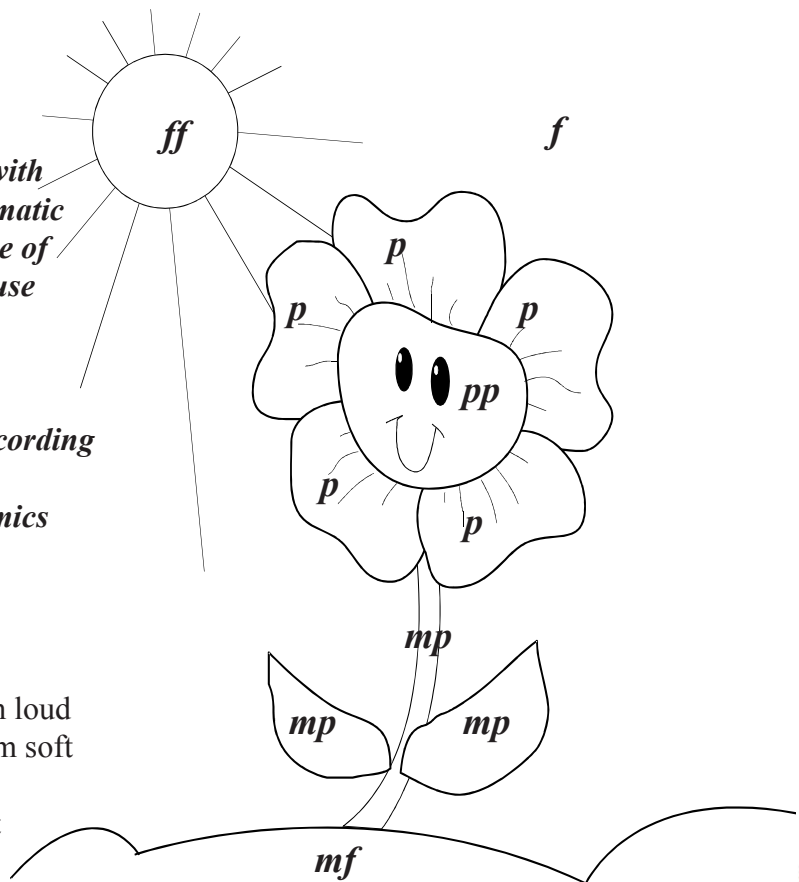
What do you hear?

1. The music begins with a trumpet playing a
 - a. fanfare
 - b. single note
2. The rhythm in the beginning suggests
 - a. horses
 - b. soldiers
3. Theme A comes back
 - a. one time
 - b. three times
4. The percussion instrument you hear most is
 - a. triangle
 - b. snare drum.
5. Dynamics in this music
 - a. change
 - b. don't change
6. A theme is a melody that you can recognize.
 - a. three
 - b. five
7. Each theme is repeated.
 - a. true
 - b. false
8. The last sound you hear is
 - a. soft
 - b. loud
9. The music below is first heard near the
 - a. beginning
 - b. middle
10. This music makes me feel like
 - a. trotting
 - b. galloping



Color me Expressive with Dynamics

Rossini filled his "William Tell Overture" with dynamics to help the the music tell the dramatic events of the story. Dynamics are the degree of loudness or softness in music. Composers use dynamic markings in the music to tell the musicians how they would like their music performed. To help you learn the different markings, color the picture on the right according to the given markings. Later, listen to the Overture and try to find the different dynamics that Rossini used in his magnificent work.



ff	yellow	fortissimo- very loud
f	blue	forte - loud
mf	dark green	mezzo forte - medium loud
mp	light green	mezzo piano - medium soft
p	pink	piano - soft
pp	orange	pianissimo - very soft