

Performance Notes

I became interested in trees after my Biology teacher took our class for a woodland walk. He taught us how to identify trees by observing the shape of the leaves, the texture of the bark and the overall structure of the tree. I love the beauty and majesty of trees. Whenever the wind blows through them, I imagine that they make music and sing and dance by waving their branches. Composing is like planting a tree. You start with a small idea or a 'seed' which then grows into a full composition. These pieces are inspired by some of my favourite trees. As the book progresses, pieces with more sharps and flats are introduced, but the repetitive nature of the music makes it easier to learn.

1. Copper Beech

Page 5

The dark red leaves of this tree stand out in the woodland. The wood is used to smoke herring, and its nuts can be roasted and ground into a substitute coffee. This piece has many changes of time-signature as it shifts between flowing quavers to chordal sections.

2. Sycamore

Page 8

The seeds are nicknamed 'helicopter seeds' because of the way its two wings spin as they fall to the ground. I have written a waltz for this tree and the middle section has a twirly repeated pattern that would suit a ballet.

3. Sweet Chestnut

Page 10

The round, green, spiky cases house the chestnuts that are popular at Christmas for roasting or for stuffing turkeys. This is a sweet and simple piece in A minor.

4. Magnolia

Page 12

The Magnolia tree in full bloom is a spectacular sight but unfortunately, the petals soon drop to the ground in the slightest wind. This melancholy piece is about the beauty, fragility and brevity of life. The middle section has a syncopated pattern on the right hand with flowing quavers in the left hand, which take turns at being prominent.

5. Wild Cherry

Page 14

The white blossoms of the cherry tree signal the beginning of spring, and the red berries are popular with birds. The introduction of this piece is a little 'wild', but the main theme is rather 'sweet'. The middle section is useful for learning how to control a gradual crescendo as the pitch of the melody rises.

6. Silver Birch

Page 17

The trunk has a papery, white bark that sometimes peel off. I like watching the swaying motion of the low, drooping branches with its tiny delicate leaves. As you perform this, imagine walking through the forest on a foggy evening, aided by the light of the moon.

7. Maple

Page 20

I love how the palm shaped leaves of the Maple tree turn bright red in autumn. On a trip to Canada, I saw how maple syrup was collected from holes drilled into the trunk. The sap drips out from a spout and is collected in a bucket. This reflective piece was mostly improvised from two notes, C and G.

8. Noble Fir

Page 22

This piece would suit a short, animated film. I imagined a girl being led through a forest by fairies and fireflies. But as she ventures deeper into the darkness, she encounters bats and adders. Fortunately, she emerges safely on the other side into a meadow full of sunshine.

9. Juniper

Page 24

The blue berries of this attractive evergreen are used for flavouring gin and its essential oil has antibacterial properties. This piece has flowing quavers in major keys in the outer sections, but the middle section is dark and chromatic.

10. Casuarina

Page 27

I have many childhood memories of playing under Casuarina trees that dot the beaches of Malaysia. This happy and relaxed piece has a constant tresillo rhythm of 3+3+2 in the left hand.

11. Blackthorn

Page 30

In the winter, all you see is a shrub covered in black thorns but in the spring, the tree bursts gloriously into life with tiny white blossoms. The black berries in the autumn are used to make sloe gin. This piece describes the austere stage and contains two musical ideas that swap registers.

12. Ponderosa

Page 33

The melody has a 4-note motif which goes with the four syllables of the title. It is useful to sing this in your head every time it occurs in its various forms. This massive pine tree is common in North America and its wood is used to make furniture.

13. Bamboo Forest

Page 36

I watched a documentary about Japan which featured the Bamboo Forest of Kyoto and its magical atmosphere. Bamboo is the fastest growing plant on land and the sound of bamboo leaves swishing in the wind is just like a waterfall. The use of the pentatonic scale in Bb minor and parallel 4ths make this piece sound Oriental.

14. Aspen

Page 39

This tree is nicknamed The Quaking Tree because of how its leaves shimmer at the slightest breeze. It turns bright yellow in the autumn. This meditative piece in G# minor uses 2 against 3 polyrhythms.

15. Mountain Ash

Page 42

This tree is also known as Rowan and its bright red berries are poisonous to humans but fine for birds. The strength and flexibility of the wood make it ideal for carving and making bows. The syncopation of this piece is quite tricky to perform so I would recommend listening to the recording before attempting to play the piece.