



CONNECTS SECONDARY

VSO Connects: Theme and Variations

Overview: This module sets students up to compose two contrasting variations on a Theme by Beethoven, from Beethoven's Septet in E-flat Major, Op. 20, 4th movement *Tema con Variazioni: Andante*. They will then listen to what Beethoven came up with!

***Note** - For the first lesson of this module, teachers may choose to hire a VSO Connects Post-Secondary Music Student (PSMS) to present the "Prelude" portion of this module over video-conference with your class. Please contact the Vancouver Symphony Education Department at education@vancouversymphony.ca for more information.

Audience

This module is recommended for students at home or in school in grades 8-12, as well as for inquiring minds of any age! Students work independently or in small groups. The theme is presented as a duo, so students may elect to write two parts for their variations and perform as a duo.

Materials – all available at <https://theconcerthall.ca/music-room-series/backstage-pass>

- 1) This 3-page document, which includes the lesson steps.
- 2) Downloadable "Theme" - choose which is applicable to you (available for all band and orchestral instruments)
- 3) Downloadable staff paper
- 4) **Theme & Variations Intro Video**
- 5) The performance of Beethoven's Septet, at <https://theconcerthall.ca/episode/beethoven-sibelius>

Alignment with BC Arts Curriculum

Big Ideas

- Identity is explored, expressed, and impacted through music experiences;
- The nuances of music are better understood through deep study and performance;
- Instrumental music offers aesthetic experiences that can transform our perspective;
- Music uses a unique sensory language for creating and communicating.

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning involves patience and time.

Curricular Content

- musical elements, principles, vocabulary, symbols, and theory;
- Creative processes.

Curricular Competencies

- Reflect on works of art and creative processes to understand artists' motivations and meanings
- Describe and analyze musicians' use of technique, technology, and environment in musical composition and performance, using musical language;
- Select and combine musical elements and techniques to interpret an idea or define style, creating a particular mood or effect;
- Receive, offer, and apply constructive feedback.

Tips for Success:

- *Ensure that students keep both parts in the same clef and same transposition family (or simply the same instrument) so that students can focus on other elements and not the task of transposition.*
- *Finale Notepad is an example of free music notation software*

Link to the full score of the whole Septet (The Theme and Variations is the 4th mvt.):

[https://imslp.org/wiki/Septet_in_E-flat_major,_Op.20_\(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Septet_in_E-flat_major,_Op.20_(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van))

A. PRELUDE – PREPARATION

A. View the **Theme & Variation Intro Video**

B. Together, make a written list of all the different ways one could alter a theme, to make a variation. Ultimately, this list should include all elements of music. To help students come up with additional ideas, display the opening of the theme as an example, and take suggestions for changes one could make.

- Begin to categorize the suggestions based on the elements of music:

beat/pulse, pitch, timbre, metre, duration/rhythm, tempo, dynamics, form, texture

- Very effective variation can be done with the addition or removal of certain notes, or with modifying the mode from Major to minor, or adding some other accidentals. Include the idea of ornamentation, through the addition of neighbouring notes.

B. STUDENT WORK PERIOD(S)

Provide students with (a) the simplified 2-part score to the Theme, (select the appropriate instrument/clef) and (b) staff paper or access to music notation software (See “Tips for Success”, above).

1. Describe the project outcome and the process.
2. Listen to the statement of the theme. The performance of Beethoven’s Theme can be accessed at <https://theconcerthall.ca/episode/beethoven-sibelius> at 25:42
3. The first step in the process is time (around 15 minutes) dedicated to experimentation: In small groups, students will experiment with different ways of applying variations to the theme (ie. change select notes, a small section, the whole theme, or as part of a larger pattern).
4. Once experimentation time is over, students apply their experience, and draw on several different elements of music to create 2 contrasting variations on the theme. Students have the option to use their own symbolic or graphic notation, if that helps them to notate their ideas.
5. Provide students with an opportunity to perform their drafts and receive constructive feedback from their teacher and peers, and then make revisions.

C. CONCLUSION & CONSOLIDATION

- When complete, students perform their variations for the class, briefly highlighting their goals or their musical decision-making.
- Teachers may choose to record or share the performances more widely with the School community or VSO community (email education@vancouverSymphony.ca).
- Finally, students watch the VSO performance of the Theme and Variations movement of Beethoven’s Septet Op. 20: <https://theconcerthall.ca/episode/beethoven-sibelius> at 25:42.

