

Stormzy vs Mozart

Jane Werry

Stormzy vs Mozart – really?

Last spring, newspapers were full of articles such as this one in the *Daily Telegraph* (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/05/21/stormzy-should-taught-schools-instead-mozart-prevent-exclusions/) which largely misinterpreted a research report from Youth Music entitled *Exchanging Notes*. Much of the press surrounding this report reduced it to an attention-grabbing ‘schools should teach Stormzy instead of Mozart’ headline, which wasn’t the intention of the research at all.

However, this resource uses the idea of comparing the music of Stormzy and Mozart as a springboard for performing, listening and analysing at KS3. The idea is not to promote one above the other, but to experience each piece of music ‘from the inside’ – by performing it – and consider what makes each one successful, drawing out similarities and differences in the process.

Three contrasting Stormzy songs – ‘Take Me Back to London’, ‘Vossi Bop’ and ‘Crown’ – will be explored through performing, playing by ear and analysis of musical elements. A range of terminology will be introduced/reinforced, which will lay some solid foundations for work at GCSE level.

Then, two Mozart pieces will be investigated: the opening theme from *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, and the last movement of Horn Concerto No. 4. These will receive the same treatment, with students playing, doing some aural work, and analysis of musical devices.

The project culminates in students stating which music they think is more credit-worthy. The emphasis here is being able to use musical evidence to back up whichever choice is made.

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Stormzy

The three songs chosen are highly contrasting:

- ▶ ‘Take Me Back to London’ is a collaboration with Ed Sheeran, has four chords and rapped verses with sung choruses.
- ▶ ‘Vossi Bop’ is based entirely on a two-chord riff, with entirely rapped vocals.
- ▶ ‘Crown’ is soft and extremely melodic, and features a gospel choir, with a four-bar chord pattern featuring a suspension.

‘Take Me Back to London’

Present students with the chords required for ‘Take Me Back to London’:

The screenshot shows a presentation slide titled "CHORD PROGRESSION 1:" with four chords: B, G^b, E^bm, and D^b. Each chord is represented by a piano keyboard diagram with colored dots indicating finger positions for the keys and a guitar fretboard diagram with a red dot indicating the fret position for the bass string. The slide is part of a presentation with 14 slides, and the current slide is 14 of 14. The presentation is titled "CHORD PROGRESSION 1:" and includes a "Click to add notes" button at the bottom.

This is in Stormzy's original key. These chords would be very tricky to play on ukuleles or guitars, so keyboards are the best way forward, unless you want to transpose. An alternative would be to use a sequencing program such as GarageBand or Soundtrap to reproduce the chords.

Here, the root notes of the chords are shown in green. There are three reasons for this:

- 1 To reinforce the theory behind chord construction, and show clearly which chords are going to be played in inversion.
- 2 To provide a scaffolded entry-point to thinking about harmonic rhythm, by playing the root notes first in time with the song.
- 3 To show clearly which notes should be played in the left hand by anyone putting in a bassline.

Get acquainted with the chord changes by playing only the root notes, in time with the lyrics. You could play along with a recording at this point, but be sure to find a 'clean' radio edit.

B Gb Ebm

Jet plane headed up to the sky

B Gb Ebm

Spread wings in the clouds, getting high

B Gb B

We ain't hit a rave in a while

Db Ebm

So take me back to London.

Identify the harmonic rhythm: it is a mixture of one and two chords per bar:

B / Gb /	Ebm ///
B / Gb /	Ebm ///
B / Gb /	B ///
Db ///	Ebm ///

Once this is established, add in the other notes of the chords. This still won't sound much like the original, so the third step is to choose an appropriate keyboard tone, and play the chords in a broken pattern in quavers. If you find a pizzicato strings sound on your keyboard or sequencer, this will give something close.

Students will now know the song pretty well, and will be in a good position to do some analysis. Listen to the whole song, identifying how the chord pattern from the chorus is used during the verses. You could ask the following questions, using some of the musical elements to organise them:

Texture	What different layers make up the accompaniment? (Clue: the broken chords count as one layer.)
	When does the texture change?
	Can you hear any of the layers of sound stop at any time?
Articulation	Which two articulation words can be applied to the broken chords? (You could provide a list to choose from: the answers are staccato and pizzicato.)
Harmony	Do you think this song is in a major or minor key?
	Which of the chords do you think is 'home'?
	What is the harmonic rhythm in the chorus?
Melody	Where are the highest and lowest notes in the chorus? Can you count the interval between them (and so work out the range)?
	Is the melody mostly made of steps or leaps?

This information will be compared with and contrasted to similar details gleaned from the other songs, so could be compiled on a grid that might look something like this:

Artist	Song/piece	Texture	Articulation	Harmony	Melody	General
Stormzy	'Take Me Back to London'					
	'Vossi Bop'					
	'Crown'					
Mozart	Eine kleine Nachtmusik					
	Symphony No. 40					

An alternative way of approaching the analysis part of this project is to use multiple-choice questions. These can be administered using paper, as a quiz for homework via Show My Homework or Google Forms, or a real-time technological method such as Kahoot or Plickers (see also KS3 Homework resource, *Music Teacher*, November 2019).

Here are some suggested questions (answers are shown in bold):

- What is texture in music?
 - A Loud and soft.
 - B Fast and slow.
 - C **Thick and thin (how many different things are going on).**
 - D The way that the notes are played.
- How many layers of sound are there in 'Take Me Back to London'?
 - A Two: the voice and the broken chords.
 - B Three: voice, broken chords and bassline.
 - C Two: the voice and the bassline.
 - D **Four: the voice, broken chords, bassline and percussion.**
- Which of these statements best describes the harmonic rhythm in 'Take Me Back to London'?
 - A Two chords per bar all the way through.
 - B **A mixture of one and two chords per bar.**
 - C One chord per bar all the way through.
 - D A mixture of one, two or three chords per bar.
- Does the chord progression change in the rap verses of *Take Me Back to London*, or stay the same as the chorus?
 - A It stays the same
 - B It changes
- Which chord in 'Take Me Back to London' feels like 'home' and tells us what key we are in? (Play audio.)
 - A B
 - B G flat
 - C **E flat minor**
 - D D flat

6 Which of these articulation words best describe how the chords are played in 'Take Me Back to London'?

- A Legato
- B Slurred
- C Strummed
- D **Staccato**

7 Which of these terms best describes how the chords are played in 'Take Me Back to London'?

- A Sustained
- B Stab
- C **Broken**
- D Block

'Vossi Bop'

'Vossi Bop' was released in April 2019 and reached number one in the UK singles charts, becoming Stormzy's first number one song. It is based on an unchanging two-bar riff:



The unchanging nature of the notes makes this perfect for students to work out by ear. Put on a clean edit of the song while they use keyboards or other instruments to find the notes. Once these have been identified, pick the pattern apart to uncover the G minor chord it is based around, and the G minor tonality.

Listen to the song again and find examples of variation. While there are subtle changes to the sound used for the riff, and changes to the beat, there are no clearly delineated sections of the song other than through the lyrics.

Without leading students to a particular answer, pose the question: 'How do you explain the popularity of this song?' Answers may include the appeal of Stormzy's image, the emphasis on the lyrics, or the fact that it was Stormzy's first new solo song for two years.

If using multiple-choice questions, you could ask these:

1 Which of these terms best describes the accompaniment in 'Vossi Bop'?

- A Block chords
- B Scale
- C Bassline
- D **Ostinato**

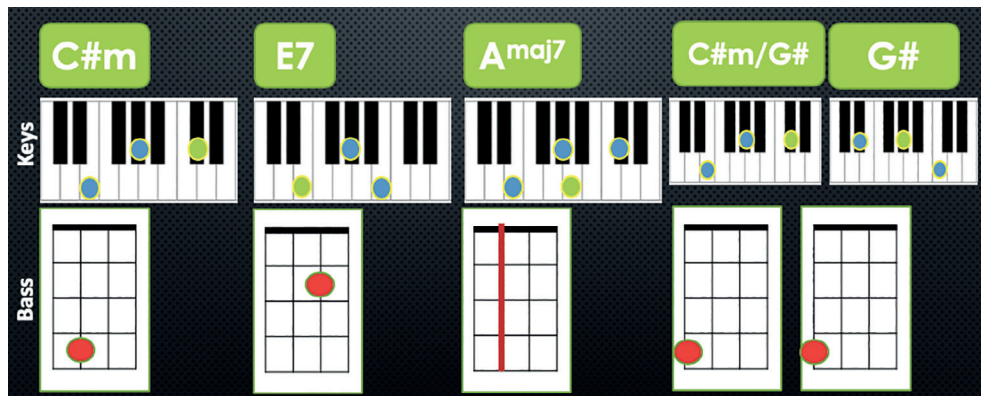
2 How many chords are there in 'Vossi Bop'?

- A **2**
- B 3
- C 4
- D 5

‘Crown’

‘Crown’ is the follow-up single to ‘Vossi Bop’, and is entirely different in character. Students could start by listening to the track and identifying all the differences that they can. There are many more layers of sound in ‘Crown’ than in ‘Vossi Bop’, with clear contrast between the sung choruses and rapped verses, and the use of a choir as backing vocalists.

Students could then practise the chord sequence that is repeated almost throughout:



You could view the C#m/G# chord as a double suspension on a G# chord: while you are unlikely to go into the technicalities of this with a KS3 class, you could discuss the way that the harmonic rhythm speeds up at this point, and try to unpick what makes this successful.

You could also consider the tonality. Students are likely to be able to identify that the C#m chord is the one that feels like ‘home’, and establishes the key of C sharp minor. However, three of the chords used are major chords, which helps to create the wistful mood that goes so perfectly with the lyrics.

During the song, these are played as block chords and in this pattern:



Students could practise playing the chords in both patterns. You could even diverge to a singing activity, replicating the backing vocals in the song by creating chords sung to ‘ooh’. There are a few occasions during the song where a D/E chord is substituted for the E7 chord, but by and large the progression is repeated unchanged throughout the verses and choruses.

Analysis of the song could be consolidated further with these multiple-choice questions:

- 1 How are the piano chords played in the introduction of ‘Crown’? (Play audio.)
 - A Broken chords
 - B Stab chords
 - C Staccato
 - D **Block chords**

- 2 Which of these statements best describes the harmonic rhythm in ‘Crown’?
 - A Two chords per bar all the way through.
 - B **A mixture of one and two chords per bar.**
 - C One chord per bar all the way through.
 - D A mixture of one, two or three chords per bar.

3 Does the chord progression change in the rap verses of ‘Crown’, or stay the same as the chorus?

A **It stays the same nearly all the time.**

B It changes.

4 Which chord in ‘Crown’ feels like ‘home’ and tells us what key we are in? (Play audio.)

A **C#m**

B E7

C A maj7

D G#

5 What does the chord symbol C#m/G# mean?

A You play C#m then G#.

B You can choose whether to play C#m or G#.

C **You play a C#m chord with a G# in the bass.**

D You play a G# chord with C#m in the bass.

Depending on the time you have available, students could be encouraged to create their own cover versions of ‘Crown’, either in small groups or using a sequencing program.

To sum up the work on Stormzy, and guide students towards making justified choices, you could ask them to decide which of the three songs is the ‘best’, musically – and then see if this matches up with the one that they *like* most. If there is a discrepancy between the ‘best’ and the most liked, the reasons for this can be explored.

Mozart

It would, of course, be possible to contrast any current artist with any classical composer, and the choice of Stormzy and Mozart is entirely inspired by recent debate. The point of the exercise is to attempt to look objectively at music from different times, make comparisons, and understand what is similar and what is different.

Eine kleine Nachtmusik (‘A Little Night Music’ or ‘A Little Serenade’) is a four-movement serenade for strings composed in 1787. The circumstances of its composition are not known, although it’s likely that it was a commission. It was not published until well after Mozart’s death, but is now one of his most-performed works, and it’s likely that students will recognise it. This in itself is worth commenting on: if a piece of music is still widely known more than 200 years after it was created, it clearly has something going for it.

Show a video of a performance of the first movement of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, such as this one (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzEXo-nwN4Y>). Invite questions from students regarding what they have seen: these might include questions about the instruments, the music the musicians are playing from, and orchestral conventions such as who leads the performance.

You can approach performance of the opening theme of the first movement with a mixture of analysis and aural skills:

CAN YOU WORK OUT EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK?

The chord symbols can help you work out the notes of the melody

The image shows three staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff has a G chord above the first measure and a D7 chord above the second measure. A green box on the right says 'Answering phrase inversion'. The second staff has a G chord above the first measure and a D7/G chord above the second measure. A green box on the right says 'Repeat'. The third staff has a sequence of chords: G, D7/A, G/B, D7/F#, G, D7/A, G/B. A green box on the right says 'Continue ascending sequence'.

What do you notice about the harmonic rhythm?

Look at how the first two-bar phrase is constructed using notes from the G major chord, with a repetition of the opening two notes that is then extended in the second bar. You might like to throw in that this kind of opening, with a bold rising phrase based on a broken chord, is called a 'Mannheim Rocket', after the school of composers who had worked in Mannheim in the late 18th century, and who established many of the conventions of the Classical style. From having considered tonality in the Stormzy songs, students should by now be relatively confident in identifying G major as the home key of this piece.

Then consider the second two-bar phrase. It's based on the notes of a D7 chord. Explain what an inversion is, and then ask students to work out the phrase by ear, which should be very simple to do. Explore tonic-dominant relationships by discussing the chords with reference to their Roman numerals. This whole passage is based on chords I and V, which is one of the things that makes it so strong. However, the harmonic rhythm is varied, as are the bass notes: Mozart gets maximum value for money out of his two chords.

Continue to work out the rest of this section, and challenge students to add in the bass part or to put together a mini-arrangement in twos or threes, with melody, chords, and bassline. Listen to the rest of the movement and discuss what happens. If you wish to, you could go into a basic explanation of sonata form, perhaps using this simple Norton listening guide (http://www.norton.com/college/music/listeninglab/shared/listening_guides/mozart_eine_kleine_nachtmusik.pdf) as a starting point. You could also explore texture. To help with this, you could use this excellent animated video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpHO4aSRqkQ&t=9s) which brings the music to life with colour-coded visuals.

Multiple choice questions for *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* might include:

- 1 Which of these statements best describes the harmonic rhythm in *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*?
 - A Two chords per bar all the way through.
 - B It varies a lot.**
 - C One chord per bar all the way through.
 - D A mixture of one, or two chords per bar.

- 2 Which of these statements best describes the texture in *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*?
 - A There are always the same number of layers of sound.
 - B There is a melody over chords all the way through.
 - C It changes all the time.**
 - D There is either one or two layers of sound at any one time.

- 3 What is it called when you turn a melody pattern upside down?
 - A Sequence
 - B Inversion**
 - C Range
 - D Ostinato

- 4 *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* starts in G major. Does it stay in this key all the way through?
 - A It stays in the same key.
 - B It changes key.**

If you want to use another Mozart piece for comparison, a good one is the third movement of the Horn Concerto No. 4. This is another extremely well known piece, and has been covered by BBC Ten Pieces (see *Music Teacher*, February 2016 and March 2016), so there are excellent videos and a simplified arrangement available on their website (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3H1v7vC6mqInq715SS7s52Q/horn-concerto-no-4-3rd-movement-by-mozart). It's less suitable for playing by ear than *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, but a quick look at a very simplified score will enable performance or straight analysis:

As with *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, there is a preponderance of tonic and dominant chords, and a feeling of question and answer in the phrases. Harmonic rhythm speeds up in each phrase: this is something we've seen in nearly all of the pieces we have looked at that feature varied harmonic rhythm, and it is worth considering why this is effective.

Compare, contrast – and choose

Now that Stormzy and Mozart have been thoroughly examined, it's time for students to make comparisons and prepare their arguments. How you go about this depends very much on whether you want to make it a written task or not. It would be quite possible for each student to write an essay stating whether they think Stormzy or Mozart's music is the best, using musical features as evidence. However, this will create a lot of marking for the teacher, and you may not have an emphasis on written work at KS3.

Perhaps the quickest way of doing this part of the project would be to give students a little time to prepare their arguments, perhaps following a 'think-pair-share' model of discussing their thoughts with a partner. You could then set up a line across the classroom, with Mozart at one end and Stormzy at the other, the students arranging themselves on the line depending on their preferences. Each student needs to make a point to justify their place in the line, without repeating a point made by anyone else. You may need to use your knowledge of students' abilities to decide on the best order for students to go in: it's best if the weakest students go first, but you may want to cloak this in a pretence of 'random' choice of students.

An alternative approach might be to organise a balloon debate. Either Mozart or Stormzy must be thrown out of the balloon, and their music never heard again. In groups, students decide on their stance and gather their musical evidence. They write a speech for one group member to deliver to the class. You can then question each speaker or group further, before a final vote is cast to decide whose music would be banished forever.