

## Mini-Project 102    Silent Night    Tasks

This Mini-Project is about relating bits of music notation to the sounds they represent. In other words, it's about reading music. You don't have to know anything about the letter names or key signatures, or anything like that.

It'll take you all the way from being able to match written and aural patterns to recognising and singing bars of the tune out of context. And you'll do it all by applying logic, not pre-existing knowledge. On the way you'll learn a bit of terminology.

This Mini-Project has 3 pdfs in addition to this one. You definitely need a hard copy of the Tune Cards because you are going to cut them up and sort them. You may find the Framework is helpful if arranging the cards is quite a challenge – and you'll need a hard copy. There's only one answer sheet – the tune written out and you could refer to that on your screen.

There are questions in the text to encourage you to have a pause and a think, but no answers apart from the tune to check.

You'll be singing the song a lot. It doesn't matter which note you start on. The notation shows the relative pitch of the notes – the up and down. It doesn't show whether any note is a C or an E or anything else.

Materials like this have to work for a wide range of people with varying amounts of knowledge. If you know a lot, rattle through. If you find it challenging, the bits in italics should help.

1. It's very unlikely that you don't know "Silent Night". Here are the words. They are set out in boxes which are the same as the bars. That's going to be useful for you when you do the first task.

|                   |                   |                   |                  |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Silent night,     | holy night,       | all is calm,      | all is bright.   |
| Round yon virgin  | mother and child, | holy infant so    | tender and mild, |
| sleep in heavenly | peace,            | sleep in heavenly | peace.           |

Sing it. It's one of those tunes that goes high in the last last line, so you need to start fairly low in your range.

*If you aren't sure that you're going to sing in tune with yourself, don't just launch in. Prepare your ear by getting into the key of the music. Choose a lowish note in your range and sing up the first 5 notes of a scale – doh ray me fah soh. If you'd rather be seasonal about it, sing the start of "Unto us a boy is born", which goes up the first 4 notes of the scale and then down again.*

*Once you are happy singing up and down the first 5 notes of the scale you are ready to sing "Silent Night" in tune. That carol starts on note 5. So sing up and count "1 2 3 4 5" There's your starting note. You should find it not too tricky to sing in tune after this preparation.*

2. If you haven't done so already, print out the sheet "Mini-Project 102 Silent Night Tune Cards" and cut it into 12 separate cards.

**a.** Get the cards the right way up. If you are used to music notation this is straightforward.

*There's information on the notation that tells you. All the bars have got a dot in them – some have got two. This is to do with the length of the note, but you aren't going to use the information for that purpose. Dots always come to the right of the note blob. So arrange all your cards so the dots follow the blobs. No bar starts with a dot.*

**b.** Find any that are the same as each other, and which are one-offs. This step means you are really looking at each card which will help you with Step 3.

You should be able to find a set of 4 and a pair. There are 6 that are individual.

Of those 6 find:

- one that is just one long note. (It's written as two blobs joined together).
- two that have the same arrangement of blobs as each other (the same rhythm) but aren't exactly the same notes.
- one that has the same arrangement of blobs (rhythm) as the card you've got two copies of.
- one that has two separate notes. Notice the second is higher than the first.
- one that has 6 blobs. Its last 3 are rather like the last 3 on the pair of cards.

**3.** Now it's sorting them into the right order. This helps you practise or develop the skill to think about a fragment of a tune you know and use logic to match the sound of it with a visual representation.

If you know you are good at this sort of thing, go ahead without referring to the bullet points below. The tune is made out of three phrases of four bars each like the words are above. So set out the cards in three lines of four to make it easier to keep track.

If you've never done anything like this before and it feels daunting, print out the sheet headed "Mini-Project 102 Silent Night Tune Card Framework". This should mean you don't get lost, and you don't have to keep starting from the beginning.

Here's a step by step way of doing it if you are not confident about handling music notation:

- Sing the first two words of the tune "silent night". That's the first bar or card. Sing it to la (the point of doing that is that it draws your attention to how many notes there are – there isn't always one note to each syllable, and that's the case here). "Silent night" has 3 syllables, but you make 4 sounds to sing it. Which syllable has 2 sounds? You've found you have to sing la la la la. So you are looking for a card with 4 blobs on it.
- Sing from the start and go onto the next two words. "Silent night, holy night" What do you notice about what you sing for "holy night" compared with "silent night"? That tells you which card comes next.
- Start again from the beginning and sing all the first line: " Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright". "All is calm" is one card and "all is bright" is another. Think about "all is calm". And then "all is bright". La la them. How many blobs are you looking for? You should be able to find two possibilities. All you've got to be able to do is work out which comes first. Look at the two cards – the notes in one are a bit lower down the five lines than in the other. Go back to your singing. Which is the lower pitched bar, "all is calm" or "all is bright"?
- That's the first line done. 4 cards in place, 8 to choose from. Most of us have to keep going back to the beginning to be sure we are singing the song correctly, so start again and this time add on "Round yon virgin". Work out how many blobs it's

going to have – be careful, are there more blobs than syllables? (This is where la-la-ing goes on being useful). Check out the cards still looking for a home. There are three possibilities by blob count. How are you going to work out which? Two of them are identical, while one has its blobs higher up the five lines. Here's a good way. Sing the first line from the beginning, and this time point to the blobs as you sing. Hang onto the note for “bright” to make sure it is thoroughly in your ears, and once it is, sing the note for “Round”. It's higher, but is it a lot higher or just one step up? That tells you which card you need.

- You know the drill now. Start singing from “Silent night” and carry on to “mother and child”. Sing just that bit: “mother and child”. Sound familiar? Yes, it's the same as the first bar.
- Half line 2 done. Start again, and go on into “holy infant so tender and mild”. Go back to the start of line 2 and sing “Round yon virgin mother and child” then “holy infant so tender and mild”. Notice what's going on? That's line 2 completed.
- You've got 4 cards left and one line of words. You could carry on working bar by bar as you have so far, or look at all four cards while you sing the line to decide which goes where. You should find that the first card with the highest notes in starts the line, the card with one note (2 blobs linked together) ends the line, and the card with 6 blobs is third in the line.

You can check that you've got all the cards in the right place by looking at the sheet headed “Mini-Project 102 Silent Night Tune Answer”.

**4.** Well done for sorting the cards into the right order, whatever strategy you used. That's an achievement. If it was easy for you, go onto step 6. If it wasn't, the most useful thing you can do is shuffle all the cards up again and repeat the process. The point of that is so that you begin to recognise a bit of notation as representing a tune pattern you know by ear. Keep shuffling and laying out until you can do it confidently.

**5.** This is an exercise to help you get more information from the music notation. You are going to look closely at the patterns on the paper and find out about both pitch and rhythm.

**a.** Think about the pitch – the up and down of the notes first

- Focus on the first bar – the one for “silent night”. Had you noticed when you were singing it that you come back to the starting note when you sing “lent”? Notice that the second note you sing on “si” is only one note higher than the first, whereas the note for “night” is two notes lower than the one for “lent”. (In music notation we use both the lines and spaces of the 5 horizontal lines as a graph. See how the blobs either fill a whole space or have a line going through them).
- Sing the same notes for the other words they fit to - “holy night” “mother and child” and “tender and mild”, thinking about the shape of the notes as you sing.
- Pick the other cards in turn and describe for yourself the shape of the pitch – same note, higher / lower / one note difference, two notes difference. Do this to draw your attention to information we often skip over. Sing the words each fits with, thinking about the pitch pattern. You'll find there are only two cards where the jump is bigger than two notes – the ones for the second “sleep in heavenly peace” and for “all is calm”. Have you noticed that those jumps are between the same two notes?
- Now look at how the cards follow on from each other when they are in the right order. Do any of the cards start with the same note as the previous one ended on? Notice how most of them follow on one note higher or lower, but on two occasions there are really big jumps in the tune. What do you notice about those jumps? What are they like to sing?

**b.** Now it's time to think about the rhythm. This is when sticks, tails, dots and ties come into the picture. If you are not familiar with these or have had a bad experience in the past – don't panic! There are only four different half-bar rhythm patterns in the whole tune, and most of the tune is made out of two of them.

- Look at the card for the last bar – when you sing it it is one long note for the final “peace”. There are two blobs and they are joined together by a curved line that doesn't quite touch the blobs. This is called a **tie**. It's used when you want to show a single sound has to carry on for the length of one or more notes. There aren't any other ties in this tune.
- Still looking at the last bar. The notes are both blobs with a vertical **stick** and a **dot** afterwards. Don't worry about what this is called. All you need to know now is that in this song, one of these blob-stick-dot notes is a relatively long sound. Find other instances of a blob-stick-dot note. (Don't worry whether the stick goes up or down. That's to do with whether the blob is lower in the 5 lines or higher). You should be able to find 8 blob-stick-dot notes apart from the last bar spread over 7 cards. Sing the song again looking at the notation as you go and noticing how the blob-stick-dot notes last a bit longer than others.
- Check out that last bar again. Every blob-stick-dot note is the same length as every other blob-stick-note. In this tune, two blob-stick-dot notes fill up a whole bar. Basic arithmetic tells you that one blob-stick-dot note must therefore take up half a bar. Look at those 7 other cards with blob-stick-dot notes in. One has two blob-stick-dot notes. The others have one. In all cases this comes in the first or second half of the bar. Which? (Remember it doesn't matter whether the stick goes up or down).
- Now you are going to look at a pattern of notes where two notes take up half a bar. Find one of the 7 bars which has two notes followed by a blob-stick-dot note. (“All is calm” and “all is bright”). Look at the two notes. The first is a blob and a stick. The second is a blob and a stick and a **tail**. One of those notes lasts for a shorter time than the other one. Sing “all is calm, all is bright” to find out – do it as slowly as necessary to decide which is the shorter note – blob-stick or blob-stick-tail. The tail has a specific job – it shortens the length of a note by half. So a blob-stick-tail note lasts half as long as a blob-stick note. You could think of the tail like a minus sign. (A dot increases the length of a note by half. So a blob-stick-dot note lasts one and a half times longer than a blob-stick note)
- Next is a quick rhythm pattern that comes 8 times, usually in the first half of a bar followed by a blob-stick-dot note. It's the pattern that starts the song, so you know it well - “silent”. Find the first card and look at the pattern. Two blobs for “si” and one for “lent”. Notice how the ends of the sticks of the three notes are joined together with a sloping line. This is called a **beam**. It's what you use when a set of notes which have tails are written out more neatly than all having separate tails. Because all these note have tails – and the middle one has two tails – that's what that extra little line is. (You don't have to remember all this, it's just helping you to look and recognise). This whole rhythm unit takes up half a bar. It's got a swing to it. Sing the song through slowly looking at the cards and notice the swingy pattern each time it comes. Singing to la la la might make it more obvious.
- Only one rhythm pattern to go, and it only comes once. It's the one in the bar with 6 notes, when “sleep in heavenly” comes for the second time. You know about the second half of the bar. Look at the first half. Three blob-stick tail notes joined together by a beam. The first two are used for “sleep” and the third for “in”. If you sing the song correctly, you make these three notes the same length as each other, though it's easy to swing them as most of the rest of the tune has the swingy half bar pattern.

- And that's it! Test yourself. Shuffle the cards and turn them over. Pick one out, get it the right way round and clap its rhythm. If you aren't sure whether you are right, put it into the right place in the tune, and clap the rhythm of the song until you get to that bar. Repeat until you can clap all the rhythms – there are only 6 of them.
- If you want to get even more confident pick out two cards, put them the right way up and place one after the other. Clap the two cards in sequence. This is reading music – the rhythm element. Try a row of 4. Now you are flying.

**6.** For this step you need to be confident about recognising which card goes with which words, taking note of both the pitch and the rhythm. If you are pretty good at it but not completely sure have the “Mini-Project 102 Silent Night Tune Answer” sheet to hand to refer to.

- Shuffle the cards and turn them over. Pick one out. Put it the right way up (remember dots follow blobs). Sing it to la. If you are sure you are right, pick another and do that one. If you aren't sure, refer to the whole song to find the bar in context. Sing through until you get to the bar to check – or learn the pattern.
- Play with the cards – it's like the way we learned French vocabulary or spelling at school. You could put ones you got wrong back in. Or if you are finding it hard, set them on one side to separate the easy ones from the difficult ones and work more on the latter.

**7.** The final challenge. You are going to sing 4 cards in sequence – at first go and fluently. Here are 4 levels from least tricky to most.

- Look at all the cards and pick out 4 you find easy to sing individually. They don't all have to be different. Be kind to yourself – you want to succeed, not catch yourself out. You could have card 1, then two that are the same as it, and then the last card. Put them in a line, think, and then sing them to la. You can make this a bit harder, gradually, by substituting one card for another
- Pick 4 cards at random and put them the right way up. If one of them looks a difficult one, you can have another pick. Sort them into an order that you reckon should make them not too difficult to sing. Have a think and sing to la.
- Pick 4 cards at random and put them the right way up in the order you drew them out. If you've got a really horrible sequence to do you can move one of them to a different place.
- No substitutions or swops!

“Silent Night” was composed in a hurry in an Austrian village because the organ was damaged. Urgently needing something to sing that evening – it was Christmas Eve, the priest, Joseph Mohr took a short poem he had written a couple of years before round to the organist and schoolmaster, Franz Gruber. Gruber quickly composed a tune that could be accompanied by guitar. It was probably flooding that was the problem, but Paul Gallico's lovely book “The Story of Silent Night” prefers the theory that it was mice.

This was all in 1818. The song might have stayed in the village, but an organ builder heard and liked it and took it with him. Two travelling families of singers (the Von Trapps were part of a tradition) added it to their repertoire and even took it to America.