

# Chac

*A Piece for String Orchestra*

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Fullbright-Hays Seminar Abroad, Mexico

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**Title:** Chac, A Piece for String Orchestra

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**School:** Merrit Trace Elementary School

**Subject Area:** Orchestra

**Topic:** A piece for 5th grade orchestra

**Grade Level:** Intermediate Elementary Orchestra - grade 1 (*this grading scale is understood by music teachers, grade 1 = easy, grade 2 = medium easy, grade 3 = medium, grade 4 = medium advanced, and grade 5 = advanced*)

**Time Frame:** The lesson should take 4 classes of 5 minute background talks on the Mayans and going over the “fun facts” and then the rehearsal and learning of the music should take 4–6 weeks.

**Included in This Unit:**

Lesson 1: Mayan Facts

Lesson 2: Music Vocabulary

Lesson 3: Program Notes

Mayan Fast Facts (student page)

Musical Vocabulary (student page)

About the Composition and Program Notes

## Lesson 1: Mayan Facts

### Objective

Students will practice finger pattern 1 (whole step, half step—ex: E-F#-G) and finger pattern 2 (half step, whole step—ex: E-F natural-G) while learning facts about Mayan Culture.

### Prior Knowledge Needed

Students should have finished the first book of any elementary string method.

### Supplies Needed

Students will need their instruments

Mayan Fast Facts page from orchestra piece *Chac* (attached)

### Precursor Activities

. With left hand in the air, move the middle finger back and forth so it touches the ring finger, then touches the index finger.

**Violins and violas:** On the D string put index finger down on the note E, then put middle finger down next to first so it touches making the note F natural. Play the note F natural 4 times. Have the students set their hand up like this and play the note 5 times.

**Cellos and basses:** On the D string put index finger down on the note E, then put second finger down so it is 1/4 of an inch away on the note F natural.

### Activity

*This activity should be done as a warmup, five minutes a day.*

- . 1. Students read two Mayan Fast Facts to themselves.
- . 2. Teacher reads the same two Mayan Fast Facts to the class.
3. Teacher will read the following statements to the class about the first two Mayan Fast Facts and give the class the following instructions:
  - . If the fast fact is true, play finger pattern 1 on the D string (D,E,F#,G).
  - . If the fact is false, play finger pattern 2 on the D string (D,E,F-natural,G).
- . Statements:
  - Chook is the Mayan God of Rain. (*false, students will respond with finger pattern 2*)
  - Maize and corn are the same thing. (*true, students will respond with*

*finger pattern 1)*

- Chac is the Mayan God of Rain. (*true, students will respond with two F-sharps*)
- Spaghetti was the main crop for the Mayans. (*false, students will respond with two F-naturals*)

.  
. Continue adding new facts each day in the five-minute daily warmup,

**Teacher T and F starter questions for Mayan Fast Facts:**  
**You will want to mix these questions up. Repeat a few of them each day.**

Chac was the Mayan God of rain. (True)

Chac-chac-chac was the Mayan God of rain. (False, Chac is the Mayan Rain God)

Corn was the main crop for the Mayans. (True)

Popcorn was the main crop for the Mayans. (False, corn or maize is the main Mayan crop.)

The Mayans associated the fish with the Rain God Chac. Before each rain the fish would jump out of the rivers to signal the rain was coming. (False, Mayans associated the frog with the Rain God Chac.)

The Mayans associated a frog with the Rain God Chac. Before it rained the frog would croak to signal the rains. (True)

Chichén Itzá is an ancient Aztec city. (False, Chichén Itzá is an ancient Mayan city.)

Chichén Itzá is not a very impressive city. (False, Chichén Itzá is one of the 7 New Wonders of the World.)

Chichén Itzá is one of the 7 New Wonders of the World. (True)

The Mayans lived in Neo America. (False, Mayans lived in Mesoamerica.)

The Mayans lived in Mesoamerica. (True)

Mesoamerica is a region that extends from central Mexico to Honduras and Nicaragua. (True)

Mesoamerica is a region that extends from Meso to America. (False, Mesoamerica extends from central Mexico to Honduras and Nicaragua.)

In 1681 Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez and his armies invaded Mesoamerica. (False, Hernando Cortez invaded in 1519.)

In 1519 Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus and his armies invaded Mesoamerica. (False, Hernando Cortez invaded.)

## Lesson 2: Music Vocabulary

### Objective

Students will be able to describe the piece *Chac* using musical terms.

### Prior Knowledge

Students must be familiar with the song *Chac*.

### Supplies

Orchestra piece *Chac* (available for download from this Web site, along with audio recordings: <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/outreach/fulbright09/>)

Pencil for each student

Attached vocabulary worksheet

**Needed Vocabulary** (vocabulary can be introduced bit by bit before this lesson, or all in this lesson)

crescendo - to get gradually louder

decrescendo - to get gradually softer

stacatto - short and separated

tenuto - note should be held for the whole length

p - piano, soft

mp - mezzo piano, medium soft

mf - mezzo forte, medium loud

f - forte, loud

pizzicato - to pluck

arco - to bow

simile - an indication to continue in the same manner

accents - > placed above a note to indicate stress or emphasis

### Activity

- .1. Pass out vocabulary sheet
- .2. Go over definitions, have students write definitions on their sheet.
- .3. Play measures 1–8 of *Chac*.

Ask students if they see anything on the vocabulary sheet from measures 1–8.

.pizzicato - plucking

.mp - mezzo piano, medium soft

.mf - mezzo forte, medium loud

.f - forte, loud

.crescendo - to get gradually louder

. Ask students to describe measures 1–8 in 2 sentences or less, using the vocabulary words from this section. Write 1 additional sentence about the story the song is telling. Write your answers in section 1 on the vocabulary page.

*Example: In the beginning of Chac the orchestra is pizzicato. Then there is a crescendo from mezzo forte to forte. The orchestra is supposed to sound like the beginning of a rain storm.*

4. Play measures 9–23 of *Chac*.

Ask students if they see anything on the vocabulary sheet from measures 9–23.

- .accents - emphasis on note
- .ff - fortissimo, very loud
- .arco - with bow

Ask students to describe measures 9–23 in 3 sentences or less, using the vocabulary words from this section. Write 1 additional sentence about the story the song is telling. Write your answers in section 2 on the vocabulary page.

5. Play measures 25–40 of *Chac*.

Ask students if they see anything on the vocabulary sheet from measures 25–40.

- .decrescendo - to get gradually softer
- .tenuto - note should be held for the whole length
- .simile - an indication to continue in the same manner

Ask students to describe measures 25–40 in 3 sentences or less, using the vocabulary words from this section. Write 1 additional sentence about the story the song is telling. Write your answers in section 3 on the vocabulary page.

6. Play measures 41–57 of *Chac*.

Ask students if they see anything on the vocabulary sheet from measures 41–57.

- .mp - mezzo piano, medium soft
- .crescendo - to get gradually louder
- .decrescendo - to get gradually softer

Ask students to describe measures 41–57 in 3 sentences or less, using the vocabulary words from this section. Write 1 additional sentence about the story the song is telling. Write your answers in section 4 on the vocabulary page.

7. Play measures 58-end of *Chac*.

Ask students if they see anything on the vocabulary sheet from measures 58-end.

- .pizzicato - plucking
- .staccato - short and separated
- .decrescendo - to get gradually softer

.f - forte, loud

.mf - mezzo forte, medium loud

.simile - keep doing the same articulation, in this case staccato

Ask students to describe measures 58-end in 3 sentences or less, using the vocabulary words from this section. Write 1 additional sentence about the story the song is telling. Write your answers in section 5 on the vocabulary page.



## Lesson 3: Program Notes

### Objective

Students will write program notes for the piece *Chac*. These program notes can be used in your next concert program.

### Materials Needed

Vocabulary sheet from previous lesson  
Pencil and paper  
Examples of program notes

### Previous Knowledge Needed

To know the song *Chac*.  
To know all of the Mayan Fast Facts.  
To understand the musical vocabulary related to the song.

### .Activity

- .1. Explain to students what program notes are:
  - . When you go to a professional concert and you get a program you will see program notes in the program. Program notes describe the piece of music that will be played to the audience.
  - .
  - . Present at least 3 different examples of program notes to the students. Go to [http://programnotes.wikia.com/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://programnotes.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page) for examples of program notes.
- .2. Have students take out their vocabulary sheet and a piece of paper.

Take the description of sections 1,2,3,4, and 5 and combine them to make program notes for this song.

Remind students that they do not need to use ALL the information they took notes on. Highlight what they think is important.

*Example: The whole orchestra is pizzicato in the beginning. The orchestra starts soft, then crescendos into the melody. The pizzicato is supposed to sound like the beginning of a storm. Then the upper strings play the melody and the cellos answer the melody with loud low notes that are supposed to sound like the thunder. Everyone starts playing arco, with bow, and the sounds of the sprinkling rain turns into a steady and constant downpour. The upper strings then start a long crescendo with half notes signaling a wind storm that comes in by getting louder with a crescendo and goes out by getting softer with a decrescendo. Chac ends with the storm leaving and the orchestra getting softer.*

These program notes can be finished in class, or taken home as a homework

assignment.

# Mayan Fast Facts

- . Chac was the Mayan God of Rain.
  - . Maize, or corn, was the main crop of the Mayans.
  - . The Mayans prayed for Chac to send rain to water their crops.
  - . The Mayans associated a frog with the Rain God Chac. Before it rained the frog would croak to signal the rains.
  - . Chichén Itzá is an ancient Mayan city and is one of the 7 New Wonders of the World.
  - . The Mayans lived in Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica is a region that extends from central Mexico to Honduras and Nicaragua.
- In 1519, Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez and his armies invaded Mesoamerica.



Chac, Mayan God of Rain

# Musical Vocabulary

crescendo -

decrescendo -

stacatto -

tenuto -

p -

mp -

mf -

f -

pizzicato -

arco -

simile -

accents -

Musical Vocabulary, con't.

Section 1:

Section 2:

Section 3:

Section 4:

Section 5:

### **About the Composition:**

I spent the summer of 2009 with a Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad in Mexico. We spent weeks learning about the Ancient Mayan Civilization, seeing Mayan ruins, and talking to experts about the rich Mayan culture. The Mayans had many gods; Chac was the God of Rain.

While visiting Calakmul, one of the greatest Mayan ruins in Mesoamerica, I was fortunate to hear the sounds of the animals, and a rainstorm coming in. Listening to the rainstorm and learning more about the rich Mayan culture inspired me to write this piece.

### **Program Notes by the Composer:**

*Chac* is the Ancient Mayan Rain God and this piece depicts a rain storm coming in and going out. The introduction is light pizzicato in the upper strings with a foreboding low string pizzicato that is supposed to signal the big storm off in the distance. The orchestra then picks up their bows, making a bigger sound, which is the rain coming down in steady and constant patterns. The melody of the constant rain gets passed around from the upper strings to the lower strings. In measure 41 a big gust of wind comes in as the strings play half notes. The gust of wind starts piano and grows to a loud forte, then goes back out. The end is very similar to the beginning. The low strings are answering to the high strings and the storm is quieting down and ends with a few sounding rain drops in the cello part.