From A Railway Carriage
A poem set to music by Nico Muhly

Extension Activities

Perform, Share, Present
As part of the final performance of the song, perhaps present a topic-based project about Nico Muhly, his life and compositions. There is, of course, option to include information about other composers you might have learned about from Friday Afternoons 2013 and 2014 including Britten (via FridayAfternoonsMusic.co.uk and/or your local Charanga site).

Present as a class, individually or in groups, but create your own presentation or project that will add to your final performance.

Choices for your end-of-unit performance:

- Sing the song arranged by Nico Muhly, decide if you want to include any optional parts
- Present your project using ideas that you explored through the extension activities of this Unit. Present before, after or during the performance of the song. You and the children decide

Explore the ideas presented below to create and support your project.

About the Song
From A Railway Carriage is a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson from his collection A Child's Garden Of Verses 1885. Nico Muhly has set this poem to music saying:

“I am always drawn to texts that have multiple interpretations. Take, for instance, From A Railway Carriage by Stevenson. The general atmosphere is one of modernity: a train rushing through a landscape. But, when you look closer, there are natural things (the hill, the plain), man-made interventions (meadows, bridges, houses) and then the supernatural (fairies and witches). The text operates through an economy of glanced stories: the boy, the tramp - we could learn more about them, but the speed of the text doesn’t allow it. I find that sort of thing very appealing, and very musical - two ideas working against one another in counterpoint.”

Robert Louis Stevenson was a 19th century Scottish writer famous for novels such as Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde.
“I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.”

Born on November 13, 1850, in Edinburgh, Scotland, Robert Louis Stevenson travelled regularly. His travels added reality and knowledge to his writing. Robert developed a desire to write early in life, having no interest in the family business of lighthouse engineering. He was often abroad, usually for health reasons, and his journeys led to some of his early literary works. Publishing his first volume at the age of 28, Stevenson became a celebrated author during his life when works such as Treasure Island, Kidnapped and Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde were released to excited audiences. He died in Samoa in 1894.

A Child's Garden Of Verses

A collection of poetry for children by the Scottish author. The collection includes three poems from this series that Nico has set to music; From A Railway Carriage, Rain and Winter-Time. The collection first appeared in 1885 under the title Penny Whistles, but has been reprinted many times, often in illustrated versions. It contains about 65 poems.

Here are some quotes from people who have read the collection:

“All the joys and sorrows, fears and fantasies of an imaginative solitary child are brought together in this edition of a much-loved classic. Stevenson's timeless verses bear witness to a happy childhood and create a treasure garden for every child to explore.”

“My grandma gave me this book when I was very young. I read it between the ages of six and seven. It made me happy to be young and now it makes me want to be that young again. It was strange how easily I could identify with the young Robert Louis Stevenson. I could absolutely understand his annoyance at being sent to bed while it was still light in summer and I just wanted to be there with him. When I read it back now I am reminded of the innocence of being so young.”

A Child's Garden Of Verses selection

Read some of the favourite poems from the collection, perhaps find a copy of the book or find more poems to read on the internet:

At The Seaside

When I was down beside the sea
A wooden spade they gave to me
To dig the sandy shore.

My holes were empty like a cup.
In every hole the sea came up,
Till it could come no more.
**Foreign Lands**

Up into the cherry tree  
Who should climb but little me?  
I held the trunk with both my hands  
And looked abroad in foreign lands.

I saw the next door garden lie,  
Adorned with flowers, before my eye,  
And many pleasant places more  
That I had never seen before.

I saw the dimpling river pass  
And be the sky’s blue looking-glass;  
The dusty roads go up and down  
With people tramping in to town.

If I could find a higher tree  
Farther and farther I should see,  
To where the grown-up river slips  
Into the sea among the ships,

To where the road on either hand  
Lead onward into fairy land,  
Where all the children dine at five,  
And all the playthings come alive.

**The Land Of Nod**

From breakfast on through all the day  
At home among my friends I stay,  
But every night I go abroad  
Afar into the land of Nod.

All by myself I have to go,  
With none to tell me what to do -  
All alone beside the streams  
And up the mountain-sides of dreams.

The strangest things are these for me,  
Both things to eat and things to see,  
And many frightening sights abroad  
Till morning in the land of Nod.

Try as I like to find the way,
I never can get back by day,  
Nor can remember plain and clear  
The curious music that I hear.

**Looking Glass River**

Smooth it glides upon its travel,  
Here a wimple, there a gleam -  
O the clean gravel!  
O the smooth stream!

Sailing blossoms, silver fishes,  
Pave pools as clear as air -  
How a child wishes  
To live down there!

We can see our coloured faces  
Floating on the shaken pool  
Down in cool places,  
Dim and very cool;

Till a wind or water wrinkle,  
Dipping marten, plumping trout,  
Spreads in a twinkle  
And blots all out.

See the rings pursue each other;  
All below grows black as night,  
Just as if mother  
Had blown out the light!

Patience, children, just a minute -  
See the spreading circles die;  
The stream and all in it  
Will clear by-and-by.

**Pirate Story**

Three of us afloat in the meadow by the swing,  
Three of us abroad in the basket on the lea.  
Winds are in the air, they are blowing in the spring,  
And waves are on the meadow like the waves there are at sea.

Where shall we adventure, to-day that we're afloat,
Shall it be to Africa, a-steering of the boat,  
To Providence, or Babylon or off to Malabar?

Hi! but here’s a squadron a-rowing on the sea -  
Cattle on the meadow a-charging with a roar!  
Quick, and we’ll escape them, they’re as mad as they can be,  
The wicket is the harbour and the garden is the shore.

Treasure Island

Probably the most popular pirate story ever written in the English language, featuring one of literature's most beloved “baddies,” Treasure Island has been happily read by several generations of boys, girls and grownups.

Its unforgettable characters include: young Jim Hawkins, who finds himself owner of a map to Treasure Island, where the fabled pirate booty is buried; honest Captain Smollett, heroic Dr Livesey, and the good-hearted but obtuse Squire Trelawney, who help Jim on his quest for the treasure; the frightening Blind Pew, double-dealing Israel Hands, and seemingly mad Ben Gunn, buccaneers of varying shades of menace; and, of course, garrulous, affable, ambiguous Long John Silver, who is one moment a friendly, laughing, one-legged sea-cook and the next a dangerous pirate leader!

The unexpected and complex relationship that develops between Silver and Jim helps transform what seems at first to be a simple, adventure story into a deeply moving study of a boy's growth into manhood, as he learns hard lessons about friendship, loyalty, courage and honour and the uncertain meaning of good and evil.

About the Composer - Nico Muhly

Nico is a composer who wakes up every day and writes music. He sits at his computer and “throws notes at it! It feels like any other job, like a butcher or a baker.” He has to be an obsessive planner who, when composing, needs to think about occupying the time of 100 musicians in an orchestra, or on a stage in an opera.

Nico Muhly was born in Vermont (August 26,1981) and raised in Providence, Rhode Island. His mother, Bunny Harvey, is a painter and teacher and his father, Frank Muhly, is a documentary filmmaker.

Nico grew up following them round the world, seeing amazing art and going to many interesting archeological sites. Through his travels he has learned to speak four different languages, including Icelandic!

There was a piano in the house when Nico was young and it was decided that he should learn to play. He started piano lessons and singing in the local boys’ choir in the church near his house at the same time. He became good at singing and playing and, when he was 10, realised that he wasn’t just interested in playing and interpreting other people’s music, but in making his own. This triggered a process of intense study and transforming that study into making his own music. He attended Columbia University where he received an undergraduate degree in English, and the Julliard
School where he completed a Master’s degree in music.

If you were to describe Nico’s job, you would say he is an American Contemporary Classical music composer and arranger, who has worked and recorded with Classical and Pop/Rock musicians and artists, many that you will have seen on TV. He realises the importance of composing for many different ensembles, soloists, for opera and ballet and in many different styles with many different collaborators. He has composed music for films such as The Reader and for operas that have been performed in amazing venues such as the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

Nico is a member of the Bedroom Community, an Icelandic record label/collective formed in 2006. This brings like-minded, yet diverse individuals together from around the world to create music. This often happens in Reykjavik, Iceland.

Nico currently lives on the Lower East side of Manhattan in New York City with his partner and his dog Óskar.

**Explore Nico Muhly’s Unit of Work from Friday Afternoons 2014**
(Via FridayAfternoonsMusic.co.uk and/or your local Charanga site)

**The Two Brothers arranged by Nico Muhly**
*Folk music from Britain to America.*

Investigate the ideas presented in Nico’s various interviews in the Friday Afternoons 2014 Unit of Work, The Two Brothers and about Folk music in general. Use this information to support the creation of your own presentation or project that will add to your final performance.

Remember that Nico has an intellectual approach to composition and enjoys collaborating with other artists.

Here are some ideas to start you off, try to think of some of your own as well.

- Listen to Nico’s arrangement of The Two Brothers. How does the accompaniment help tell the story?
- Find as many different versions of The Two Brothers as you can - explore YouTube and Spotify. Which version do you prefer? Listen to the differing accompaniments, do they help tell the story?
- Explore some of Britten’s Folk song arrangements, go to www.britten100.org.
- Listen and explore Britten’s Friday Afternoons songs that were written for
Nico Muhly composes for many different ensembles, soloists, for opera and ballet and in many different styles, with many different collaborators. Below are some examples that you could find and listen to:

- I Drink The Air Before Me
- Drones And Piano
- Nico loves listening to the music of Stravinsky - find some of his music to listen to. Nico suggested 3 ballets: Petrushka, The Firebird and The Rite Of Spring.