

Meridian Music of the Week!

Issue No. 210 (based on previous Newsletter No.172 – November 2024)

Each week ALL our children will be listening to a piece of music as part of our music lessons. We'll be talking about it in class and discussing what we like, what we don't like and what it makes us think about. Parents/carers/family - why not join in and listen for yourself at home! All music is available **free** on YouTube as well as paid services such as iTunes and Spotify.

This week's music...



'Pick a Pocket or Two' from the musical 'Oliver!'

Music and lyrics by
Lionel Bart (1960)

You can find the song from the original film musical version of 1968 – [HERE](#)

Or you can try the klezmer version! - [HERE](#)

'Boy for Sale'...

This week's song from the musical 'Oliver!' is sung by a new character that we haven't met yet. His name is **Fagin**, and he's very important to the story. But before we talk about his song – I need to tell you what happened after Oliver asked Mr. Bumble for more gruel!

Well, Mr. Bumble takes Oliver in front of the governors of the workhouse – and they decide his behaviour is so unacceptable (just for asking for some food!) that they say he has to leave the workhouse altogether. So, in the musical (not actually in the original book*) Mr. Bumble takes Oliver into the streets and tries to **SELL** him!

He tries to sell him as a kind of slave to work for someone. He tries a blacksmith, a baker and finally sells him to work for an undertaker called Mr. Sowerberry. There's a song in the musical all about this which you can watch [HERE](#).

Oliver lives with Mr. Sowerberry and his wife in the undertaker's shop. He has to sleep in the storeroom (along with all the coffins!) – but at least he gets to eat and Mr. Sowerberry is fairly kind to him.

However, the Sowerberrys already have a young man working for them – Noah Claypole. He's a really unpleasant young man and he constantly bullies Oliver about his dead mother. Finally, Oliver can't take it anymore and he fights back.



Mr. Bumble tries to 'sell' Oliver in the street.

* When Charles Dickens wrote the original story, it was common that workhouse boys **would** go and work for a tradesman, but it was the workhouse that had to pay the tradesman! Still, it was probably still cheaper than feeding and clothing the boys for years themselves.

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An original illustration from the book 'Oliver Twist' showing Oliver fighting with Noah Claypole.

But Noah Claypole accuses Oliver of going crazy and they call Mr. Bumble to the shop to help lock Oliver in the basement while they decide what to do with him. But Oliver escapes! He decides to leave the town and make his way all the way to London on foot! **

When he arrives in London, Oliver is exhausted and starving after his journey. But he meets another boy called 'The Artful Dodger' who seems to make friends with him. Dodger takes Oliver back to where he lives. It's an old, horrible, abandoned building where lots of other boys seem to live too. All the boys work for a man who also lives there – and his name is **Fagin**, the singer of this week's song.

Fagin is a thief and a criminal and he gets boys who work for him to steal from people in the street. Fagin then sells what they steal. The strange thing is, Fagin seems to treat Oliver kindly, but this is only because he wants Oliver to steal for him too!

In the song, Fagin (and the other boys) explain what it is that they do – and try to show Oliver how to pick people's pockets for valuable items.

**"In this life, one thing counts,
In the bank, large amounts,
I'm afraid these don't grow on trees,
You have to pick a pocket or two!"**

Oliver doesn't really understand what it is they're doing (when he sees all the handkerchiefs they've stolen, he thinks they work in a laundry!) and Fagin and the boys show Oliver how to steal as if they're just showing him how to play a game.

The song also mentions a character called **Bill Sikes**. He's a real villain and he will be very important in the story of Oliver in the future. But that will have to wait until another newsletter!



Fagin and 'Dodger' in the film.

In the story and the film, the character of Fagin is Jewish. And the composer of the music (Lionel Bart, who was also Jewish) uses this fact to influence Fagin's songs. There is a popular type of old Jewish music called **Klezmer** and Lionel Bart uses klezmer styles in this song.

** Charles Dickens lived only 100 metres from a workhouse in London at the time he wrote 'Oliver Twist'. But, in the original story, Oliver's workhouse is in a made-up town called Mudfog – 75 miles from London.

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A klezmer band playing at a Jewish wedding

Klezmer music is often in a **minor key** (sounding sad or threatening) and an original klezmer band would usually include a **violin**, a **clarinet**, a **bass** and a **drum**. In more modern times they also often include an **accordion**. Klezmer musicians often perform at Jewish weddings and other celebrations. If you want to know what it sounds like – you can listen to a real klezmer version of ‘Pick a Pocket or Two’ [HERE](#)!

So, what will happen to Oliver next? You’ll have to wait until next week to find out!...

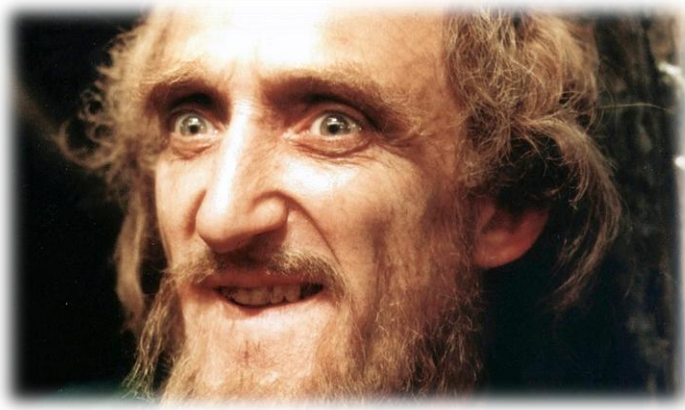
Listen & enjoy...

Mr. Mole

Music Teacher



Words to the song on the next page...



Pick a Pocket or Two

[FAGIN]

In this life, one thing counts
In the bank, large amounts
I'm afraid these don't grow on trees
You've got to pick a pocket or two
You've got to pick a pocket or two, boys!
You've got to pick a pocket or two

[BOYS]

Large amounts don't grow on trees
You've got to pick a pocket or two

[FAGIN]

Why should we break our backs
Stupidly paying tax?
Better get some untaxed income
Better pick a pocket or two
You've got to pick a pocket or two, boys!
You've got to pick a pocket or two

[BOYS]

Why should we all break our backs
Better pick a pocket or two

[FAGIN]

Robin Hood, what a crook
Gave away what he took
Charity's fine
Subscribe to mine!
Get out and pick a pocket or two
You've got to pick a pocket or two, boys!
You've got to pick a pocket or two

[BOYS]

Robin hood was far too good
He had to pick a pocket or two

[FAGIN]

Take a tip from Bill Sikes
He can whip what he likes
I recall
He started small
He had to pick a pocket or two
You've got to pick a pocket or two, boys!

[BOYS]

Have no fear, attack the rear
Get in pick a pocket or two

[FAGIN]

When I see
Someone rich
Both my thumbs
Start to itch
Only to find some piece of mind
I have to pick a pocket or two
You've got to pick a pocket or two, boys!
You've got to pick a pocket or two

[BOYS]

Just to find some piece of mind
We have to pick a pocket or two