

MR DARWIN

COMPOSER'S NOTES

THE SONG IN A SENTENCE

As a result of his voyage around the world on The Beagle, Charles Darwin realised that evolution is driven by natural selection, but hesitated to publish his discovery until Alfred Russel Wallace wrote to him with the same idea – much to the annoyance of Patrick Matthew who'd come up with a version of the theory 30 years earlier, but been ignored.

HISTORY & MAIN POINTS OF THE SONG

Mister Darwin was written in 2004 as part of the Teign Lifetime Project. I wanted to get into a simple song several important points about Darwin:

- The great length of his voyage on the Beagle
- The huge number of species in many countries that he studied
- Darwin's two decades of hesitation in publishing his findings
- The fact that other people made the same discovery

STYLISTIC POINTS

Mr Darwin has a folk song quality. It's probably best sung simply, energetically and straightforwardly with a great emphasis on making the words as clear as possible so that the story comes across well.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- With its simple melody and clear rhythms, Mr Darwin makes a great song to dance to - perhaps in a country-dancing style.
- So many creatures and countries are mentioned that the song offers numerous opportunities for illustration and artwork generally. It might be a good project to make a book of the lyrics with illustrations flowing around and between the text.
- In an educational setting the song could form the starting-point for a play or dance-piece about Darwin's life and work, with the action being punctuated by the five verses and the coda at appropriate moments.
- You may like to write extra verses for the song about other aspects of Darwin's life, perhaps describing in more detail the controversy his work provoked, or outlining his in-depth study of worms over many years, or the sad fate of the Beagle's captain. You could have a verse or two in the key of D minor instead of D major if the subject matter were sad or serious – or perform them in 4/4 time instead of 9/8 and at a slower tempo.