

London Philharmonic Orchestra



**GCSE
BrightSparks
Resources**

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Eric Coates

(1886 – 1957)

**The Dam Busters
March**
(1955)



Eric Coates

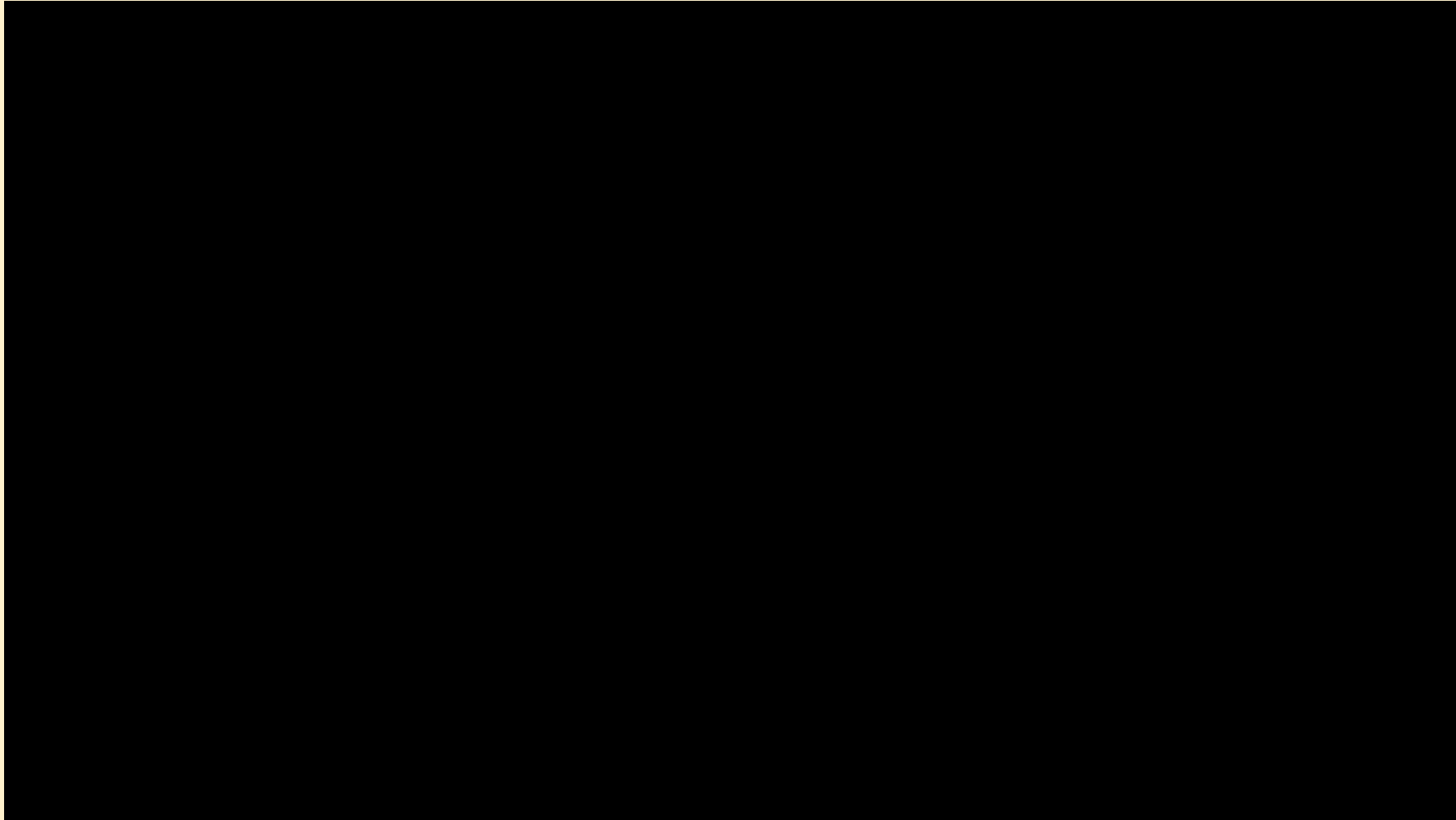
(1886 – 1957)

- Eric Coates was born in Nottinghamshire to a musical family – although his parents were reluctant to let him pursue a career in music!
- He studied composition and viola at the Royal Academy of Music, and then began playing in symphony orchestras, including under conductor Thomas Beecham (who founded the LPO!)
- In 1919 he gave up the viola and made his living solely through composing
- Some of his most well-known works include ‘By the Sleepy Lagoon’ (1930), the *London Suite* (1932), and ‘The Dam Busters March’ (1955)

***The Dam Busters* (1955)**

- *The Dam Busters* is a British war film directed by Michael Anderson, based on the true story of Operation Chastise, when the RAF attacked 3 dams in Nazi Germany in 1943
- It stars Richard Todd and Michael Redgrave, and was Britain's biggest box-office success of 1955, receiving rave reviews for the acting, direction, special effects photography and the soundtrack score by Eric Coates
- It has become a British classic!

Hear the LPO perform *The Dam Busters March*



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baAqOQu7p7o>

Dam Busters March analysis

Introduction (bars 1 – 6)

- Long rumbling dominant pedal (G in C major) to add suspense

Pedal = a long note usually underneath the texture underpinning the harmony

- The rest of the introduction is based on the famous main march theme (here in F major but the introduction is in C):



Introduction (bar 7 – Figure 1)

- Coates **fragments** the main theme, meaning that we don't hear all of it, just a shorter bit
- He uses a technique called **diminution**, which means that the note values are shorter
- He also uses a sequence, repeating the same short idea on higher pitches



Structure:

Introduction

Jaunty theme

Main March theme (Figure 3 – Figure 7)

After this, there is no new material except:

- Countermelody (a secondary melody usually less prominent than the main melody) – here it is so good that it almost attracts attention away from the main theme!
- New orchestration – different instruments play each part
- Different moods and speeds

Coda (Figure 14 – end)

- **Coda** = the ending section of a piece
- Uses the main theme one more time, this time **augmenting** the note values at the end, which means stretching them out and lengthening them
- The final coda uses a fragment of the main theme
- It shifts the theme from F major to Ab major for a lovely final chord progression: IV – bVI – I in C major
- Pounding timpani plays I-V-I-V-I (Hollywood-style ending)

Quiz

1. How does Coates create a feeling of suspense at the beginning of the piece?
2. What is the difference between **diminution** and **augmentation**?
3. What is the mood of Coates's first theme?
4. What is the technical term for the second melody that is performed alongside the Main March theme in the middle of the piece?
5. Which instrument creates the Hollywood feel at the end?

Quiz answers

1. **How does Coates create a feeling of suspense at the beginning of the piece?** - With a long, rumbling dominant pedal
2. **What is the difference between **diminution** and **augmentation**?** - **Diminution** is when you shorten the note lengths. **Augmentation** is when you extend them
3. **What is the mood of Coates's first theme?** - Jaunty and happy
4. **What is the technical term for the second melody that is performed alongside the Main March theme in the middle of the piece?** - The second melody is called the **countermelody**
5. **Which instrument creates the Hollywood feel at the end?** - Timpani

Bonus question:

As you listen to the piece, have a think about how different aspects of the music reflect the theme and story of the film. What features of the music tell you that this is a film about the Second World War?