

The Adventures of Kelp Creature – Music Teacher Resource

Curious about how The Adventures of Kelp Creature (AKC) came together as a music story? Here are some notes from the composer, Alex Chen, to give a behind-the-scenes peak (sorted by musical number in chronological order)!

Bull Kelp

Bull kelp provides the **foundation** of kelp forest ecosystems. Similarly, pianos are often a foundational musical partner in chamber (i.e. small group) music. Whether in AKC or another piece of chamber music, the piano can create the ecosystem where all the other instruments get to live and play, weaving together their musical lines.

Notice the **low bass notes** that the piano plays in this piece – they paint the picture of the **holdfast** of the bull kelp which is its anchor to the sea floor.



Herring Spawn

The **creamy colour** of the herring spawn made me think of the **sweet timbre** of the **sopranino saxophone**. With its long, singing lines, I think it reflects the gracefulness of spawn waving gently in the eelgrass meadows. Fun fact: a big herring spawning event can paint the coastal waters a milky white!

The sopranino saxophone is also a fairly small saxophone, imitating the smallness of the spawn relative to the adult Pacific herring, depicted by the larger alto saxophone.

Gracefully ♩ = 112

Sopranino Saxophone

Alto Saxophone

Piano

p *mp*

p Red.

Herring Farts

The ability of the alto saxophone to articulate an **effective toot** made it a perfect fit for depicting the flatulence of Pacific herring. Accompanied by a waltz pattern in the piano, I imagine a school of herring dancing about together, trading messages in their farts (or as the scientist like to call them, **fast repetitive ticks or FRTs**).

16

A. Sax.

Pno.

3

Red.

Chinook Salmon

The **silvery shimmer** of oceanic Chinook salmon made me think of none other than the trusty flute. This **active predator** eats other, smaller fish like herring. The athletic hunting strategy of this endangered species inspired me to depict it with a flute line that darts up and down in search of its next snack!

Searching for a snack ♩ = 56

The score is for Flute and Piano. The Flute part is in treble clef, key of D major (one sharp), and 6/8 time. It features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns, some slurs, and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with rests throughout the piece.

Southern Resident Orcas

Southern resident orcas are immensely majestic creatures whose recent history can be quite sad. The **warm, resonant brass timbre** of the French horn evokes how beautiful these orcas are. Simultaneously, there's a **delicacy** in the tone that reminds us of the sadness of their modern history. The harmonies of this piece include a greater proportion of minor chords to highlight the struggle of the southern residents.

Grand, mildly melancholy ♩ = 60

The score is for Horn in F and Piano. The Horn part is in treble clef, key of D major (one sharp), and 4/4 time. It features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf cantabile*. The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with rests throughout the piece. There are two *Red.* markings at the bottom of the piano part.

Sea Urchins

This piece, which begins with the orcas (French horn) and bull kelp (piano) being violently disturbed and dispersed, features the sitar. The many strings of the sitar parallel the **many spines of the sea urchin**. The **pointy timbre** drawn from the sitar's colour palette further accentuated the external features of sea urchins. The interval of an **augmented 4th** or **tritone** sneaks into the sitar part, adding to the ominous scenario of sea urchins razing the kelp forest, leaving behind **kelp barrens**. On occasion, multiple strings of the sitar can be heard at once, reminding us of the multitude of urchins overgrazing the kelp forest.



Sea Otters

With a playful fanfare, we are introduced to the sea otters! The **rounded, bubbly timbre** of the clarinet fits the swirling swimming motions of the sea otter. **The musical line swirls** as the otter picks up urchin after urchin (depicted by a supporting sitar part) to satisfy their huge appetite (they need to eat around a quarter to a third of their body weight each day – and sea otters weigh between 50 to 100 pounds in adulthood)!

Playful and hungry ♩ = 112



Musical notation for Clarinet in Bb and Sitar. The notation is on two staves with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 12/8. The Clarinet part starts with a *mf* dynamic and a *poco a poco cresc.* marking. The Sitar part provides a rhythmic accompaniment.

Finale

To wrap up our ocean journey, we have (almost) everyone chime in for a final 'chorale'. Similar to how ecosystems thrive when different members of **biological communities live in balance**, the chorale has the different instruments coming together in **consonant harmonies**. Kelp Creature gets the opportunity to voice the

community's **hope for the ocean's future**. Notice how the piano has made a return to support the musical ensemble, illustrating the **recovery of the bull kelp** in the ecosystem.

For the astute listener, you'll notice that the sitar is absent. I had written a sitar part but, with it being my first time writing for sitar, the part wasn't idiomatic for the instrument! As such, we weren't able to include it. If you or someone you know wants to create their own sitar part and play along, it would be very welcome to round out the full, balanced ecosystem!

The image shows a musical score for a jazz ensemble. The score is written for seven instruments: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl. in Bb), Alto Saxophone (A. Sax.), Horn in F (Hn. in F), Sitar (Si.), Baritone Saxophone (Bar.), and Piano (Pno.). The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 5 and ends at measure 8. The second system starts at measure 9 and ends at measure 12. The lyrics "Come support the ocean cause" are written under the Baritone Saxophone part in the second system. The piano part features a prominent bass line with chords. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and a trill in the flute part.

Happy listening! – Alex Chen