



MALTA
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide Infernal Dance

Igor Stravinsky

Infernal Dance from Firebird Suite 1919

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/6Vj8ow8iC4s>

Key vocabulary:

Ballet – An artistic dance form performed in music using set steps and gestures.

Mood – The feeling or emotion that is expressed through the music.

Confusion – A clash of two or more notes that is unpleasing to the ear.

Timbre/Tone Colour – The unique quality of the sound of an instrument or voice.

Dynamics – How loud or soft the music is played.

Information:

Ballet has been around for around 500 years, and composers have written music for many ballets. The most popular composers for ballet were either French or Russian, and in fact Igor Stravinsky is one of the most famous Russian composers in modern music.

Stravinsky wrote several famous ballets, his first being The Firebird. He wrote the Firebird for Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes Company and it was first performed in Paris in 1910. Audiences were fascinated by the ballet's music and the story which depicts the heroic efforts of Prince Ivan and a magical glowing bird struggling to defeat evil and restore peace to the world.

The Infernal Dance is performed after Prince Ivan had been captured by the evil sorcerer King Kastchei for invading his kingdom. Just as the sorcerer was about to turn him into stone, Ivan waved the feather and the Firebird instantly appeared. The magical bird puts a spell on the Kastchei and his guards, causing them to dance a wild and furious dance. They dance faster and faster, getting out of control until exhausted they fall down to the ground, sound asleep. Listen to the whole orchestra playing loud series of notes played at the same time which is intended to shock the audience. Double basses play an insistent rhythm creating the dance which will wear the guards/monsters out and they will go to sleep because they can dance no more. The brass instruments and the percussion feature here to create the tension, intensity and energy of the story.



MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide In The Hall Of The Mountain King

Edvard Grieg

In The Hall Of The Mountain King from Peer Gynt, Suite No. 1

YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/kLp_Hh6DKWc

Key vocabulary:

Tempo – The speed at which a piece of music is played.

Incidental Music – Background music to a story or a play.

Suite – An instrumental piece consisting of several shorter pieces (movements).

Movement - A separate section of a larger composition (suite).

Information:

Program music is a style of composition which describes a literary idea, a legend, a description of landscape, a scene or a story about people, places or relationships. This style of writing became popular in the Romantic era (around 1780 – 1910) and is still used in modern compositions.

Peer Gynt is a Norwegian fairy tale which was used as inspiration for Henrik Ibsen's play Peer Gynt. Ibsen then asked composer Edvard Grieg to write music for his play. Grieg created 26 movements to accompany the play from which 8 were chosen to create 2 Suites of music. Each suite has 4 movements.

In The Hall of the Mountain King is the 4th movement of the Suite 1 of Peer Gynt which is about a young boy, Peer Gynt who falls in love with a girl called Solveig but he is not allowed to marry her. With a broken heart, he runs away into the mountains so he can be alone. However when he arrives at the mountain, he is captured by ugly trolls who take him to the troll king. In the middle of the night, Peer tries to escape, tiptoeing as quietly as possible but the trolls hear him and chase him through the mountain corridors. Eventually he runs into the king but manages to escape from the mountain as big rocks come crashing down. Listen to the opening where the music begins slowly and softly, played by celli, double basses and bassoons. Gradually more instruments join in the repeated melody with the violins, violas, oboe and clarinet now playing the melody at a higher pitch. Tempo and dynamics are very important in In the Hall of the Mountain King as the piece starts slowly and softly and gradually increases in volume and speed as the trolls chase Peer Gynt until the end when the piece finishes very fast and very loud as the rocks are falling.



MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide Ride Of The Valkyries

Richard Wagner

Ride Of The Valkyries from The Valkyrie

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/7A1Evy0fJto>

Key vocabulary:

Leitmotif – A musical theme given to a particular idea or main character of an opera.

Opera – A drama where the words are sung instead of spoken.

Trill – Two notes alternating back and forth very fast.

Triad – A chord made up of three notes.

Information:

Opera is a form of theatre in which music has a leading role and the parts are taken by singers. It is the result of teamwork between a composer and a librettist. The performance is usually given in an opera house. The singers are accompanied by an orchestra, which since the early 19th century has been led by a conductor.

Richard Wagner was one of the most revolutionary composers in musical history. He evolved a new concept of opera as a complete work of art being a combination of music, poetry and painting. Opera would never be the same after Wagner. He usually based his operas on stories from Germanic or Arthurian legends.

The Ride of the Valkyries is the opening scene of Act 3 of the opera Die Walküre. On a mountain top four of the eight Valkyrie sisters have gathered in preparation for the transportation of fallen heroes to Valhalla. When they are joined by the other four sisters the Valkyries greet each other and sing their battle-cry. At the very beginning listen to the swirling strings and woodwinds which eventually are joined by low strings and horns playing dotted rhythms. The most prominent though is the leitmotif being played first by horns, then by trumpets and then by a host of brass instruments.



MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide Tam O'Shanter Overture

Malcolm Arnold

Tam O'Shanter Overture

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/ceWSd1-udgM>

Key vocabulary:

20th Century (Music) – Time in music history ranging from 1900 – 1999, characterised by dramatic innovations in musical forms and styles.

Solo – From Italian, meaning alone. When a piece or a section of a piece of music is played by a single instrument.

Information:

20th Century Classical Music does not feature a dominant style and composers created highly diverse kinds of music. Jazz and folk music were important influences on many composers at this time.

Tam O'Shanter Overture is based on the poem Tam O'Shanter written by Robert Burns. Composer Malcolm Arnold uses the full symphony orchestra to create a musical impression of the images from the poem.

Tam O'Shanter is a Scottish drunken farmer riding home late at night from Ayr. He happens upon and secretly watches a band of witches, ghouls and goblins dancing to their master's bagpipes. Tam cries out "Well done, cutty-sark!" Instantly all is dark and the creatures pursue him. He spurs his horse Maggie toward home at full speed but the vengeful hags are close on his heels. In a furious climax, a witch springs to seize him but all she gets is Maggie's tail. Tam arrives home safely but he faces one last danger when his shrewish wife reacts poorly to his explanation of the evening. Listen to the strings at the beginning, forming a background for the woodwinds and brass that establish the atmosphere. Scottish themes are heard through the clarinets playing in a bagpipey sound and piccolo whistling a part of a Scottish flavoured melody with bassoons offering rhythm and copious 'Scotch snap'. Lightning flashes and thunder roars with gong, cymbals and drums being much in evidence as Tam gallops harder and harder. Brass and drums suddenly lead to shivering tremolos as Tam watches the sacrilegious dance. "Well done, cutty-sark!" cries Tam, in a trombone solo that all but articulates the words. It all comes to a sudden end and there is a short sweep of woodwind solos as Tam is disappearing in the distance, ending in a high trilling note in the piccolo. Woodwinds point to the moral of the story ending with a terrific flurry.



MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide Danse Macabre

Camille Saint-Saëns

Danse Macabre

YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/YyknBTm_YyM

Key vocabulary:

Fiddle – another word for violin.

Counterpoint – Two or three melodic lines played at the same time.

Coda – Closing section of a movement.

Information:

A tone poem is a piece of orchestral music, usually in a single continuous movement. It illustrates the content of a poem, short story, novel, painting or other non-musical source. Its music is intended to inspire listeners to imagine scenes, images, specific ideas or mood.

Danse Macabre is a tone poem by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, based on an old French superstition. Originally it was written as a song for voice and piano in 1872 however 2 years later the composer reworked the piece into a tone poem, replacing the vocal line with a solo violin part.

According to legend, Death appears at midnight every year on Halloween. Death calls forth the dead from their graves to dance for him while he plays his fiddle. His skeletons dance for him until the rooster crows at dawn, when they must return to their graves until the next year. The piece has many sections, each of which is dominated by either a solo instrument or a section of the orchestra. Changes of scene are indicated by changes of instrument.

Listen to a harp playing a single note 12 times indicating the 12 strokes of midnight when a solo violin enters, indicating Death's violin playing for the death. The flute which follows signals the dead quietly rising. Strings playing slower and calmer represent a ballroom dance while the brass is loud and wild, indicating chaotic movement and rapid dance. Woodwinds playing softly indicate a single set of partners dancing and a xylophone used to represent rattling bones brings a vision of the skeletons dancing. At the end of the piece, an oboe indicates a rooster crowing in the dawn. Finally the piece ends with a solo violin which indicates that the graveyard is now empty after the night's festivities.



MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide A Night On The Bald Mountain

Modest Mussorgsky

A Night On The Bald Mountain

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/Im258Ea5FJA>

Key vocabulary:

Melody – Lots of notes played one after the other, to form a tune.

Tempo – The speed at which a piece of music is played.

Mood – The feeling that a piece of music creates.

Rest – Silence in a piece of music, a break or a pause.

Information:

A tone poem is a piece of orchestral music, usually in a single continuous movement. It illustrates the content of a poem, short story, novel, painting or other non-musical source. Its music is intended to inspire listeners to imagine scenes, images, specific ideas or mood.

A Night on the Bald Mountain is a tone poem by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky, written in 1867 and inspired by Russian folklore. He wrote this piece of music in just 12 days. Sadly he never heard it as it was never performed while he was still alive.

It depicts one night of the year when witches gather at the top of a mountain. According to Russian folk tradition, the night of 23rd June, also known as St John's Eve is the night when witches come out and evil forces are at work until a church bell rings six times, telling the witches that the sun is coming up and it is time for them to disappear. They can come back next year! Listen out to the trombones and tuba very early in the piece, playing long rumbling notes, giving the idea that something bad is about to happen. Here the composer uses lots of instruments all at once, and then switching between them very quickly creating suspense. After the chiming of the six bells the mood changes completely - the violins and the French horn play a soothing melody with a slower tempo.



MPO Educational Programme

Listening Guide Harry Potter Extract

John Williams

Harry Potter Extract

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/Htaj3o3JD8I>

Key vocabulary:

Soundtrack – Music accompanying and synchronized to the images of a motion picture.

Pitch – The frequency of a note determining how high or low it sounds.

Melody – Often consist of one or more musical phrases or motifs, and are usually repeated throughout a composition in various forms.

Harmony – Additional musical notes that support the melody to make it sound more complete.

Information:

Today, with the development of new technology and years of experience, film composers have the ability to create the perfect score for the movie, emphasizing the movie's plot and characters in such a way that it enhances the film and turns it into an experience.

The Harry Potter films are a series about an orphaned boy who is enrolled in a school of wizardry, where he learns the truth about himself, his family and the terrible evil that haunts the magical world.

The music from Harry Potter gives a very gripping and atmospheric effect. The recognizable theme sound track from the movie (Hedwig's Theme) captures much of the general air of mystery and wonder that a child like Harry would feel in becoming part of a world filled with wizards, witches and magic. Listen to a high-pitched mystical melody with the orchestral string instruments playing the harmony. The harmonies are mostly really long notes which help give the atmospheric effect. The higher-pitched instruments play fast melodies adding to the idea of rushing and add to the fast paced mood of the film.

During less tense scenes John Williams uses long high-pitched sounds, a thinner texture and he tries to give it a more 'at ease' sort of feeling but at the same time he is able to convey that something big is going to happen soon. He does this by adding silence between notes. During the more tense scenes Williams creates a thick texture, using clashing chords and increases the tempo and volume dramatically.