

## **The Firebird Finale by Igor Stravinsky**

### PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

*Written by Rachel Leach*

#### *Background*

**The composer: Igor Stravinsky (1882 - 1971)**

- Russian composer
- One of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century
- First became famous in Paris as a ballet composer

**The music: The Firebird Finale**

- Written in 1911
- Firebird ballet tells the story of an evil king, a prince, a princess turned to stone and the magical firebird who saves them all
- The finale comes at the very end of the ballet as the world returns to normal after the death of the evil king

#### *Learning outcomes*

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

#### *Curriculum checklist*

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

### *Glossary of music terms used*

<b>Bar</b>	a small section of music that is used to help counting
<b>Coda</b>	another word for ending
<b>Drone</b>	one long continuous sound (usually a low note)
<b>Leitmotif</b>	a short fragment of music used to describe a character, place, emotion etc
<b>Ostinato</b>	a repeating pattern
<b>Pitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
<b>Tune</b>	another word for a melody. A linear line of notes that makes a satisfying musical shape
<b>Unpitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers woodblocks, tambourine etc.

### *Resources required*

- Paper and writing materials
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments that your children might be learning

*This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.*

## The six lessons at a glance

### Lesson 1:

Activities: Listen and describe a piece of music  
Watch the film and discuss  
Create artwork inspired by the music

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians

### Lesson 2:

Activities: Create a frozen soundscape

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

### Lesson 3:

Activities: Learn to sing and play a tune  
Use technical terminology where appropriate

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

### Lesson 4:

Activities: Listen and analyse Stravinsky's music  
Create new versions of Stravinsky's tune

Curriculum link: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression  
Develop an understanding of the history of music

## **Lesson 5:**

Activities: Structure ideas to tell a narrative  
Create a coda  
Use technical terminology

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

## **Lesson 6:**

Activities: Create character 'signature tunes' (Leitmotifs)  
Structure musical ideas to tell a narrative  
Perform in front of an audience

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

# LESSON 1

## Watching and listening

### 1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on a fantastic piece of music by a composer called Igor Stravinsky and watch the introductory film with Claudia Winkleman

### 2. Tell your children the story of the Firebird. Here is a simplified version –

- Evil King Kastchei has turned his whole garden to stone. Everything is stone – trees, grass, plants, animals and even a beautiful princess. Only the magical firebird is alive and free to fly around but not leave.
- Prince Ivan wanders into the garden looking for the princess. He befriends the firebird.
- King Kastchei arrives and fights with the Prince
- The firebird stops King Kastchei by crushing the golden egg that contains his soul. As the king slowly dies, everything in the garden turns back to life. The prince and princess are reunited and finally, the firebird is free to fly away.

### 3. Listening task

Give out A4 sheets of paper to everyone and ask them to place them landscape on their desks. Ask them to gently fold the paper to create three roughly even columns and write 1, 2, 3 at the top of each column. Like this –

1	2	3
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*To save time, you might want to prepare this ahead of the lesson! You could even draw a template of a garden in each column for your children decorate (see below)*

- ### 4. Explain
- that you are going to play a short extract from a recording of Firebird Finale to your class. Your children's task is to draw something from King Katschei's frozen garden in column 1 as they listen. The first extract is from when the garden is still frozen in stone so they could draw a bare tree, a wilted plant, a frozen animal or even a princess statue. They can draw as many things as they like in the column but they will only have a short amount of time to do so.

When everyone is ready, play the **beginning** of the Finale to about **0'35** (stop when the harp and strings begin).

*This task might work better if you play a recording without the images. At this stage in the project, seeing the orchestra is too distracting!*

5. **Repeat this activity for column 2.** Explain that in the music has moved on and is now describing the garden beginning to turn back to life. Ask your class to draw the same images as in column 1 but now slightly altered as the garden begins to 'melt'. Play **0'40 – 1'40** for this bit of the task.
6. **Repeat this activity for column 3,** starting the recording at about **1'40** and playing to the **end**. Explain that the garden is now in full bloom. Can your children draw the same images but now glowing and thriving in the sunlight?
7. **Look at your children's resulting artwork** and have a class discussion about what they have done and the music that inspired them.
8. **End your session** by watching the full orchestral performance of the finale and having a quick chat about what they have seen on screen.

## LESSON 2

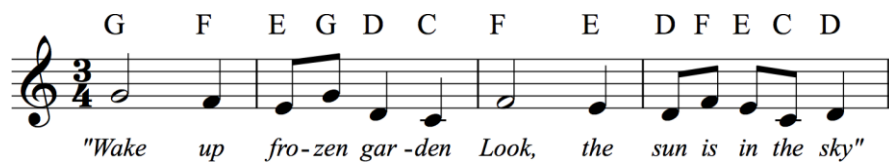
### Frozen garden

1. **Warm-up.** Begin with your class sitting in a large circle. Pass a clap around the circle and ask for other suggestions of sounds and gestures to pass around.
2. **Explain** that you are going to make a short music piece to describe King Kastchei's frozen garden. Remind your class of the story of the firebird and the fact that the garden is frozen in stone. Ask for suggestions of 'cold' sounds and gestures to pass around the circle. You are looking for things such as a shiver, rubbing hands together to keep warm, saying 'brrrr!' etc.
3. **Explore your instrument collection.** Ask volunteers to come forward and make a cold, shivering or frozen sound on an instrument and slowly work towards everyone having an instrument and making quiet frozen sounds. If your children are learning orchestral instruments try to include them in the music making too and if you run out of instruments have some children continue using body percussion.
4. **Appoint a conductor.** His or her job is to signal to individual players and create a frozen soundscape. There are some rules for this. Your soundscape should be:
  - quiet
  - constantly shimmering (i.e. no gaps in sound or silence)
  - ... and everyone should have a turn to play at least once
5. **Try this several times** with several different conductors and make tweaks and changes until you have the perfect frozen soundscape piece. Can you perform it without a conductor?
6. **End the session** with a short performance of your piece and write down what you have done and what instruments were used.

## LESSON 3

### Stravinsky's tune

1. **Warm up.** Begin in a circle again and recap your frozen soundscape either with or without instruments. Also remind your class of the listening task they did in lesson 1.
2. Give out the artwork they made and **listen / watch the full orchestral performance again.** As you listen ask your children if they can spot what is similar about the three sections of music they drew as well as what is different. Hopefully they will spot that Stravinsky uses the same tune over and over again but changes everything around it (i.e. the accompaniment, instrumentation, mood and timing all changes).
3. **Teach** Stravinsky's tune to the class. Here is a simplified version –



4. **Create a full class version of this tune.** Here are some tips –
  - Play the melody on xylos/ orchestral instruments
  - Sing with actions
  - Add a strong drum beat on the first note of each bar
  - Think about how many times to repeat the tune, how to start and stop and what to do in between repeats.

*If will greatly help future lessons if your children stick to the same instrument they used in lesson 2*

5. **Finish** this lesson with a performance of your class version of the tune and remember to carefully keep a record of what you have done



## LESSON 4

### From frozen to defrosted!

1. **Warm up.** Begin this lesson by playing through your class version of Stravinsky's tune. Remind the class that Stravinsky uses the same tune throughout his finale but keeps changing it as the garden 'defrosts'.
2. Listen to the finale once more and ask your children to make a list of the things that Stravinsky does to alter his tune. Write these on the board. You should have something like this -
  - a) Adds a shimmer (drone, rumble) from strings
  - b) Adds slow, upward footsteps
  - c) Takes away the rhythm so the tune becomes a series of even notes
  - d) Puts big bangs at start of each phrase
  - e) Adds an unpredictable bassline – two notes played back and forth
  - f) Makes it very loud with bangs, swoops, cymbal crashes
3. **Split your class into small working groups.** Ask each group to make their own version of the tune, they can use ideas from the list you have made on the board or the list above. They may even like to try something new (i.e. try the tune as a round, with a new ostinato added, as a waltz!)
4. **Bring the class back together** and listen to each group separately. Challenge your children to place the groups in an order so that, like in Stravinsky's version, the music gradually gets more exciting as it goes along.
5. **Practise** cycling through the groups using this new order. Aim to go from group to group without a gap. Challenge your class to add the frozen soundscape from lesson 2 onto the beginning.
6. **Finally,** write down what you have done and who plays what.

# LESSON 5

## Coda

- 1. Warm-up.** Sitting in a circle again, remind your children of everything they have worked on so far off-instruments. Make a diagram on the board of the order of your finale piece.
- 2. Get the instruments out** and split back in your working groups. Ask each group to put their piece back together from last lesson before putting the whole piece back in order (with the frozen soundscape on the beginning).
- 3. Listen or watch** the very ending of the full orchestral performance – about 2'45 to the end. **Explain** that this is called the coda (coda just means ending). As they just heard Stravinsky's coda uses the following ingredients –
  - i. Drone (one long, unchanging note)
  - ii. Chords moving up and down (played by the brass)
  - iii. Long shimmer/ rumble
  - iv. A massive crescendo (getting louder)
  - v. A big bang
- 4. Challenge your children**, working in their groups or together as a full class, to create their own massive coda to end their piece. A good note to base this on is C.
- 5. When this is achieved**, add it onto the end of your existing piece and practice until everyone is confident and the piece is ready for performance.

## LESSON 6

### Storytime!

- 1. Warm up.** Begin the lesson with a quick focusing warm-up like pass the clap and then talk through the piece you made last lesson. It should look something like this:
  - Frozen soundscape
  - Tune – group by group getting louder (warmer) with each group
  - Coda – big note, rumbles, chords, big bang etc
- 2. Get the instruments out** and put your piece back together.
- 3. Explain** that you are going to perform the piece to an audience but first you have to explain a little about the story. Remind them of the story of Firebird and particularly the four main characters:
  - **Prince Ivan**
  - **Princess**
  - **King Kastchei**
  - **Firebird**
- 4. Split into four groups** and ask each group to make a sort 'signature tune' for one character. In opera such 'signature tunes' would be known as 'leitmotifs'.

Here are some rules, borrowed from Stravinsky, to help -

- **Prince Ivan** – creeps around slowly and softly. (listen to Firebird Suite: Introduction)
- **Princess** – she is sad. Her music goes down and up using next-door notes only (listen to Firebird Suite: Round of the Princesses)
- **King Kastchei** - big bangs, loud and rhythmic (listen to Firebird Suite: Infernal Dance)
- **Firebird** – fast, flickering, lots of short notes (listen to Firebird Suite: Variation of the Firebird)

Encourage your children to work quickly on this and make just a short, snippet of music for each.

*If your class are struggling to remember everything musically, do this activity without instruments. Simply ask each group to 'become' their character – stand and pose like him/ her and say one or two sentences to move the story forward*

5. **Hear the groups separately** and then ask your class to put the characters into an order that helps to tell the story. Add a tiny bit of narration, like this -

'Prince Ivan crept into a frozen garden'

'He saw a statue of a beautiful princess, she looked sad'

'King Kastchei came along, he was angry'

'The firebird saved the day'

'The garden came back to life'

Prince Ivan music

Princess music

King Kastchei music

Firebird music

FINALE (everyone)

6. **Practise** your piece in order with the narration **and finally**, invite another class in to be your audience and perform your piece to them.

# TAKING IT FURTHER

## Cross-curricular activities

- **ARTWORK:** Stravinsky's original ballets featured costumes and sets by the best artists of early 20th century - people like Pablo Picasso! Use the music of the Firebird Suite to inspire costume designs
- **LISTENING:** Listen to (or watch online) Stravinsky's follow-up ballet, Petrushka which tells the story of a puppet at a fair.
- **LITERACY:** Re-write a fairy story or legend for the stage. Can you turn a favourite story into a play, a film or even a ballet?

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