

Let's Listen 1

Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy

*The pieces for these lessons are taken from the collection **100 Popular Classics**, a set of 5 CDs, issued by Castle Communication, Catalogue number MBS CD 517, available from HMV. However, the pieces featured are also available on many other recordings, and may already be in your school.*

Listening and Responding to Music is one of the three core strands of the Revised Music Curriculum – the other two are *Performing* and *Composing*. *Listening and Responding* is a highly enjoyable activity, and is a very useful point from which to explore the revised music curriculum.

Conscious of expense, the author has selected a cost effective series of CDs, and the initial lessons will be based on pieces from this collection.

Resources

CD Player

100 Popular Classics, set of 5 CDs, issued by Castle Communications.

Catalogue number MBS CD 517 Available from HMV, or from any good music store. However, the pieces to be featured are also available on many other recordings, and may in fact already be in your school. If there is a music library attached to your local library, you may be able to borrow the recordings.

Before you begin - A message to the teacher

- The focus in these lessons will be on enjoyment. We hope that you and your pupils will enjoy the featured pieces
- There is a difference between active listening and passive hearing. You will be asking your pupils to listen actively
- Children may respond in many ways, for example, by talking about the music, by moving, by painting and drawing, by writing, by song singing, by playing percussion instruments, by simple compositions. Vary the responses to keep the children interested, and to deepen their understanding of the music
- It is better to use short extracts at first

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- As long as the extract is not too long, any piece can be suitable for any class - what varies is the response required of the children.
- Play each piece a number of times over the school year, perhaps varying the response required of the children, to keep them interested
- Be very familiar with the music yourself, before you introduce it to the children. Listen to it several times beforehand, unless you are already familiar with it.
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Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy

Composer : Peter Tchaikovsky 1840 – 1893, Russia

Introductory investigation

If there is a piano in school, take the children to see it. Remove the front cover, and show them the strings inside. When a key is pressed, a hammer moves forward, and strikes a string. This is what gives the sound.

If you have access to a glockenspiel (metal keys) or xylophone (wooden keys), show the children how this is played. The keys are arranged like a piano, but you strike them with a beater. There are no strings involved.

Introduction to the music

Peter Tchaikovsky was a very clever composer, who lived in Russia. He composed lots of ballet music. Once, Mr Tchaikovsky went on a trip to Paris, and when he was there, he saw and heard a new instrument which had just been invented - a celeste. On the outside, it looks rather like a small piano, but inside it is quite different. Instead of the strings that are inside a piano, there are little bars, rather like a glockenspiel, which are hit by the hammers. So this instrument is more related to a glockenspiel than it is to a piano! Tchaikovsky was very excited by the sound of this new instrument, and he wanted to be the first person to introduce it to the Russian people. He arranged to have a celeste brought secretly to Russia, and he was very careful that the other Russian composers didn't get to know about it. He composed a piece of music for the celeste – the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, which became part of the ballet *The Nutcracker* that he was working on at the time. The high sweet magical sound of the celeste is just right to paint the picture of the Sugar Plum Fairy dancing gracefully. Let's listen. First you will hear some plucked strings, and then the celeste will begin.....

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Class listens to the music. After first hearing, the teacher leads a discussion on what has been heard – the high tinkling sound of the celeste, and the sound of the orchestra which accompanies it. Ask the children if they thought the music was magical and fairy like. As a contrast, play a tiny part of *St. John's Night on the Bare Mountain* which is on the same CD – does this piece sound graceful and fairy like – no it is loud, scary and threatening. Now play the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* again, and allow the children to move to the music, if they wish.

Extensions and developments. – (Choose one or more of these activities depending on the age and interests of your class).

- Colour the picture while listening to the music. Choose colours that reflect the mood of the music
- Paint a picture suggested by the music
- Senior classes could research the story of *The Nutcracker*. Your local library may have this in storybook form
- Senior classes may enjoy using the Internet to find out more about the composer, Peter Tchaikovsky.
- If you can obtain a video of the ballet, *The Nutcracker*, show a little excerpt. The children will really enjoy seeing the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, and hearing the music, which should now be familiar to them
- Tell middle and senior classes that the celeste now belongs to the percussion family of the orchestra. The other instrument families are the strings, the woodwind, and the brass. The percussion family includes all the instruments that are hit or banged, which is why the celeste belongs there. The other melodic instruments in the percussion family are the xylophone (wooden keys) and glockenspiel (metal key) Children could collect pictures of the percussion family, and make a display.
- Older children may also enjoy identifying some other instruments on this piece. They will especially listen for plucked strings, and the low mellow sound of the bass clarinet. Can they hear when the celeste plays rippling chords, to suggest the fairy twirling around?
- Above all, enjoy the music

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