

Let's Listen 11

The pieces for these lessons are taken from the collection ***Classics for Children***, a set of 2 CDs, issued by Decca, Catalogue number 458 592-2, available from Virgin records. However, the pieces featured are also available on many other recordings, and may already be in your school.

Cuckoo in the Depths of the Woods from Carnival of the Animals

Composer: Camille Saint-Saens, 1835-1921

Background Information for the Teacher

Camille Saint-Saens was born in Paris. He was a child prodigy, who excelled in Latin, archaeology, botany, astronomy, as well as music. His greatest love, however, was music, and he excelled as a piano player and composer, creating his first composition at the age of three years, and giving his first public piano recital at the age of eight! In adult life he worked as a composer and performer, and travelled widely giving concerts and talks. His private life was not happy, and his marriage broke up shortly after his two young sons died within a few weeks of each other.

Saint-Saens wrote ***Carnival of the Animals*** while on holiday in Austria in 1886. He referred to it as a 'grand zoological fantasy.' It is a suite, or collection of musical pieces, each portraying a different animal. It includes ***Elephant, Swan, Wild Asses, Tortoises, Kangaroos, Cuckoo in the Woods***, and ***Aquarium***. Saint-Saens was afraid that the composition would affect his reputation as a serious composer, so he would not allow it to be publicly performed during his lifetime. Nowadays, it is Saint-Saens' most popular work.

When using Carnival of the Animals with children, it is best to use individual pieces from the suite, rather than expecting the children to concentrate on the entire suite. In previous editions of InTouch, we explored ***Elephant*** and ***Fossils***. This time, we are going to listen and respond to ***Cuckoo in the Depth of the Woods***.

Cukoo in the Depths of the Woods from Carnival of the Animals
This article is one of a series that first appeared in INTO InTouch magazine in 2002-2003 written by Mary Ryng

Possible presentation for Middle Classes

- Talk to the class about the cuckoo. Discuss its nesting habits, and its distinctive call
- Teacher tells the class that they are going to listen to a piece of music, which is called **Cuckoo**. Ask what they expect to hear. They may suggest that they will hear the cuckoo's call. Tell them to listen very carefully to see if they are correct.
- Play the recording through. The children will be delighted to hear the cuckoo's call
- Tell the children that the clarinet plays the cuckoo's call, while the two pianos represent the dark mysterious woods. The clarinet is usually positioned at a distance from the pianos, to suggest the elusive quality of the cuckoo. The real title of the piece is ***The Cuckoo in the Depths of the Woods***.
- Play the piece again, and tell the children that the piano chords represent the trees and the woods. Ask them to count how many times they hear the cuckoo's call – (Answer: 21 times in all)
- Discuss the instruments heard – this is an excellent piece to focus on the sound of the piano and the clarinet.
- The recording should be played often in the following days/weeks. Children could be asked to respond in different ways, e.g. by counting the cuckoo calls, pointing to the instruments on an instrument chart, painting the picture it evokes in their imaginations.
- Compare this piece with ***Elephant***, also from ***Carnival of the Animals***

Possible presentation for Junior and Senior classes

- The class teacher is the best person to modify above for his/her class.
- Younger children may like to move to the music – walk slowly through the mysterious woods, and stop every time they hear the cuckoo's call
- They could hold up a picture of a cuckoo each time the cuckoo calls

- They may like to discuss the sound of the piano and the clarinet.
- Senior classes may like to devise their own pictorial scores to represent what is happening in the music – pictures of footprints among trees to represent walking in the wood, and pictures of the cuckoo each time it calls
- They will be able to decide what instrument families the clarinet belongs to – woodwind.
- The most important thing is to enjoy the music and to make it a pleasurable experience for the children.