

Dukas' 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice': Exploring Sound Colours

In this unit, we will be looking at the different sounds, or colours, that instruments make. To help with this, we will focus on a tone poem written by the French composer Paul Dukas in 1897 called 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice'.

'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' is based on a poem of the same name by the acclaimed 18th century German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and was made famous for the modern audience by appearing as one of the sections in Walt Disney's 'Fantasia'.

It tells the story of a grumpy, elderly wizard (or sorcerer) and his young apprentice (or student) and the mischief he causes when the sorcerer leaves his workshop. The moral of the story is do not mess with things you do not yet understand!

Its main theme is famously played by the bassoon, a member of the woodwind section of the orchestra.



The Bassoon

The Story



The poem begins with an old sorcerer departing his workshop, leaving his apprentice with chores to perform. Tired of fetching bucketfuls of water by hand, the apprentice enchants a broom to do the work for him, using magic in which he is not fully trained. Happy with a job well done, the apprentice drifts off to sleep. However, when he wakes, the floor is awash with water, and the apprentice realises that he cannot stop the broom because he does not know the magic required to do so. The apprentice smashes the broom to pieces with an axe, but each of the pieces becomes a whole broom that takes up a pail and continues fetching water, now at twice the speed. At this increased pace, the entire room quickly begins to flood. When all seems lost, the old sorcerer returns and quickly breaks the spell. The poem concludes with the old sorcerer's statement that only a master should invoke such powerful spirits.

A-B-A Form

A



The first part is roughly where the apprentice watches the sorcerer perform magic spells in awe. This is the introduction to the music. This section is quiet, uneasy and has a sense of foreboding.

B



In the second part, the main part, the apprentice performs magic which he not capable of controlling. At first everything goes swimmingly, but then the magic gets out of control.

A



In the final part, the sorcerer returns and puts everything back to the way it was only for the apprentice to return to his tasks.

Dynamics



f

Loud



p

Quiet

Tempo

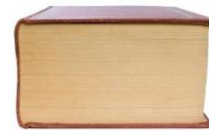
This is the musical word for speed. Is the music...



or



Texture



A thick texture is when lots of people are playing.



A thin texture is when only a few people are playing.

Pulse and Rhythm



Pulse is the heartbeat of the music.



Rhythm is when long and short notes are joined together.

Musical Notes



Crotchet = 1 beat



Crotchet rest = 1 beat of silence



Minim = 2 beats



Semibreve = 4 beats



1 quaver = $\frac{1}{2}$ beat
2 quavers = 1 full beat



Quaver rest = $\frac{1}{2}$ beat of silence

Pitch

Pitch is how high or low a sound is.



Smaller instruments tend to have a higher pitch.



Flute

Larger instruments tend to have a lower pitch.



Bassoon

Ostinato

An ostinato is a pattern that repeats.

