

Mother Goose Suite: Saxophone Middle and High School

Lesson 1: "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"

Objective:

Develop smooth, legato phrasing, dynamic control, and expressiveness while interpreting the dreamlike, serene character of the piece.

Piano Duet: [▶ Martha Argerich and Lahav Shani - Ravel: Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant](#)

Orchestra: [▶ Marin Alsop -- Ravel: Mother Goose, I. Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant \(Le...](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Analysis:**

Play *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* and discuss the piece's character. What emotions does it evoke? How does the music convey calmness, sleep, or beauty? Have students listen for the smooth, flowing melody and subtle dynamic changes.

- **Discussion of Style:**

Explain what a *pavane* is — a slow, stately dance from the Renaissance era — and how Ravel adapted this style into a dreamy, orchestral piece.

- Watch a segment of dancers performing a pavane.

[▶ Pavane - Renaissance - Dance - Belle qui tiens ma vie -Thoinot Arbeau \(15...](#)

- Discuss the dancer's movements, tempo, and mood. Listen to a segment of *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* again. Discuss similarities/differences - tempo, mood.

- **Legato and Tone Control:**

Focus on smooth, connected phrasing. Practice long, flowing notes with proper air support to achieve a consistent, seamless tone. Encourage students to avoid abrupt articulation between notes, keeping the sound fluid and connected.

- **Dynamic Shaping:**

Discuss how Ravel uses dynamics to shape the music. Have students practice crescendos and decrescendos, playing softly and gradually building up in volume and then fading back down. Focus on keeping the dynamics even and smooth, reflecting the peaceful mood of the piece.

- **Expressive Phrasing:**

Encourage students to shape phrases with subtle variations in tone and dynamics, as though telling a story. Use visual imagery (e.g., imagining the "slow awakening" of Sleeping Beauty) to help students feel the music and phrase more expressively.


Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* at home, focusing on the fluidity of the melody and how the dynamics shape the music. Encourage them to imagine the peaceful, dreamy setting of the piece.



Lesson 2: "Tom Thumb"

Objective:

Explore and analyze how Ravel portrays Tom Thumb wandering through the forest. Listen for and identify instruments used for “wandering” and for Tom Thumb’s melody.

Piano Duet:  Martha Argerich and Pablo Galdo play Ravel Petit Poucet

Orchestra: [Tom Thumb, National Philharmonic Orchestra, Charles Gerhardt](#)

- **Listening and Exploration:** Play *Tom Thumb* for the students (linked above). Ask the student to describe what they hear.
 - Is the music fast, slow, quiet, smooth (legato), choppy (staccato) loud, busy, calm, sad, happy? What do they hear that helps them to know how Tom Thumb is feeling? How does the music create the image of Tom wandering through the forest?
 - Listen to the first section orchestra performance linked above.
 - Point out or ask if they can hear the 2 layer texture - wandering, legato, continuous eighth note accompaniment and melody.
 - Ask them to name the instrument family that plays the accompaniment/wandering theme (strings)
 - Listen to the first section (0:00 - 1:45) Focus on the melody and how the melody is passed from one instrument to another.
 - Ask the student to indicate when a new instrument takes over the melody.
 - Ask the student if they can identify the instruments, and help as needed: oboe, English horn, clarinet, flute, strings.
 - If they are not familiar with the English horn, show these videos or assign for them to watch at home:
 -  What does an English horn sound like? (Ode to Joy)
 -  Oboe vs. English Horn with RPO musicians
- Listen for the birds in the second section of the orchestra performance (1:46-2:35). Can they hear the bird sounds? Can they name the instruments playing the bird sounds? (piccolo, flute, violin harmonics and trills)

- **Listening Assignment:**

Ask students to listen to Tom Thumb and imagine themselves wandering through the woods trying to find their way home, or wandering through their house trying to find something they lost (a favorite toy, book, or maybe their hat). How would this make them feel?

Lesson 3: "Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas"

Objective:

Explore the exotic, bell-like quality of the piece, focusing on tone quality, delicate phrasing, and air control.

Piano Duet: [▶ Ravel's "Ma mère l'Oye": Martha Argerich and Daniel Barenboim | Carnegie ...](#)

Orchestra: [Ravel: Mother Goose Suite: III. The Empress of the Pagodas | Fabien Gabel](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Imagery:**

Play *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* and discuss the imagery it evokes. What kind of place does the music represent? Encourage students to imagine a magical, peaceful temple or garden with the sound of bells.

- **Exploring the Pentatonic Scale:**

Introduce the pentatonic scale and explain its use in the piece to create an exotic sound. Have students play through the pentatonic scale.

- Compare the major pentascale with the pentatonic scale - have students listen to examples of both, then try to identify examples played by the teacher.
- Ask students to improvise with the pentatonic scale. They can play solo or improvise over an accompaniment played by the teacher.
- Discuss the influence of pentatonic scales and how they create a sense of "foreignness" or mysticism.
 - Explain that the pentatonic scale is commonly used in Asian music, and we often associate music based on this scale with Asian cultures. During Ravel's time people did not travel widely or have the opportunity to experience art and music from distant cultures. Composers responded to non-Western music they heard in Paris at the World Exposition of 1889 - Moorish melodies in Spanish music, Javanese and Chinese orchestras. They embraced the rhythms, scales, and instrumental colors, offering enchanting contrasts to the familiar sounds of Western music.

- **High Register and Light Tone:**

Focus on playing in the upper register of the saxophone. Have students practice long

notes in the higher range, focusing on maintaining a clean, bell-like tone. Encourage them to use lighter air support and adjust their embouchure to achieve a bright, clear sound.

- **Tone Control and Light Articulation:**

Discuss how to create a light, bell-like sound with controlled air and subtle articulation. Have students practice playing delicately, using light tonguing and focusing on maintaining a smooth, yet bright sound throughout the piece.

- **Exotic Sound Exploration:**

Introduce the idea of using pentatonic scales to evoke an exotic feeling. Have students play through a simple pentatonic scale, experimenting with sound and air control to capture the mysterious and delicate nature of the piece.

Listening Assignment:

Encourage students to listen to *Laideronette* at home, imagining the sounds of bells in a serene, magical setting. They should focus on the clarity and brightness of the higher register and how it contributes to the exotic quality of the music.

Lesson 4: "The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast"

Objective:

Develop contrasting phrasing and dynamics to reflect the characters of Beauty and the Beast, using expressive tone and varied articulation.

Piano Duet: [▶ Argerich and Galdo play Ma mère l'oye \(IV\) RAVEL](#)

Orchestra: [▶ Live from Royal Festival Hall: RAVEL Mother Goose – Conversations between ...](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Character Exploration:**

Play *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* and have students identify the two contrasting themes: the gentle theme of Beauty and the more intense theme of the Beast. Ask students how the music represents these characters.

- **Contrasting Phrasing and Articulation:**

Focus on contrasting the smooth, lyrical phrasing for Beauty's theme with the more dramatic, aggressive phrasing for the Beast's theme. Have students experiment with using different tonguing techniques (light tonguing for Beauty's theme and more forceful tonguing for the Beast's).

- **Dynamic Range and Expression:**
Work on dynamic contrasts, with Beauty's theme being played softly (piano) and smoothly, while the Beast's theme should be louder (forte) and more intense. Practice building tension in the Beast's theme with a gradual crescendo and playing Beauty's theme with a controlled, delicate diminuendo.
- **Emotional Interpretation:**
Encourage students to embody the characters while they play. For Beauty, ask them to imagine calm, grace, and serenity. For the Beast, encourage them to focus on strength, intensity, and drama. Experiment with body posture to enhance the musical expression of each character.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* at home, noting the differences in phrasing, dynamics, and articulation between the two themes. Have them reflect on how each character is represented in the music.

Lesson 5: "The Fairy Garden"

Objective:

Create a magical, flowing atmosphere through smooth, delicate phrasing, dynamic control, and smooth transitions between phrases.

Piano Duet: [▶ Argerich and Galdo play Ma mère l'oye \(IV\) RAVEL](#)

Orchestra: [▶ Live from Royal Festival Hall: RAVEL Mother Goose – Conversations between ...](#)

Activities:

- **Listening & Imagery:**
Play *The Fairy Garden* and ask students to describe the emotions and images it evokes. What kind of environment do they imagine while listening to this music? Encourage them to think of a magical, serene place, such as a fairy garden, and let that image guide their playing.
- **Smooth, Flowing Phrasing:**
Focus on long, flowing phrases. Have students practice playing smoothly between notes, maintaining consistent air support throughout each phrase. Encourage them to avoid any breaks or interruptions in the sound to create a continuous, flowing line.
- **Dynamic Control and Expressiveness:**
Teach students how to gradually build and release tension within phrases, using

dynamic contrasts and subtle changes in tone. Practice playing softly (pianissimo), gradually building up in volume (crescendo), and then gently fading back down (decrescendo).

- **Imaginative Visualization:**

Encourage students to play with their eyes closed to help them focus on creating a smooth, flowing sound. Ask them to imagine walking through a peaceful, magical garden, letting the music reflect the serenity and beauty of the environment.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Fairy Garden* at home, imagining themselves in a tranquil, magical setting. Focus on the gentle, flowing nature of the piece, as well as the dynamic changes throughout.
