

Mother Goose Suite Lesson Plan: Strings Age 10-16

Lesson 1: "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"

Objective:

Develop legato bowing, dynamic contrast, and expressiveness, emphasizing a smooth, controlled sound to reflect the peaceful and dream-like 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 mood of the piece. Ask students to listen for dynamic changes (from soft to loud and back to soft) and to describe the character of the music. What emotions or images does it evoke? How does the music portray the idea of sleep or beauty?

- **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 Bowing & Smooth Sound:**

Focus on creating a smooth, continuous legato bow stroke. Start with long bows on open strings, ensuring that each note flows seamlessly into the next without any breaks or unevenness. Challenge students to maintain control while using the entire bow for a rich, even sound.

- **Dynamic Control:**

Emphasize the importance of subtle dynamic shifts. Have students practice playing with slow crescendos (getting louder) and decrescendos (getting softer), keeping the sound smooth and even. Discuss the importance of gradual dynamic changes to maintain the dreamy quality of the piece.

- **Expressive Phrasing:**

Ask students to experiment with phrasing. Teach them how to create musical phrases

that feel like a gentle, flowing sentence. Guide them to subtly shape each phrase with the bow to create a sense of rise and fall in the music.


Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* at home, paying attention to how the dynamics change throughout the piece. Encourage them to visualize the peaceful imagery and the fluid, flowing nature of the music.

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?
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Lesson 3: "Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas"

Objective:

Explore the exotic, bell-like sounds of the piece, develop control over higher notes, and focus on delicate bowing techniques.

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 *Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas* and discuss the imagery it evokes. Ask students to imagine the setting of a magical garden or temple. What kind of sounds might they hear in such a place? How does the music reflect the beauty and delicacy of this character?
- **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 on the violin or cello, focusing on smooth, even bowing.
 - 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 String Practice & Bell-Like Sound:**

Introduce students to the higher strings (A and E strings), helping them develop a smooth, delicate tone on these strings. Focus on achieving a clear, bell-like sound. Have students practice playing on the higher strings, using light bow strokes to produce a clean, bright tone.

- **Bow Control & Lightness:**

Encourage students to maintain a light, gentle touch while playing. Have them practice bowing in a relaxed manner, using light strokes to produce a sound that evokes the tinkling of bells or the gentleness of a temple's atmosphere.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *Laideronette* at home and imagine they are in an exotic, magical place. Focus on the bell-like quality of the music and the smoothness of the higher notes.

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

Objective:

Develop contrasting bowing techniques, dynamic control, and expressiveness to reflect the characters of Beauty and the Beast.

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 contrasting characters of Beauty and the Beast in the music. How does the music change when Beauty plays, versus when the Beast plays? What do these changes tell us about the characters?

- **Contrasting Bowing:**

Teach students how to contrast Beauty's gentle, smooth bow strokes with the Beast's more forceful, dramatic strokes. Practice these contrasting techniques by dividing the piece into sections: Beauty's theme with light, flowing bow strokes, and the Beast's

theme with a heavier, more intense bowing.

- **Dynamic Shifts & Drama:**

Emphasize dynamic changes in the piece. Have students practice playing Beauty's theme softly (piano) and with gentle phrasing. For the Beast's theme, they should use a stronger bow stroke and a louder dynamic (forte). Discuss how dynamic contrasts can reflect the characters' emotions.

- **Role-Playing Through Music:**

Encourage students to "become" Beauty or the Beast. Ask them to use their body language and posture to reflect the character they are playing. When playing Beauty's theme, they should stand or sit gracefully and play with a smooth, gentle sound; when playing the Beast's theme, they should use more dramatic, forceful movements.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Conversation of Beauty and the Beast* at home, paying attention to how the character of Beauty contrasts with the Beast. They should listen for the differences in dynamics, bow strokes, and the overall mood of each theme.

Lesson 5: "The Fairy Garden"

Objective:

Refine delicate bowing techniques and dynamic control, and express a dreamy, magical atmosphere with the music.

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 what kind of place the music evokes. How does the music feel? Is it peaceful and calm, or does it have a sense of wonder? Encourage them to think about a magical, serene place, like a fairy garden.

- **Soft Bowing & Smooth Sound:**

Have students practice creating a soft, flowing sound with the bow. Focus on smooth, continuous bow strokes, playing with a light touch to produce a soft, dreamy tone. Practice playing softly (pianissimo) and gradually getting louder (crescendo) and then fading back to softness (decrescendo).

- **Expressive Phrasing:**

Discuss how to shape musical phrases to create a sense of flow and dreaminess. Encourage students to play phrases as if they are floating or gently moving through a garden. Help them create subtle variations in volume and tone to enhance the expressive quality of the piece.

- **Imaginative Visualization:**

Have students imagine themselves walking slowly through a beautiful, magical garden. Encourage them to play with their eyes closed to focus on producing a smooth, soft sound, matching the peaceful mood of the piece.

Listening Assignment:

Ask students to listen to *The Fairy Garden* at home, imagining themselves in a fairy garden. Encourage them to pay attention to the smooth, flowing nature of the music and to listen for any changes in dynamics and tone that make the music feel magical and serene.
