

Class 5 : Music and Make-Believe

Intro: *Fantasia*

1. Class title 1 (*L'Enfant* and *Fantasia*)
2. Section title A (posters for *Fantasia*)

In 1940, the year I was born, **Walt Disney** (1901–66) made a feature-length cartoon movie consisting entirely of pieces from the classical repertoire conducted by **Leopold Stokowski**, the legendary director of the Philadelphia Orchestra. He called it *Fantasia*. Since Disney was doing exactly what we are after in this course—using music as an escape to other mental states—I thought I'd cue the three major sections of this class to clips from the film. Here they are.

3. Disney: clips from *Fantasia*
4. — stills from the above

The snatches of music you have just heard—you'll hear them again—come from the last movement of the *Pastoral Symphony* (1808) by **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770–1827), a snatch of *Night on Bald Mountain* (1867) by **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839–81) and part of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1897) by **Paul Dukas** (1865–1935). They were in chronological order.

5. The same, with section titles

Disney appealed to the general public rather than connoisseurs, and there was no curbing his taste for cute, but these three do work rather well in announcing my main sections, all of which involve seeing the world in ways contrary to factual observation. The Beethoven will lead us to a short section on the **Idealization of the Countryside**. The Mussorgsky is one of many examples of the **Romantic Imagination** run wild. And the Dukas, seen by him as a fairy-tale involving animate objects, is handled by Disney in terms of humanized animals—either way, types of **Make-Believe**. I added a fourth section on musicals.

A. Idyll/Ideal

6. Section title A (circular temple at Stourhead)

Let's look at Disney's Beethoven again. What is the imagery you see in it, and what on earth possessed him to come up with it?

7. Disney: *Fantasia*, opening of the last movement of the Beethoven
8. — stills from the above and Stourhead

So what was the imagery? All **classical mythology**, right? You get Bacchus, little Pegasuses, Centaurs, and that abomination that he called **Centaurettes**, complete with bras! As I say, he could be terminally cute. But why? I think he realized that Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* was an idealization of the countryside, and he thought back to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, when a taste for idealized landscape developed. You can hear it in the *Four Seasons* (1725) of **Antonio Vivaldi** (1678–1741), and you can see it in those 18th-century gardens, such as this at **Stourhead** in Wiltshire, built in imitation of the classical landscapes painted by **Poussin** and others.

9. Vivaldi: "Autumn" from *The Four Seasons*, opening

10. Beethoven in the Wienerwald

But Beethoven does not seem to be writing that kind of idealization at all. Here he is in the countryside around Vienna, the *Wienerwald*, and here is another movement of the *Pastoral*. It is played by an English group called the **Aurora Orchestra**, one of whose features is that not just the conductor, **Nicholas Collon**, but the entire orchestra plays from memory. I am playing the ending of the slow movement, "By the Brook." Three questions: Is Beethoven idealizing the countryside? If his view is not classical, then what? And why?

11. Beethoven: *Pastoral Symphony*, end of 2nd movement

12. Beethoven in the Wienerwald (repeat)

What did you think? Disney's centaurs and centaurettes were completely misplaced, for there is nothing classical about this kind of idealization; we are already looking towards the romantic era. But if not Ideal, it is still an **idyll**, the aural equivalent of a picture postcard. And remember that Beethoven was already losing his hearing; it was at **Heiligenstadt**, in the Vienna Woods, that he wrote his famous *Testament*, coming to terms with this. In that light, I find the bird songs with which the movement ends especially moving. The higher pitches are the first to go, as I have discovered for myself. Beethoven would never hear these birds again in nature; they existed only in his sketchbooks and score.

13. Beethoven loses his hearing

14. Schubert: *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*

Classical poets and 17th-century artists not only idealized the countryside, they idealized the lives of the shepherds who worked in it, seeing a simplicity that verged on perfection by being so close to nature. The 19th-century Romantics had a similar view of peasant life. Here is the closing movement of a song by **Franz Schubert** (1797–1828) called *The Shepherd on the Rock*. It is written for piano, and a solo clarinet representing the shepherd's pipe. I have shown this before in at least voice, one other course, but cannot get too much of the commitment of these three young artists in a Cologne cellar.

15. Schubert: *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, final movement

16. Scene from *Giselle*

The story of *Giselle*, the 1841 ballet by **Adolphe Adam** (1803–56) also involves an idealization of the countryside. The spoiled hero **Albrecht**, bored with life at court, disguises himself as a simple woodcutter and drops in on the nearest village where he meets the pretty peasant girl **Giselle**. Of course

she falls for him, and when his proper-princess fiancée turns up to corral him back for the wedding, Giselle goes mad. And being somewhat fragile, she dies in his arms. Here is the first entrance of the *corps-de-ballet*, in a dance whose main purpose is to establish the idyllic simplicity of the environment. I'll cut directly from that to the opening of Act II, which takes place at night, by Giselle's grave.

17. Adam: *Giselle*, scene from Act I

18. Adam: *Giselle*, opening of Act II

B. Imagination Run Wild

19. Section title B (Mussorgsky: *Night on Bald Mountain*)

The **Mussorgsky** music we heard in *Fantasia* at the start, and also just now, comes from his tone poem *Night on Bald Mountain*. It is one of a number of works by Romantic composers in the middle of the 19th century to depict *Walpurgisnacht*, when the spirits of the dead emerge from their graves. If they are conjured up by living creatures who join in the wild orgy, it would be called a *Witches' Sabbath*. **Adam** is already moving in this direction in the second act of *Giselle*, where the *Wilis*, or the ghosts of maidens who have died before their marriage, collect to punish Albrecht by forcing him to dance to death

20. Berlioz (black and white)

This is as far from classical idealization as you could imagine, but it continues the fascination with depicting a make-believe world of the imagination rather than reality. And for many Romantic artists in all media, the landscape that truly fascinated them was to be found inside their own minds—stimulated as often as not by the taking of the opiate laudanum. One such artist was the French composer **Hector Berlioz** (1803–69), the interior of whose mind was a highly colored as they come.

21. A glimpse into the mind of Hector Berlioz

I am only going to play one work, the *Symphonie Fantastique* of Berlioz (1831), because I want you to hear several movements. He described it as an autobiographical portrait of an artist's inner life, in the ultimately failed pursuit of a woman who is represented by a tune—the *idée fixe*—that appears in each of the five movements. The work is clearly modeled on Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, also in five movements, although these come in a different order. Berlioz also has a scene by the brook in the countryside, and this also ends in passages for solo woodwind instruments. Only these are not birds, but the shepherds' **alpenhorn**, which began the movement with a lively duet with a distant partner, but now calls out in vein, while thunder is heard in the background. I will go on to play the last two movements complete. It is another memorized performance by the **Aurora Orchestra**, this time with theatrical effects, and an actor, **Matthew Baynton**, linking the movements. I'll let them take it on from here.

22. Berlioz: *Symphonie Fantastique*, breakdown

23. Berlioz: *Symphonie Fantastique*, last two movements

24. Class title 2 (Inside the Artist's Mind)

C. Aspects of Make-Believe

25. Section title C (Disney still)

Of all the snippets from *Fantasia* that I played, I think *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* works best, because it is a fantasy story anyway, and you don't have to attach images to music that was never intended to contain them. Actually, it was the start of the whole movie. Disney wanted something that would revive the waning popularity of Mickey Mouse; he came up with the idea of portraying him as the Sorcerer's Apprentice, but the project got too big for a mere short, so he added half a dozen other pieces as well. As we know, the Apprentice unleashes more than he can control. Here, from later in the movie, is his attempt to regain control of the situation—which turns into an even greater calamity than before!

26. Disney: *Fantasia*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, continued

In *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Disney engages in two different kinds of make-believe: using animals in place of people, and animating normally inanimate objects. My original title slide for this class featured a shot from **Andrew Lloyd Webber's** *CATS*, but I find I don't have time for it. Instead, I will show both kinds of animation—things and living creatures—in a single piece: the 1925 fantasy opera, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (roughly “The Child and the Enchantments,” but it is never translated) by **Maurice Ravel** (1875–1937). It is a longish clip, almost 10 minutes, but showing so much in one work leaves room for me to end with similarly substantial selections from two Broadway musicals of the mid-century.

27. Ravel: *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, title

L'enfant et les sortilèges is a cautionary tale by **Colette** (1873–1954), who also wrote *Gigi*. To punish her **Child** (a boy, but sung by a woman) for his wanton destruction and neglected homework, his **Mother** locks him in his room. He is defiant, until the objects he has damaged—the clock, an armchair, a teapot and cup—come to life and reprove him. We will pick this up in a production from Glyndebourne in 2012, at the point where the figures in his **Arithmetic** textbook come to life and torment him. This is followed by a scene with two **Cats**, who open the doors to the garden, where the Boy is similarly reproved by **Trees** on which he has carved his name, and a **Dragonfly** whose mate he has killed. Note Ravel's masterly portrayal of the sounds the nighttime garden, created partly by orchestral effects such as the slide-whistle, but mainly by layer upon layer of wordless voices.

28. Ravel: *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, *Arithmetic*, *Cats*, and *Garden*

D. The Heather on the Hill

29. Section title D (*Brigadoon*)

I suppose any visit to Broadway involves some suspension of disbelief and is therefore an escape. But I want to end with two mid-century musicals, where the fantasy and/or escape elements are particularly

strong. They come ten years apart: *Brigadoon* by **Alan Jay Lerner** (1918–86) and **Frederick Loewe** (1901–88) in 1947, and *The Music Man* by **Meredith Willson** (1902–84) in 1957, though I will be playing each in the Hollywood movies made later.

30. Highland mists

I might have included *Brigadoon* in my class about escapes to far-away places, as it is about two American tourists visiting Scotland. But this is no ordinary visit. On their first night there, they see a village magically appearing out of the mist. This is Brigadoon, which only comes to life for a single day every hundred years. The two friends, **Tommy (Gene Kelly)** and **Jack (Van Heflin)** go to explore, and soon each has found a local girl. Tommy's attraction to **Fiona (Cyd Charisse)** is the more serious, as he tells her when they go gather "Heather on the Hill." I'll play the opening, and then cut to Tommy's song.

31. Lerner & Loewe: *Brigadoon*, opening

32. Lerner & Loewe: *Brigadoon*, "The Heather on the Hill"

33. — still from the above

This song is followed by a dance, but much as I like Gene Kelly, I find this one rather stilted, and will move on. Later in the act, the village elder **Mr. Lundie** explains the conditions of the miracle. Brigadoon will continue to appear every 100 years, provided that none of its inhabitants leave. Tommy asks if a stranger can come to stay. "Only if he loves somebody in Brigadoon so much that he is prepared to give up everything else for her." But Tommy is not quite ready; he has a real-life career and fiancée in New York, and at the end of the day he bids farewell to Fiona and sadly leaves. Fast forward a few months to a New York restaurant. Tommy's fiancée chatters on about their upcoming wedding and the house she hopes he'll buy, but every other word she says triggers a memory of Fiona and Brigadoon. He realizes that he *has* to go back. Jack tells him that Brigadoon will no longer be there. "But at least I'll see where it used to be," he replies. The mists gather once more. He meets Mr. Lundie again, who realizes that he indeed is prepared to give everything up for love. The mists part, and he is reunited with Fiona.

34. Lerner & Loewe: *Brigadoon*, New York scene

35. Lerner & Loewe: *Brigadoon*, ending

36. — still from the above

The New York restaurant scene is almost 9 minutes long, and most other movie musicals would have omitted it or cut it to shreds. But *Brigadoon* is making an important point: that Tommy Albright, successful though he may be, is looking for escape. And even if that escape is to a fantasy, perhaps believing it it enough will make it real.

37. Robert Preston as *The Music Man* (film 1962)

Another musical where believing in fantasy makes it real is Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*. We know from the outset that the title character, **Harold Hill**, is a con man. He makes his living by selling band instruments and uniforms, purporting to train a band to keep the young folk out of trouble, but skipping town before this is put to the test. Here is his opening pitch to the good folk of River City, Iowa. **Robert Preston**, who originated the role both on stage and screen, has charisma by the bucketful!

38. Willson: *The Music Man*, “Trouble”

39. Shirley Jones and Robert Preston in *The Music Man*

Harold Hill has a few successes. He persuades the town’s board of supervisors that they are really a barbershop quartet, and he gets a lot of the parents to sign the kids up for his band, which he proposes to teach by what he calls “The Think Method”—basically think you can do it, and you’ll find you can. But he fails to get out of town in time, largely because he has fallen in love with the town librarian **Marian Paroo (Shirley Jones)**. A part-time piano teacher and professional researcher, Marian soon realizes that Harold is a fake. But she sees something more important in him: a positive spirit that has transformed the entire town. So when he is arrested at the end and is threatened with being tarred and feathered, she alone speaks up for him. Now his think method is put to the test. And surprisingly, it works! The kids don’t play very well, but in their parents’ eyes they are all John Philip Sousas. And when they march outside, they turn into professionals. The 76 tombones become real. Fantasy? A metaphor? Escapism? You decide!

40. Willson: *The Music Man*, final sequence

41. Class title 3 (Fantasy? Escapism? ...or Something Else?)