

Musical Escapes



5. Music and Make-Believe

December 2, 2025

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THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE WISH TO BELIEVE that the world is not just the sum of the mundane facts around us, and music can help us do that. Walt Disney, in fact, made the film *Fantasia* in 1940 to invite us to see images in music, whether or not the composers had them in mind.

Disney's imagery may not coincide with ours today, but his movie still offers a useful guide to the various kinds of make-believe that we can find in music: idealization of the outer world, expression of the visions of the inner one, humanizing animals or animating everyday objects, and—inherent in the movie musical genre itself—the recourse to musical fiction not only to provide escape but also to explore it. *rb.*

Intro: Fantasia

Three fragments from *Fantasia*, offered as a index to the remainder of the class. All are available at greater length online.

Disney: *Fantasia* (1940), excerpts from Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*, and Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (Various artists; Leopold Stokowski, c.)

A. Idyll/Ideal

Four works that take an idealized view of the country or the lives of the people who live there.

Vivaldi: *The Four Seasons* (1725), "Autumn," opening (Janine Janson, Amsterdam Sinfonietta), with view of Stourhead

Beethoven: *Symphony #6, "Pastoral"* (1808), end of slow movement (Aurora Orchestra, Nicholas Collon, c.)

Schubert: *The Shepherd on the Rock* (1825), third movement. (Anna Lucia Richter, *sop.*; Blaž Šparovec, *clt.*; Nicholas Rimmer, *pno.*)

Adam: *Giselle* (1842 ballet by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot), excerpts (Royal Ballet, Lobdon; Alina Cojucaru, *Giselle*; Johan Kobborg, *Albrecht*)

B. The Imagination Run Wild

No longer contenting themselves with depictions of the outside world, Romantic composers increasingly concerned themselves with the stuff of legend, the supernatural, and the visions in their own minds.

Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique* (1831), end of movement 3 (“Scene in the Fields”), plus the complete movements 4 (“March to the Scaffold”) and 5 (“Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath”). Aurora Orchestra, Nicholas Collon, *conductor*, Matthew Baynton, *speaker*.

C. Aspects of Make-Believe

Disney’s treatment of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* involves two kinds of make-believe: treating animals as humans, and animating everyday objects. We look at an opera that does both.

Ravel: *L’enfant et les sortilèges* (1925), Arithmetic, Cats, and Garden. (Glyndebourne 2012; Laurent Pelly, *dir.*; Kazushi Ono, *cond.*)

D. The Heather on the Hill

Although not part of the original breakdown from *Fantasia*, we finish with two mid-century movie musicals, both of which end with the acceptance of fantasy as a form of escape.

Lerner & Loewe: *Brigadoon* (1947), excerpts (film 1954; Gene Kelly, Cyd Charisse; Vincente Minnelli, *dir.*)

Willson: *The Music Man* (1957), excerpts (film 1964; Robert Preston, Shirley Jones; Morton DaCosta, *dir.*)

Adolphe **Adam** (1803–56, *French composer*), Ludwig van **Beethoven** (1770–1827, *German composer*), Hector **Berlioz** (1803–69, *French composer*), **Colette** (Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, 1873–1954, *French writer*), Walt **Disney** (1901–66, *American filmmaker*), Paul **Dukas** (1865–1935, *French composer*), Alan Jay **Lerner** (1918–86, *American lyricist*), Frederick **Loewe** (1901–88, *German-American composer*), Modest **Mussorgsky** (1839–81, *Russian composer*), Maurice **Ravel** (1875–1895, *French composer*), Franz **Schubert** (1797–1828, *Austrian composer*), Antonio **Vivaldi** (1678–1741, *Italian composer*), Meredith **Willson** (1902–84, *American lyricist and composer*)

The course website is www.brunyate.com/MusicalEscapes
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