
ROMAN RIVER MUSIC FESTIVAL

2014 Education Programme

The Soldier's Tale

Teachers' Resource Material

Project Outline

This project is built around a piece of music theatre composed in 1918 in the aftermath of the First World War by the Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky. We'll be finding out about the story and the music, learning a song to sing during the performance, and creating our own versions of key moments from the tale.

This brochure contains everything that you need to know about the project and includes all the resources you need, to be ready for the performance on 26th September.

In addition to this material, you'll receive a visit from a music leader and a player from the performance. This music workshop will help to prepare you to get the most out of the show.

Before the Show

There are only two things you need to do before the show:

1. Familiarise yourselves with the story (see below)
2. Learn "Be Careful" – we'll be singing this song as part of the performance.

If you're feeling inspired, we've added some suggestions for extension activities which we hope will enhance your experience but which are definitely extras.

Story Outline

Joseph, a soldier is on the way back from war. He takes out his beloved violin and begins to play. Instantly, a strange character appears (the Devil disguised as an old man) and asks Joseph to sell him the fiddle. When Joseph refuses, the Devil offers him a book, which contains untold wealth. Still reluctant to part with his beloved violin, the Devil finally convinces him to swap.

But Joseph needs to be taught how to use the book, and the Devil needs to learn how to play the violin, so the soldier agrees to go home with the stranger for three days.

After the three days are up, Joseph finally returns home to his fiancée. But when he arrives, he sees that she is already married to another man, and has had children with him. To his horror, he realises that three years – not three days – have passed and the residents of the town think he's a ghost.

Furious, Joseph challenges the Devil and accuses him of playing a trick. Instead of apologising, the Devil reminds Joseph about the book and teaches him how to use it to predict the future and amass a huge amount of wealth. But before long, Joseph realises that all this material wealth means nothing and he only wants the things he had before – the simple things everyone else has.

The Devil reappears, now dressed as an old peddler woman. She offers Joseph a range of goods with no reaction and finally brings out the soldier's old violin. Immediately Joseph perks up and he tries to play the fiddle, but the violin makes no sound. In a fit of rage, Joseph hurls the violin away and tears up the book.

He leaves town with nothing and travels to a strange land where he hears the tale of a King's sick daughter. Whoever can raise her from her bed will be given her hand in marriage. Determined to give it a go, he heads for the palace. But when he gets there, the Devil is waiting, disguised as a virtuoso violinist. Joseph realises that as long as he has the Devil's money, he will never be free.

So he challenges the Devil to a card game, and cunningly loses all his money to the Devil (who is desperate to win). Finally, the Devil falls and Joseph is free. He takes the violin and plays dance music, which revives the princess. Furious, the Devil arrives but the soldier realises he can control him by playing the violin. He forces the Devil to dance himself into exhaustion.

And so the soldier and princess marry. But the Devil warns them that if they leave this new land and go back to the soldier's village, he will take Joseph's soul. Finally, Joseph can resist no longer and, desperate to see his mother one last time, he travels back. But as soon as he crosses the frontier, the Devil has won and the soldier loses everything. He is to be the Devil's slave for all eternity.

Notes:

The Game:

This is a moving and listening game. Start by getting the group to walk around the room, starting when you first clap your hands, and standing still when you clap them again. Then start introducing different pieces of music as a cue to do an action or tell a bit of the story. Switch between tracks to see how quickly the group can identify the different pieces of music. Here are the tracks and the activities, which match them:

- Track 2 You are a soldier on your way home from war. You stop by a stream to play your violin [air violin exercise].
- Track 17 Dance and twirl around the room as the Devil, gleeful and evil, hatching a plan!
- Track 4 The soldier realises he's been tricked. Working in groups of three, two people create a happy scene of marriage whilst the soldier buries his head in his hands in despair.
- Track 8 Royal March – you're at the palace and marching around luxurious rooms. You can decide to be a king, a lord or lady or a servant
- Track 11 Waltz around the room – you're the princess, awoken from her slumber, or you're the soldier playing the violin (you can do either one, boy or girl)
- Track 15 In threes, walk forwards. When "The soldier" crosses the frontier, "The Princess" is dragged back by "The Devil" and the soldier follows.

Notes:

Computer Research

Here is a range of different areas to explore on the internet:

1. Excerpt from animated film of the story:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-Uk_rAGgnQ

2. A full version with acting and dance [N.B. I have watched excerpts from this but not the whole thing]:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RewFQpEY55w>

3. Short biography of Stravinsky:

<http://www.classicsforkids.com/composers/bio.asp?id=56>

4. Longer biography of Stravinsky:

<http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/igor-stravinsky-325.php>

5. Website with footage of Stravinsky conducting:

<http://kidsmusiccorner.co.uk/composers/classical/stravinsky/>

6. BBC film exploring the music of Soldier's Tale [N.B. I haven't been able to watch this, so check it before you show it to the class!!]

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00hhplm>

Notes:

Composition Tasks

Song writing

Create a song for the soldier to sing when he realises he's been tricked by the Devil. There are several ways into song writing. Perhaps the easiest is to pick a song that everyone knows and then write new words, which fit with this song.

Slightly more involved (but lots more fun) is to make a brand new song. I usually start with words. Create between four and six lines – they don't have to rhyme or have a specific rhythm but they can if you like.

Once you've got your text, start to find the music. If you play the piano or guitar, you might want to play some chords as an accompaniment and then create a melody to fit on top. If not, you could get a small group to create a groove on instruments such as xylophones or glockenspiels – a short pattern of notes, which can be repeated (sometimes called an ostinato). Once this is set up, you can find a melody to fit on top.

Of course you could also create a song with no accompaniment – just the melody.

Instruments

Whether you're using instruments people already play or classroom percussion, start by making sure the group can follow a start and stop sign. Next pick a moment in the story – I'd probably go for the part where the soldier makes the Devil dance until he collapses. Ask the group what the music should sound like – should it be fast or slow, happy or sad, smooth or spiky etc. Start gathering ideas from the group and gradually build up a piece. Think about the structure of the piece – does it gradually build up, instrument by instrument? Are there sections, which repeat?

It's worth having a clear stop sign during this process, as things are certain to get noisy. You might want to use a visual cue (hand in the air etc.) or a sonic one (perhaps a shaking tambourine or something else which might cut through the din).

Notes: