

Meridian Music of the Week!

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Each week ALL our children will be listening to a piece of music as part of our music lessons. We'll be talking about it in class and discussing what we like, what we don't like and what it makes us think about. Parents/carers/family - why not join in and listen for yourself at home! All music is available **free** on YouTube as well as paid services such as iTunes and Spotify.

This week's music...



'The Sorcerer's Apprentice'

by Paul Dukas (1897)

Animation from the Walt Disney movie 'Fantasia' [HERE](#)

Full (better sounding) orchestral version by Moscow City Symphony Orchestra [HERE](#)

Demonstration of ONLY the bassoon section playing [HERE!](#) (play from 1:41 secs)

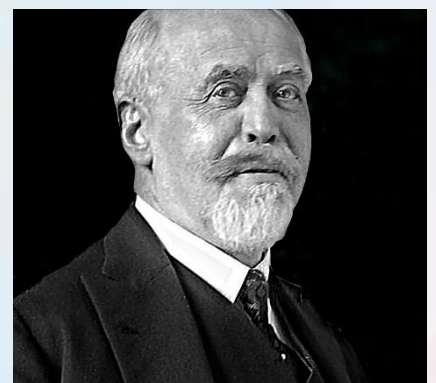
"I've never heard of Paul Dukas!..."

...and neither had I - until a couple of years ago. This week's music - 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' is his only really famous piece of music. And, to be honest, that's mainly because it features in the 1940 Disney film '[Fantasia](#)'. Paul Dukas wasn't just a composer; he was also a music **critic** - which means he wrote about **other** people's music for newspapers and magazines. It seems that Dukas was a bit of an old grump. He never became a famous composer in his own time. Traditional composers **quite** liked him - and the new experimental composers **quite** liked him - but no-one seemed very bothered either way.

Dukas was a French composer and a bit of a perfectionist - and this is why his music isn't very well known. He had an annoying habit of destroying any of his music that he didn't think was good enough - and this means that not much of his music survives today.

It also seems that Dukas didn't like music concert audiences too much either. His last major piece of music was a ballet called 'La Péri' ('The Winged Spirit' or 'Fairy'). It's all about a young Persian prince who travels all over the world searching for a magical flower that will give him immortality (eternal life).

But Dukas' problem was that his ballet started really quietly - and he knew how noisy concert audiences could be while they were getting ready for a concert to start. They were often so busy making a noise finding their seats, saying 'hello' to their friends etc. that they missed the beginning of the music!



Paul Dukas, not looking miserable for a change!

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The opening fanfare from Dukas's ballet 'La Péri'.

So, just to make sure his noisy audience didn't miss anything – he changed the quiet beginning of the ballet by starting with a really loud **fanfare** on the trumpets, trombones and tubas instead. You can hear it [HERE](#). This lasted for just over two minutes – which gave his audience time to settle down before the real music began.

It was a great idea – but Dukas became annoyed when, later on, it seemed that people liked the noisy fanfare more than the rest of the music. In fact, sometimes orchestras performed the fanfare on its **own**!

Dukas' grumpiness also came out after 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' became famous for being in the film 'Fantasia'. You'd think that Dukas would be pleased, wouldn't you? But no. Even then he became irritated because he thought that this one piece of music was now more famous than **he** was! Everyone knew 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' – but no-one knew who Paul Dukas was. What an old misery-guts!

Walt Disney's 'Fantasia'...

In 1940, 'Fantasia' was Walt Disney's most ambitious animated film so far. It was only the third full-length Disney film ever (coming after 'Snow White' and 'Pinocchio') but it was very different from any other film that had ever been made. It featured eight different pieces of classical music, each one with its own animation. It was also the first Disney film to combine animation with live action film (each of the eight sections is introduced by a real-life composer called Deems Taylor) and was the first popular film ever to be played in cinemas in stereo sound.

Interestingly, the whole film was a bit of an accident. Originally, Disney filmed 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' on its own, without the seven other sections. It was simply supposed to be a new, short Mickey Mouse cartoon. But the Disney Studios spent so much money making it, they realised they wouldn't be able to make a profit if they left it as just a short cartoon. So, Walt Disney decided to extend it into a full-length feature film so he could charge audiences more money to watch it! It certainly worked, considering the time when it was made, 'Fantasia' is now the 24th biggest money-making movie of all time in America!



What about the music?...

Well, it's based on a German poem all about a wizard's assistant. When the wizard leaves the assistant alone, he decides to try some magic of his own – but it all goes wrong! Check out the video if you want to see what happens...

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A bassoon player in an orchestra

One of the most interesting things about the music (at least for me) is that it often features an instrument that doesn't usually have the main tune in an orchestral piece – the **bassoon**. We have heard it feature a few times in previous Music of the Week newsletters (especially '[In the Hall of the Mountain King](#)' by Edvard Grieg – which is a bit similar) – but in this music, Dukas uses **four** bassoons to play the main tune. In fact, one of them is a **contrabassoon** – which is like an ordinary bassoon – but even **lower** in **pitch**. It plays an **octave** (eight notes) lower than an ordinary bassoon.

A normal bassoon is usually about 1.35m tall – but it's actually made of a single 'tube' that is bent in half. If you 'unrolled' a bassoon it would actually be 2 and a half metres long! The contrabassoon is even bigger – it's a tube that's bent into **three** – and if you stretched it out it would be **5 and a half metres long!**

They're so heavy that, unlike a bassoon, the contrabassoon is usually stood on a spike on the floor (a little like a cello). You can see and hear four bassoon players talking about the 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' music and their bassoon parts [HERE](#).

So, Paul Dukas may have been a not-very-famous, grumpy composer, but 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' is a great piece of music.



By the way, it was even the influence for an action-fantasy film of the same name in 2010 – starring Nicolas Cage. It's not a brilliant

movie – but it does have some good action sequences. The story is set in New York, but **real** New Yorkers had some problems when they were filming it. One night, they were filming an exciting car chase when the stunt driver of a Ferrari sports car lost control and drove it straight into the front of a pizza restaurant in Times Square! Two pedestrians were injured, one of them because a lamppost fell on top of them. Fortunately, they weren't seriously injured and they carried on filming the scene the following night. I wonder what grumpy Paul Dukas would have thought of that? Probably would have **grumbled** I think...



A contrabassoon

Listen & enjoy...

Mr. Mole

Music Teacher

