THE FIREBIRD (IGOR STRAVINSKY)

Compose a majestic melody

Creative response lesson plan designed by Andrew Smith

Introduction
‘The Firebird’ is the only composition from the ‘Ten Pieces’ repertoire that was originally composed for a ballet. The ballet is based on ‘The Firebird’ from Russian folklore: a mythical creature, the firebird, helps the hero, Prince Ivan, defeat an immortal villain in his quest to free an imprisoned princess. This extract is from the ‘Finale’ and is a celebration of the victory that occurs in the previous section of music. Stravinsky revisits a theme that is heard throughout the ballet to represent the Firebird, and uses it in different ways to create a victorious and majestic ending to the ballet. Pupils can create their own rousing finale inspired by Stravinsky’s Firebird.

Compose a majestic melody
Below is the melody Stravinsky composed for ‘The Firebird’:

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G F E G D C F E D F E C D D G G F E G D C F E D F E C D
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Ask pupils to compose a short melody (using tuned percussion or other instruments) using just notes C, D, E, F and G. Ask them to think about the length of notes: some notes can be longer and some shorter. The tune should be slow so that it can be majestic (a fast tune cannot be played majestically!). Pupils should also think about the note their melody begins and ends on. If they begin and end on a C, the tune will sound complete or finished. If the melody begins on a C but ends on a note other than C, it will sound unfinished.

Add a pedal note
A pedal note is a bass (or low sounding) note that’s held or repeated. The melody above may change but the bass pedal note remains the same. The pedal note creates tension and pulls the harmony back to its root. Sometimes composers use pedal notes in higher registers; these are called inverted pedal points. Pedal notes are usually on either the tonic (first note) or dominant (fifth note) of the scale. So if pupils have composed a melody using C, D, E, F, G, the tonic is C and the dominant is G.

Suggest that pupils add a pedal note, on either C or G, below their melody. The pedal notes need to be the lowest C or G that’s available on the instruments being used.

Perform
Once they have had time to practice their melodies with pedal notes, give pupils the opportunity to perform their majestic melodies in their groups to the rest of the class.

Vocabulary

<table>
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<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>pedal note</td>
<td>the first note of a scale and the note from which the key takes its name</td>
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<tr>
<td>tonic</td>
<td>the fifth degree of a scale (e.g. if the key is F, the 5th note above F is C so the dominant is C)</td>
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