

# *Mother Goose Suite*

**By Maurice Ravel**



# **Resource Pack**

## Mother Goose Suite by Maurice Ravel

Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* was composed in 1908 as a group of five piano duet pieces for Mimi and Jean Godebski, the children of his closest friends. Later in 1911 Ravel re-arranged the piano pieces for orchestra and used them as the basis for a longer ballet.

The original *Mother Goose Suite* was originally made up of five pieces called:

1. *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty in the forest*
2. *Tom Thumb*
3. *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas*
4. *Conversation between Beauty and the Beast*
5. *The Enchanted Garden*

Each piece is based on a well known story from the *Mother Goose Tales* first published in 1697.

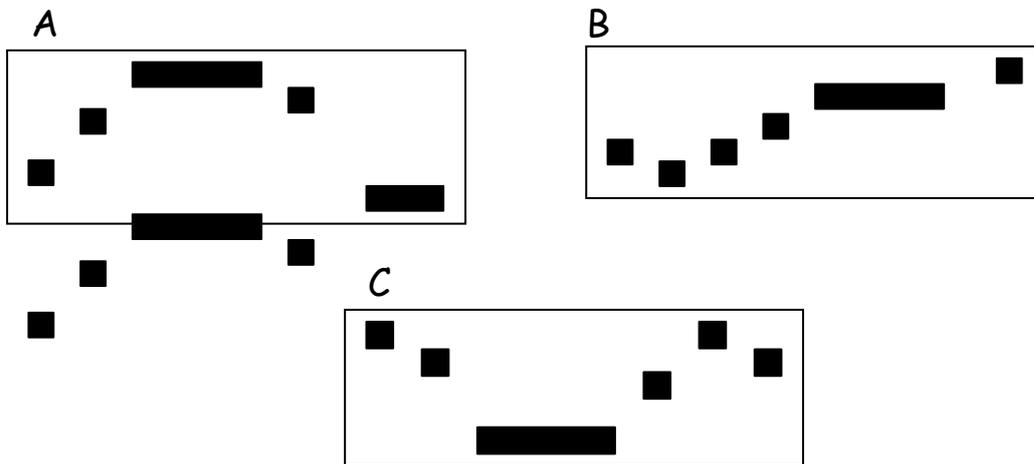


## *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty in the forest*

The *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty* is the first and shortest piece of the *Mother Goose Suite*. Ravel sets the scene with an ancient slow processional dance in which its melodies are played mostly by woodwinds above a quite string and harp accompaniment.

### **Listening to Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty**

The *Pavane* has 3 melodies. The shapes of the beginnings of each melody (the first 5 or 6 notes only) are shown in graphic notation below.



The *Pavane* has 5 sections in which the melody is played by the instruments shown in the table below. Match the melody that the instrument plays with the correct graphic shape, A B or C above, and write its letter name in the right hand column below:

Section	Instrument	Graphic (A, B or C)
1	Flute (low pitch)	
2	Flute (high pitch)	
3	Clarinet	
4	Flute (low pitch)	
5	Violins	

## Tom Thumb

The second movement of *Mother Goose Suite* is about the tiny character Tom Thumb. Tom Thumb and his brothers are abandoned in a forest by his parents who are so poor that they are unable to feed them at home any more. However, Tom has left a trail of pebbles and the boys find their way home. As the family get poorer, the boys are abandoned for a second time in the forest. This time Tom leaves a trail of crumbs to find his way home. Tom is very surprised when he discovers that the birds have eaten them. Lost in the woods the boys are taken in by the wife of an ogre who on his return home vows to eat them. Tom outwits the ogre, tricks him out of all of his valuable possessions and returns with his brother back home. In this piece Ravel describes one scene from the story i.e.:

*'He thought that he could easily find his way home by the bread crumbs that he had dropped along the path, but he was very surprised when he found that he could not find a single crumb .. birds had eaten them.'*



## Listening to *Tom Thumb*

Ravel creates the feeling of Tom's bewilderment and searching during a short introduction played by violins. The introduction is made up of a series of changing melodic patterns which suggest him moving forward and changing direction. The introduction is played tremolo, a shaky effect that suggesting that Tom is really frightened. A gentle melody played on oboe joins in representing gentle Tom and this is passed from one instrument to another. Near the end the woodwind instruments imitate birds chirping and twittering as they gobble up the crumbs left by Tom to show him the way home.

### Activity:

Most music has a regular metre i.e. a number of beats in a bar that repeats throughout e.g. 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4 etc. The first beat is stressed so that the pattern is clear to hear.

Ravel's *Tom Thumb* begins with the following changing pattern:

1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3 4	1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
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1. Speak the numbers out loud keeping a steady pulse. Stress number 1 each time it is spoken.
2. Next, find a space and whilst speaking the numbers walk in time with the numbers. Change direction on each number 1 to create the feeling of being lost and searching for the way home.
3. Play Ravel's 'wandering' accompaniment in pairs, one playing the un-shaded notes, the other playing the shaded notes and then listen to the complete piece.

1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3 4	1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
G A B	D E <sup>b</sup> F	G A B C	D E <sup>b</sup> F	G A B C D	E <sup>b</sup> F G

## Composing 1: Creating a chorus of birds

1. Listen to 3 recordings of a blackbird, chaffinch and collared dove. 

2. Below are three characteristics of the birdsongs each with a graphic symbol that describes the sound. Can you a) add three or more characteristics to the list and b) invent three different graphic shapes to illustrate the sound?

Short sound	●
Repeated short sound	● ● ● ● ●
Raspy sound	

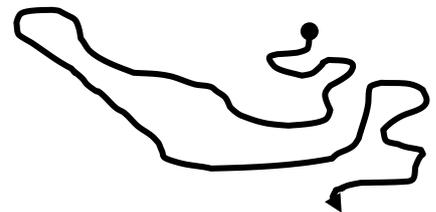
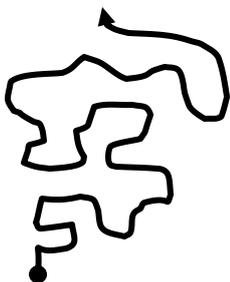
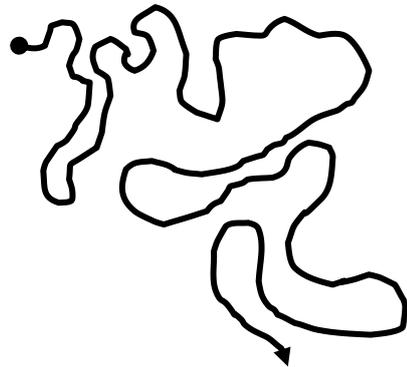
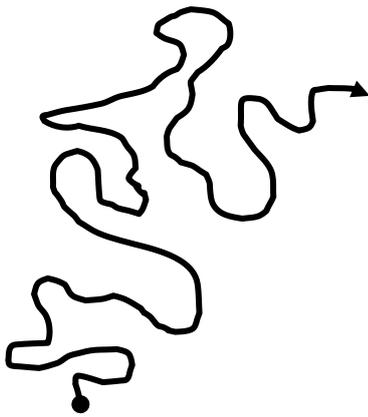
3. Using a pitched instrument compose a short bird song melody that has some of the features above. Notate your melody using the graphic symbols, sequencing them in the order that you used them.

4. In the wild, birds can often be heard responding to each other. In pairs invent a birdsong-like melody as a 'conversation' between two imaginary birds. Use the list of features as a reminder when you are composing your piece.

5. In groups or as a class, listen to each pair and organise your birdsong conversations, to create a longer 'dawn chorus'.

## Tom Thumb Composing 2: Tom's Journey

Compose a piece that describes Tom Thumbs journey through the forest. Use the Journey outlined below to help you organise your composition. Notice that each scene is linked by Tom wandering and searching for home. Compose your own section of wandering music that links each section.



## ***Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas.***

The Pagodas of the title are not temples, but little porcelain figures with grotesque faces and nodding heads, who magically play to their Empress on instruments made from nutshells as she takes her bath. The music has an Oriental feel, resembling gamelan music from the Indonesian islands of Java and Bali. A gamelan is an 'orchestra' of metallophones, glockenspiels, gongs, drums and flutes an.

In the story which inspired Ravel, Laideronnette is a Chinese princess who has been cursed with horrible ugliness, and wanders for years, her only companion an equally ugly green serpent. Eventually they are shipwrecked on the island of the pagodas, little porcelain people who take her as their queen. In the end, she marries the serpent (a handsome prince in disguise ... of course). They both get magical makeovers and return to their former good looking selves. Ravel uses pentatonic melodies to create an oriental feel in this movement. They are played to great effect on flutes, harp, glockenspiel, xylophone and gong.



### ***Listening to Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas***

#### ***Questions:***

1. *Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* is in three sections. The first section consists of 6 shorter sections of music. Using the 6 cards provided, read each statement and place them in the order in which they are heard. Two already have numbers to help you.
2. The Pagodas magically play to their Empress on instruments made from nutshells as she takes a bath. In groups discuss how you think this effect is achieved in the music. Feedback your ideas to the class.

## Learning how Javanese and Balinese gamelan influenced 'Pagodas'

An important influence on Ravel's 'Pagodes' was Balinese and Javanese gamelan music. Ravel first heard gamelan music, aged 14, at the Paris Exhibition in 1889 performed by a visiting group from Java. The sounds of the gamelan inspired new compositions from a whole generation of French composers who were thrilled by its music.

For a practical introduction to the Javanese gamelan follow the link below to Radio 3 Making Tracks online gamelan. This site introduces the gamelan and allows you to perform a part in a Javanese gamelan piece by using the number keys on the computer keyboard (note: the Saron part is the main or 'core' melody).

[www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/makingtracks/gamelan.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/makingtracks/gamelan.shtml)



## Learning about Rindik gamelan

Rindik is the name given to a small Balinese gamelan that consists of two bamboo xylophones and a wooden flute. Follow the link below to hear or view a performance of a rindik piece:

[http://www.sftsunami.org/bamboobali/hear\\_us.shtml](http://www.sftsunami.org/bamboobali/hear_us.shtml)



## Performing a Balinese rindik piece - Tempung ketan

Before learning Tempung ketan, listen to a performance of the piece 

Tempung ketan has two pairs of parts. These are:

- core melodies 1 and 2:
  - Core melody 1 is played by the flute as sustained notes.
  - Core melody 2 is played by a bamboo xylophone. Because the bamboo xylophone cannot sustain notes, it plays the same core melody in repeated notes.
- Kotekan (interlocking). These are decorative parts which feature an important Balinese technique called interlocking melodies i.e. two rhythmic melodies which when played together create a single flourid and intricate melody:
  - Kotekan - lanang (boy) a short repeating melody using G & A
  - Kotekan - wadon (girl) a sort repeating melody using E & D

The 4 melodies of Tempung ketan are based on the Slendro scale. The slendro scale is a pentatonic scale. It is a convention of gamelan music that the notes of the slendro scale are referred to not by letters but by numbers. Musicians learn melodies by numbers (singing them out loud when learning) rather than letters i.e.:

G A B D E   
 1 2 3 5 6

### Tempung ketan

#### Core melody parts

↓  
(kotekan parts start here)

CM1	2		1		2		1		5		6					
CM2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6

CM1	1		6		1		6		1		5					
CM2	1	1	6	6	1	1	6	6	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	5

#### Kotekan parts

lanang	. 1	2 .	1 .	2 1
wadon	6 .	5 6	. 6	5 .



## Composing a Dragon Dance



A feature of many Asian and in particular, Chinese carnival processions is the presence of a dancing dragon like the one pictured below:



Compose a pentatonic Dragon Dance using some or all of the ideas below:

- Use the notes of the pentatonic scale for your piece i.e.:  

C	D	E	G	A
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- Accompany your dance with a drone using the notes C & G. Use the rhythm, *dra-gon dra-gon* for your drone and repeat it throughout.
- Using the following phrases, compose one or two pentatonic ostinati to the rhythm of the descriptive words below.
  - Spi-tting out fire
  - Wings out-stretched
  - Scales on it's back
- Use one of the phrases above as an ostinato rhythm played on unpitched percussion e.g. tambourine or wood block
- Combine the drone, pitched and unpitched ostinati as an accompaniment.
- Finally, compose a longer pentatonic melody that describes the movement of the dragon. Combine this with the ostinati and drone.



## ***Conversation between Beauty and the Beast***

The story of Beauty and the Beast provided Ravel with an opportunity to create music, which describes two very contrasting characters.



### ***Listening to Conversation between Beauty and the Beast***

This piece is has 4 sections:

- 1) music that describes Beauty (followed by a short silence).
- 2) music that describes the Beast.
- 3) A longer section that describes Beauty declaring her love (during which the music of Beauty and the Beast combine)
- 4) The Beast changes into a handsome prince (this follows a short silence)

#### **Questions:**

1. Below are six statements. Listen to the first two sections of the music and sort them into:

- Those which describe the music of Beauty
- Those which describe the music of the Beast

The melody is played on clarinet

The melody is played on a contra-bassoon

The music is flowing

There is an Oom Cha accompaniment

The melody is played at a low pitch

A harp plays throughout this section

The beginning of the melody is accompanied by 4 loud pizzicato notes

A cymbal is heard twice

**Beauty**



**Beast**



2. How does Ravel describe in music the Beast being changed into a handsome Prince towards the end of the piece?

## Composing a piece called Beauty and the Beast

Compose a piece that uses a similar structure as Ravel's Beauty and the Beast i.e.:

1. Music that describes Beauty
2. Music that describes the Beast.
3. Music that describes the Beast changing into a handsome prince

To help you plan your piece, complete the grid below, writing down your ideas for each section of music before you start composing.

	BEAUTY	BEAST
Mood		
Pitch		
Dynamics		
Silence		
Tempo		
Timbre		

## *The Enchanted Garden*

The final movement of the *Mother Goose Suite* describes an enchanted garden. The piece describes a slow procession of the Prince and Princess through the Fairy Godmother's garden and their eventual wedding.



### *Listening to The Enchanted Garden*

**Activity 1:** *Note:* For the following activity, you will need a Thesaurus.

1. Listen to *The Enchanted Garden* and, in pairs, brainstorm three or four words to describe the music. Write them down.
2. Share and compare your words with another pair.
3. In groups of 4, select some of your words to look up in a Thesaurus.
4. Compare your own words with the new words that you have found and add suitable words to your original list
5. In groups, select the words that you feel best describe the music. Write them in the boxes on the sheet provided. Illustrate the *Enchanted Garden* in the spaces around your chosen words.

**Activity 2:**

How does Ravel suggest in the music at the end of *The Enchanted Garden* that the Prince and Princess get married?

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

