



London Symphony Orchestra
LSO Discovery

The Rite of Spring

Igor Stravinsky



Project Pack
Key Stage 3

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About the London Symphony Orchestra & LSO Discovery

The London Symphony Orchestra is widely regarded as one of the world's leading orchestras. It is a resident orchestra at the Barbican Centre in London and regularly tours abroad. Its many activities include LSO Discovery, the energetic and groundbreaking education and community programme, LSO Live, a recording company and exciting work in the field of information technology. Over a century after it was formed, the LSO still attracts the best players, many of whom also have flourishing solo and chamber music careers. The LSO also draws on an enviable roster of soloists and conductors, including Sir Simon Rattle, Valery Gergiev, Daniel Harding and Michael Tilson Thomas.

LSO St Luke's, the UBS and LSO Music Education Centre on Old Street, continues to expand its artistic programme with top artists from diverse musical backgrounds, and LSO Discovery is facilitating music education using new technology, and building stronger links with the local communities. LSO Live is the best-selling orchestral own-label in the world and is regularly No 1 in the classical downloads charts on iTunes. Continuing the Orchestra's long association with film music, the LSO has recorded soundtracks for Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith and Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. The Orchestra also features regularly on radio, TV, computer games and in-flight music programmes.

LSO Discovery has, for the past 20 years, been one of the most important ways for the LSO to realise its mission of 'making the finest possible music available to the widest number of people'. Through workshops, projects and masterclasses, LSO Discovery has become a world leader in taking the music and players of the orchestra into the community, and making the LSO relevant to the lives of thousands of people beyond the concert hall.

“

The most important piece of music of the 20th century

”

- Leonard Bernstein

Introduction

This pack is designed to help you to use Stravinsky's mind-blowing *Rite of Spring* in the classroom as a creative tool and features a step-by-step guide to the piece, creative projects and amazing HD footage of the LSO performing with Sir Simon Rattle.

The Rite of Spring is a piece that changed music forever. Written originally as a ballet score and telling the gruesome story of a girl dancing herself to death, the piece caused an actual riot to erupt amongst its first audience in 1913. The Parisian public had simply never heard anything like it before and were shocked and appalled by the sounds emanating from the orchestra pit. Watching our HD footage will give your students a close-up tour of the orchestra as well as giving them a real feel for what it is like to be surrounded by this groundbreaking music.

There are three projects below which will help you and your students to re-create some of the famous moments from the score using Stravinsky's actual composing techniques and motifs, and utilising whatever resources you have.

Igor Stravinsky (1862 – 1971)

Igor Stravinsky was born in St Petersburg in 1882 into a musical family. His father was a bass singer with the Imperial Opera, but despite this it was expected that young Igor would take up a career in law, and his musical tuition as a boy was patchy as a result. In 1902 Stravinsky met the great Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov, who at that time was one of the most important figures in Russian music. He took an interest in Stravinsky's early compositions and encouraged him to take music more seriously. When Stravinsky's father died, Igor quit his law course and began studying music full time with the aim of becoming a composer.

In 1909 Stravinsky's tiny orchestral overture *Fireworks* was heard by the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev who invited Stravinsky to write for his ballet company in Paris. Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* aimed to bring the best of

Russian ballet – the best dancers, musicians and designers – to the sophisticated Parisian audience. Stravinsky was a very Russian sounding composer but was also very daring and new. He was perfect for Diaghilev's vision and their first collaboration, *The Firebird*, was a tremendous success. They followed it with the equally impressive *Petrushka*, and then came the riotous *Rite of Spring*. After that, Stravinsky was the most talked about composer in the world and very much in demand.

Stravinsky then had a long and varied career. After his time in Paris writing ballet, he switched styles and began to focus on re-creating the sounds of the past in his own unique way (neoclassicism) and later in life he adopted the twelve-tone technique of Arnold Schoenberg (serialism). He really was a musical chameleon! Stravinsky died in New York in 1971 and is regarded as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century.

Rite of Spring (1913)

Whilst writing *The Firebird* Stravinsky claims that he got a fleeting image in his mind of men stood in a circle watching a girl dancing herself to death. He sought out Nicholas Roerich – an artist, set designer and the foremost expert of the day on ancient Russian rituals. Together they sketched out a two-part scenario and named it 'The Great Sacrifice'. Stravinsky took the idea to Diaghilev. He painted a picture of a work unified by the mystery and creative power of spring. It would be composed by Stravinsky and designed by Roerich as a series of choreographed episodes with a ritual sacrifice at the end. Diaghilev approved and appointed his star ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky as choreographer.

Rehearsals began in March 1913, and the orchestra were baffled by what they saw in front of them. Instruments were asked to play at the very extremes of their range, each bar was of a different length with the pages scattered with different time signatures. Each orchestral section clashed with their neighbour and so rehearsals kept stopping while the musicians queried notes or were simply unable to play for laughing. Meanwhile the dancers were dealing with equal difficulties: Nijinsky wanted them to turn their feet inwards rather than out and they were asked to stamp and pound on the stage rather than skip lightly over it. They named it 'anti-ballet.'

The Rite of Spring was first performed at the *Theatre des Champs-Elysees* on 29th May 1913 and this is surely one of the most written about evenings in the history of music. From the opening notes of the bassoon the audience were uneasy and laughter erupted from the stalls. Stravinsky retreated into the wings where he found that the dancers were unable to hear the orchestra due to the shouts and cries of the audience. Nijinsky then started to shout out

counts to the dancers to keep them in time, and the conductor later talked of objects being hurled into the orchestra pit.

By all accounts however, things had calmed down by the second act and the ballet actually received polite applause for all, with a couple of extra curtain calls for the star ballerina and the orchestra. The next day the press was full of stories of a riot and the ticket sales inevitably went up and up. Soon after, the music began to be performed as a concert work without dance and its success grew rapidly.

One hundred years on it still has the ability to shock and inspire, and it will probably continue to do so for hundreds of years to come.

The Orchestra

Stravinsky uses an enormous orchestra of over 100 players for his masterpiece. Look out for:

- ✦ 3 flutes plus piccolo and alto flute
- ✦ 4 oboes plus cor anglais
- ✦ 4 clarinets plus bass
- ✦ 4 bassoons plus contrabassoon

- ✦ 8 French horns plus Wagner tubas
- ✦ 5 trumpets plus bass trumpet
- ✦ 3 trombones
- ✦ 2 tubas

- ✦ 5 timpani plus a huge array of percussion
- ✦ ...and a massive string section

The Scenario – section by section

PART ONE

Name	Music	Story
Introduction	An extremely high (and famous) bassoon solo. Other instruments gradually join in. They reach a peak. Silence. The bassoon again.	Animals, plants and flowers awaken and stretch their heads to the sky. It is the first day of spring.
The Augurs of Spring	A pounding chord with unexpected accents, tiny rhythmic cells, moans, fragments of tune. A constant 'chugging' rhythm.	Girls celebrate the arrival of spring with games and dances. An old woman arrives and predicts the future.
Ritual Abduction	Terrifying! Aggressive shouts from various sections of the orchestra and a constant trembling sound.	The girls enact a mock abduction.
Spring Rounds	A steady, but strangely uneven um-pa-pa-pa pattern interrupted by woodwind solos. A tune grows from quiet and calm to menacing and massive.	The girls perform a circle dance.
Ritual of the Rival Tribes	The orchestra splits into smaller sections each with its own motif and character. The sections battle against one another.	The girls split into two teams and enact a battle.
Arrival of the Sage	The music grows more dissonant (clashy), There's a feeling of grandness - someone is coming.	The Sage, the oldest and wisest one, proceeds to the scene.

The Sage	Several short, low, throbbing chords, followed by a high, ghostly and sustained chord.	The Sage arrives and kisses the earth.
Dance of the Earth	A climatic section in 3 - Stravinsky uses every device he can think of to disguise the feeling of 3: unexpected stabs, cross-rhythms, etc.	Everyone celebrates spring, the Sage, the earth.

PART TWO

Introduction	A complete change of mood. Gloomy alternating chords from the woodwind, tiny upward leaps from the violins and a doom-filled chord. A tune struggles to be heard amongst the texture.	The calm before the storm.
Mystic Circles of the Young Girls	One theme over and over with different orchestrations. Flute solos similar to those at the beginning. A steady um-pa with a beckoning theme on top. This section ends with 11 loud bangs.	The girls play games to decide one of them is to be the Chosen One. A girl is chosen.
Glorification of the Chosen One	Changing time signatures, shifting accents, flourishes, bursts of colour. A patchwork of seemingly random sound.	The chosen girl is honoured with a martial dance.
Evocation of the Ancestors	A simple 2 note, 2 rhythm fanfare-like melody which repeats but is never exactly the same.	The young girls evoke the ancestors.

Ritual Action of the Ancestors	A steady and simple um-pa with short solos on top from cor anglais and wandering alto flute. A melody creeps in on strings and then explodes on French horns.	The chosen one is taken into the care of the elders. Slowly she realises her fate....
Sacrificial Dance	An unpredictable and shocking dance of different bar lengths and uneven rhythms. Then a drop in dynamics. The brass and percussion have aggressive solos. The dance returns. Then another pause with lower instruments playing repeating patterns, percussive overload, brass snarls. The dance returns.... A soft flourish, a pause and a mighty gruesome bang.	The chosen girl dances herself to death.

Classroom Projects

Project 1 – Awakening Spring

The very beginning of Rite is a musical portrayal of the world waking up to spring. Stravinsky uses traditional folk tunes throughout the score with the very opening bassoon theme derived from a Lithuanian song. By using a few simple rules, it's quite easy to create your own version of this famous introduction.

1. Begin by telling your class a little about Rite of Spring and explain that they are going to compose, in groups, their own version of the very opening. Explain further that Stravinsky uses a lot of simple solo tunes to create feeling of the world waking up to spring

2. Here's the opening bassoon tune –



It is made up of just 5 pitches –



And one repeating idea –



Stravinsky changes the rhythm of this idea and shifts it around so that every time you hear it it sounds slightly different

3. Explain this to your class and using the pitches above, ask a volunteer to come forward and create their own fragment of melody. Now ask them to perform it again stressing a different note. And perhaps one more time.... Explain that it's rather like saying the same sentence in three different ways.

By doing this they have just done exactly what Stravinsky does during that very famous opening.

4. Split your class into small working groups. Ask each member of the group to choose five pitches and create a similar small 'cell' of melody and then to experiment with altering the stress of it. Each group member should choose five different pitches, but at least one should try Stravinsky's pitch and one should try using just the black notes to provide some Stravinskian dissonance.

5. When these cells are created, ask your groups to make a piece which layers up the solos gradually to give the feeling of the world waking up slowly and coming alive

6. When this is achieved, hear each group and encourage the class to give constructive feedback. Now challenge the class to put their group pieces together to make one bigger piece but maintaining the same feeling of gradual awakening

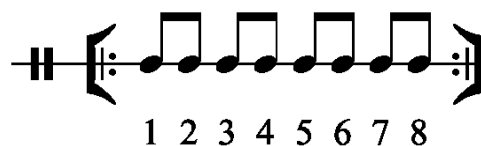
Taking it further

- ♦ Watch the opening of Rite of Spring with your class and ask them about the structure. They may notice that when Stravinsky's piece is full, loud and busy it abruptly stops and after a pause of silence the original bassoon tune is heard alone once more. Choose a tune for this completely solo role at the beginning and end and try, possibly by appointing a conductor, to re-create Stravinsky's shape.
- ♦ Some of Stravinsky's solo 'cells' really jump out of the texture and shout. Encourage the class to choose a couple of their ideas to do this.

Project 2 – The Augurs of Spring

In this extremely famous section a pounding chord is heard with unexpected accents. Stravinsky then creates a modern day rondo with smaller fragmented ideas placed in between occurrences of this pounding chord. A rondo is a structure whereby one idea keeps returning and contrasting 'episodes' are placed in between each 'return'. A – B – A – C – A etc.

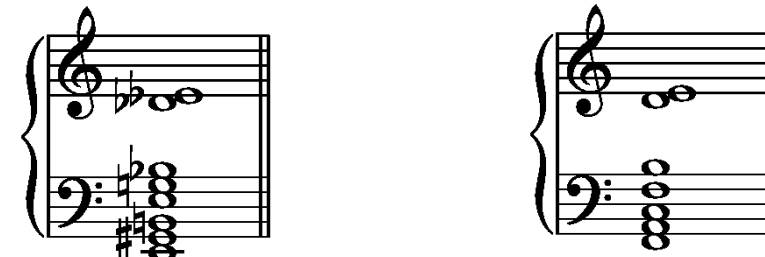
1. Begin by asking your class to tap a quick pulse and count to 8 softly out loud over and over as they do so, like this -



2. Show them the grid below and ask them to count and tap again but to shout out or emphasise the numbers that are large.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

3. Quickly transfer this onto instruments. Stravinsky uses a complex bitonal chord – two major chords, a semitone apart stacked on top of each other. Here's Stravinsky's chord in its original guise and then transposed and simplified –



Create a class version of the grid using one of these chords on whatever instruments you have available (pitched and unpitched) but following these simple rules –

- ♦ Something must play on every count – softly
- ♦ The large numbers must be accented

4. When this is achieved, explain that Stravinsky returns to this idea several times and creates short contrasting 'episodes' in between each occurrence. His 'episodes' use the following tiny ideas –

- a. The 'this way, that way' idea, *used continuously*.



- b. 'Moans' – one note repeated, followed by a fall away, *used sparingly*.



- c. A fragment of melody – a repeated note then a move to next-door notes, down and up or down and up, *used sparingly and different every time*.



(Stravinsky varies the number of notes at the beginning)

6. When this is achieved, hear each group and give feedback. Can you structure the pieces, along with the pounding chord (the grid), into a rondo? (I.e. Pounding chord – Episode 1 – Pounding chord – Episode 2 – Pounding chord etc.)

Watch this section of the piece. Its not as simple as above is it? Can your class identify any other ideas to add to their structure? They might spot the following –

With all of these ideas, be careful that the music doesn't get too confused and chaotic!

Project 3 – *Danse Sacrale*

The *Danse Sacrale* is another rondo with one highly rhythmic section returning four times. This section is made up (on its first appearance) of 35 bars of different length. Here's how to create something similar.

3	2	3	3	4	2	3
3	4	3	3	5	4	3
4	5	2	3	4	3	4
3	2	3	4	2	4	3
2	3	4	2	3	3	4

1, 2, 3
1, 2
1, 2, 3
1, 2, 3
1, 2, 3, 4 etc.

7

This is a great exercise in counting but also in teamwork, score reading and stress! It shows very neatly all the mental processes that occur when performing – the concentration, the lapses of concentration, the effect of stress and how the brain plays tricks on us – we doubt our position in the score as we reach the end.

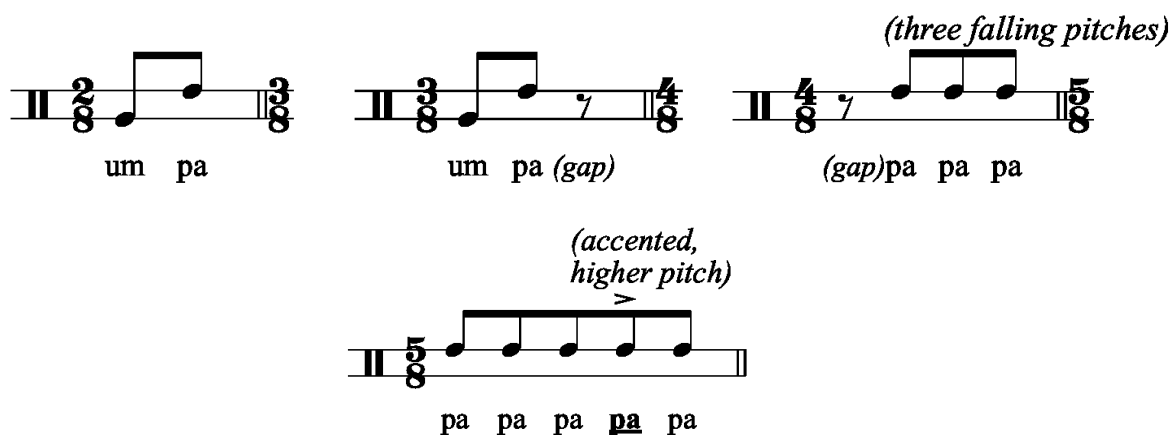
- When this is achieved and neat, explain that each number actually represents a pattern of strong and weak beats (um-pa-pas) as follows



- Using a stamp for the 'um' and a clap or knee tap for the 'pa', challenge your class to perform the grid again.

- At this point you may want to move on to instruments. Select one type of instrument for the strong (um) beat and another for the weaker (pa) beats. If using tuned instruments, try for clashing sounds rather than a nice, neat major chord (try asking everyone to choose a note without discussion and see what you get!)

- Explain that Stravinsky inserts gaps and a melodic hook to each pattern to confuse the sound further. Demonstrate these cells –



- Challenge your class, either as a full group, or in small working teams, to recreate Stravinsky's *Danse Sacrale* using these rules on whatever instruments they have.

Taking it further

Stravinsky creates two episodes to go in between the music you have already created. Watch the *Danse Sacrale* footage and ask your class to make a list of techniques he uses during these episodes. Here are just some of them –

Episode 1

- Soft, seemingly random stabs
- Loud 'shouts' from brass
- Interruptions from timpani
- Stabs grow in confidence
- Swirling strings

Episode 2

- Constant drumming
- Flashes of tam-tam
- A tune on the brass which spreads across the orchestra
- A short burst of the dance
- A climax with 'screams' from all sections
- Create two episodes using these ideas to alternate with your dance

Challenge the class to make their own dance with their own grid – can they organise the 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s into another order that maybe has some logic within it, but remains startling to the listener? Many musicologists have argued that Stravinsky's version includes hidden logic including symmetry... can your students crack the code?

Finally, watch the very ending. It's made up of –

- A gentle upward scale on flutes
- A long pause
- A quick flash of high strings and a mighty bang

Can you add this onto the end of your piece?

Tell your class that Stravinsky remained unhappy with his ending for the rest of his life and tried out several different versions. Perhaps your students can come up with a better solution...