

THE FIREBIRD

QSO
LEARNING
/2016



Queensland Symphony
Orchestra

The Composer – Igor Stravinsky

[Igor Stravinsky Foundation](#)

Igor Stravinsky was born in Russia in 1882 and is one of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century. During his life he lived in France and then America. As a child he studied piano and went on to become a very famous conductor and composer.



As a composer Stravinsky became famous internationally with three ballets, *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913). *The Firebird* was premiered in Paris in 1912. Stravinsky and his family travelled there for the performance. Stravinsky then lived in Paris before deciding moving to Switzerland during the summers and back in Russia during the winters. When World War One (1914) broke out Stravinsky was not able to live in Russia and he and his family did not then return until 1962.

He and his family settled in France and became citizens and during this time Stravinsky struggled financially but still composed despite his wife and daughter dying from tuberculosis and Stravinsky himself catching the disease.

Stravinsky travelling to America during World War Two. He remarried and the family settled in West Hollywood, Los Angeles. He died in New York in 1971.

The Era – Historical Context

Late Romantic/ 20th Century

Stravinsky's works are divided in three main periods.

Russian 1907 – 1919. This was the time that *The Firebird* was composed. Stravinsky explored and used Russian folksongs and studied composition and orchestration with Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The use of folk-songs was a feature of the Romantic period but Stravinsky pushed the ideas of rhythm and harmony into the modern era. [*Symphony in E flat*](#) is an excellent example of this period and was strongly influenced by Rimsky-Korsakov. [*The Rite of Spring*](#) (1913) showed the intensification of rhythm within Stravinsky's compositions.

The Firebird was composed as a ballet in 1910 and Stravinsky revised the “best bits” into a Suite in 1919.

Neoclassical 1920 – 1954. During this time Stravinsky explored the music of J.S. Bach and the Classical Period. [*Pulcinella Suite*](#) is an example of Stravinsky's work using counterpoint like Bach and basing the ballet on an 18th century play but with the more unusual rhythms and harmonies of the 20th century.

Serial 1954 – 1968. In America, Stravinsky explored the twelve-tone technique (dodecaphony) of Arnold Schoenberg. All 12 notes of the chromatic scale are used in tone rows and no note is to have any more importance than any other. This created atonal and asymmetrical rhythmic works. [*Canticum Sacrum*](#) is an example of a tone row composition.

The Background of *The Firebird*

The Firebird is one of the *Ballet Russes* (Russian Ballet) created by Serge Diaghilev and was the first of Diaghilev's ballets to have an original score (music) composed for it.

The story of Koschei the Immortal and the Firebird combines a traditional Russian story with a popular children's poem *A Winter's Journey*.

*And in my dreams I see myself on a wolf's back
Riding along a forest path
To do battle with a sorcerer-tsar
In that land where a princess sits under lock and key,
Pining behind massive walls.
There gardens surround a palace all of glass;
There Firebirds sing by night
And peck at golden fruit.*

Stravinsky was only 28 when he agreed to compose the original music for the ballet and this was one of his first commissions (job) as a composer. The ballet was a great success with critics and the public and made Stravinsky well known around the world.

This led immediately, to commissions for the other ballets *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring* and his career as a composer was born.

Firebird Suite – The Story

Discover the story and the music of [The Firebird](#) with Gerard Schwarz, American Conductor.

Prince Ivan is the hero of the story. He is traveling and accidentally arrives at the castle of Kaschei the Immortal. Kaschei is immortal (never will die) because his soul is kept in a magic egg hidden in a casket.

While in the meadow outside of the castle he hears a beautiful sound and discovers the Firebird. He captures the bird but the Firebird begs for her life by offering to help him if ever he is in need. She offers him an enchanted feather which he can use to summon her.

Ivan meets thirteen princesses at the castle and falls in love with one of them. Ivan confronts Kaschei but they start fighting and Kaschei sends his monsters in to turn everyone to stone and kill Prince Ivan.

Now in trouble, Prince Ivan summons the Firebird. She arrives and casts a spell over the monsters making them dance until they can dance no more and they fall asleep.

While they are asleep, The Firebird shows Prince Ivan where the magic egg is kept. He destroys it and Kaschei's magical spell is broken.

All the people, including the princesses wake up and are freed from the evil spells and the castle and Kaschei disappears.

Prince Ivan marries his true love, the princess, and everyone lives happily ever after.

The Form - Suite

A Suite is a musical work consisting of several shorter pieces which would be linked thematically. Each piece is complete in itself or played together to complete the story.

In the Baroque era (1600 – 1760) a Suite usually consisted of a series of dance movements. Later an Overture was added to showcase the orchestra or instrumental ensemble performing.

During the Classical period (1730 – 1820) the symphony and sonata became a more popular form for composers to use.

The suite re-emerged in the Romantic period (1780 – 1910) and has continued to the present day as it was a perfect vehicle to combine works based on a story or play, a theme, an original idea or to combine pieces of music used in ballets or films.

Suite based on a theme:	The Planets Suite	Gustav Holst
Suite based on a play, opera or ballet:	Nutcracker Suite L'Arlésienne Suite	Peter Tchaikovsky Georges Bizet
Suite based on a film:	Star Wars Suite	John Williams
Suite based on an original concept:	Holberg Suite	Edvard Grieg

Firebird Suite

[The Firebird](#)

1. Introduction
2. The Princesses' Khorovod (Round Dance)
3. Infernal Dance of King Kaschei
4. Berceuse (Lullaby)
5. Finale

Firebird Suite - Introduction

To set the quiet mood as Ivan arrives in front of the castle, the viola and cello play unison (playing the same notes) with mutes.



A **mute** is a piece of rubber placed over the bridge to reduce the volume but without affecting the quality of the sound.

A mute is often stored on the strings behind the bridge and moved onto the bridge when required.

The double bass parts are divided with half playing arco (with the bow) and half playing pizzicato (pluck the strings with the fingers).

The Bass drum creates suspense with two beaters rolling to create a rumbling sound.

When Ivan enters the meadow in front of the castle, the woodwinds become more agitated. The strings are shimmering and the trombones pop in quick sounds to create the atmosphere of Ivan walking through a forest and not quite knowing what is out there in the dark and behind the trees.

The introduction is in 12/4 time. There are 12 quavers, 1/8 notes or ti per bar but a conductor will often conduct in 4 beats (3 quavers per bar).

Firebird Suite – The entrance of the Firebird

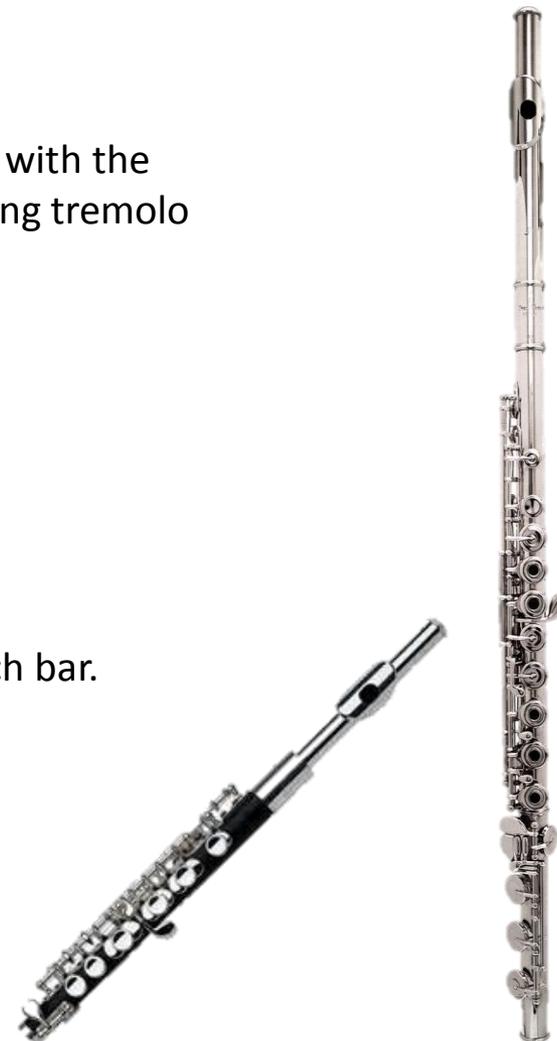
The image of the bird fleeing around the trees and Ivan is achieved with the instruments playing short snippets of melody, the strings playing using tremolo (quick repetition of the a note to create a shimmering effect).

The high woodwinds, piccolo and flute introduce the firebird.

The time signature is $2/4$ which is two crotchet, $\frac{1}{4}$ notes or ta in each bar.

The tempo is fast.

A **piccolo** is half the size of a **flute** and plays one octave higher. Both the flute and piccolo are played the same way and with the same fingering.



Firebird Suite – The Princesses' Khorovod

The Firebird is announced using the flutes playing in the high register while the french horns are holding a long sustained note. The strings and harp join in.

The oboe plays the theme of the Firebird accompanied by the harp. This theme is taken from a Russian folk song.

The strings introduce the Princesses' dance playing a folk –like tune. To change the orchestral colour the theme is then played by the woodwinds.

The time signature is $\frac{3}{4}$ which is 3 beats in each bar. Many dances are written in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, the most famous being the waltz. Other dances in triple time include the scherzo and the minuet.

The **oboe** is a woodwind instruments with a double reed.



1. Firebird Suite – Infernal Dance of King Kaschei

[Infernal Dance of King Kastchai](#)

Whole orchestra plays a loud (forte) chord (a series of notes played at the same time). After the beauty of the Round dance this chord is designed to shock the audience.

Double basses play an insistent rhythm creating the dance which will wear monsters out and they will go to sleep because they can dance no more.

The brass instruments and percussion feature in the infernal dance to create the intensity and energy of the story. The brass play a syncopated rhythm to create tension.

3 beats per bar



Still 3 beats per bar but rhythm is between the beats.



Syncopation is a rhythm placed between the beats instead of on the beat.

Here, a crotchet, $\frac{1}{4}$ note or ta is split into two quavers and placed at each end of the bar, throwing the rhythm between the beats.

Chords played by muted trumpet, harp, piano, oboes and viola transition into Bercuese

Firebird Suite – Berceuse

After the infernal dance the monsters are asleep.

The berceuse is a lullaby played by bassoon and accompanied by harp. The oboe takes over then bassoon returns.

Stravinsky writes no dynamics (Loud or soft) into the bassoon solo. It is up to the bassoon player with the conductor to decide how to play the melody and where to get louder or softer.

Tremolo in the strings leads to finale.

Dynamics

pianissimo	<i>pp</i>	very soft
piano	<i>p</i>	soft
mezzo piano	<i>mp</i>	moderately soft
mezzo forte	<i>mf</i>	moderately loud
forte	<i>f</i>	loud
fortissimo	<i>ff</i>	very loud

To change dynamics

crescendo	<i>cresc.</i>	gradually getting louder
decrescendo	<i>decresc</i>	gradually getting softer
subito	<i>sub.</i>	suddenly louder or softer

The **bassoon** is a woodwind instruments with a double reed.



Firebird Suite – Finale

[Finale](#) means the final or ending.

Ivan is married to his true love, one of the princesses, and the story seems to be at its conclusion.

The solo is a beautiful melody played by one french horn. The finale is marked *lento maestoso* with the dynamics *piano* (soft) and marked *dolce cantabile* (sweetly and in a singing style). It is then passed to the strings and then builds through orchestra with winds then brass until the whole orchestra is playing a grand almost hymn like chorale.

Rather than finishing on a grand note, Stravinsky want to created more excitement and celebrate that all the monsters are dead and the people have all come back to life so he gives the beautiful horn melody to the brass and they play it faster - *allegro non troppo*.

Directions:

Lento maestoso	slow and majestic
Allegro non troppo	lively and fast but not too much
Maestoso	majestically

The grand slower chorale played by the whole orchestra in a majestic style returns to conclude The Firebird Suite.



Australian Curriculum – Music

Elements of Music	Foundation to Year 2	Years 3 and 4	Years 5 and 6	Years 7 and 8	Years 9 and 10
Rhythm	Beat and rhythm Fast/slow Long/short	Tempo changes ostinato	Compound metre	Time signature Rhythmic devices - anacrusis, syncopation , ties and pause	Regular and irregular time subdivision Triplet, duplet Motif, Augmentation/ diminution
Pitch	High/low Pitch direction Pitch matching Unison	Pentatonic patterns Melodic shape Intervals Treble clef and staff	Major scales Pitch sequences, arpeggio, riff, Bass clef	Minor scales Key and key signatures Major/minor chords Ledger lines	Tonal centres, Modulation Consonance/dissonance Chromaticism
Dynamics & Expression	Forte, piano	Dynamic gradations <i>pp to ff</i> Legato & staccato	Staccato, legato accent	Dynamic gradations Articulations relevant to style	Rubato, vibrato, ornamentation,
Form and Structure	Introduction Same/different, echo patterns, repetition Verse, chorus, round	Question & answer Repeat signs Binary (AB) form Ternary (ABA) form	Theme, motif Phrase Rondo (ABACA) form ostinato	Repetition and contrast Theme and Variation Verse chorus, bridge	Motivic development Sonata form Interlude, Improvisation
Timbre	How sound is produced Every voice and instrument has its own sound	Recognise orchestral instruments by sound In isolations and in combination	Acoustic and electronic sounds Voice and instrument types	Recognise instrumental groups	Identify instruments by name and sound production.
Texture	Melody Accompaniment Drone	Patterns occurring simultaneously	Contrast within layers of sound	Layers of sound and their role. Unison , homo/ polyphonic	Horizontal/vertical layers countermelody
Creating	Creating sounds using voice and instruments				
Performing	Playing instruments in groups.	Rhythms	Playing and reading melodic and rhythmic excerpts		Sing and play in two or more parts
Responding	Moving to beat and rhythms	Respond to the stories.	Historical context		Awareness of ensemble

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