



Vaslav Nijinsky
1889-1950

Vaslav was born in Kiev. His parents were dancers and from the age of 9 he studied at the ballet school in St. Petersburg. He was the first dancer to perform "Petrouchka" and became one of Russia's greatest dancers.

BALLET

An entertainment where classical dancers in costume perform to music on a stage with scenery

SUITE

A collection of dances or movements taken from a larger work

PETRUSHKA

COMPOSER: Igor Stravinsky

DATES: 1882-1971

NATIONALITY: Russian

- * Igor learnt to play the piano from the age of 9
- * He also enjoyed reading, painting and visiting the theatre
- * Igor wanted to be a musician but his father insisted he studied criminal law
- * After his father died he returned to studying music
- * Igor later travelled across Europe and America as a concert pianist
- * 1919 moved to France & from 1939 lived in USA
- * Igor became a famous 20th century composer

THE MUSIC:

- * Stravinsky composed over 12 major ballet scores
- * Petrushka (Little Peter) was completed in 1910
- * It was 1st performed in Paris during 1911
- * Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929) commissioned the work for the Russian Ballet Company
- * Based on an old traditional Russian folk story about a children's puppet theatre
- * The music was adapted into a suite in 1947
- * The 4 scenes are performed without a break

WHAT DID YOU HEAR?

- 1 Which speed did you have your finger on most?
- 2 Which instrument/s represented Petrushka?
- 3 Which character/s danced a waltz?
- 4 Did you hear mainly happy or sad tunes?
- 5 Which scene did you enjoy the most?

WHAT TO DO NEXT!

- Carry out a speed survey in your neighbourhood
- Write down the headings from the speed-o-meter on a large sheet of paper
- Describe, under the appropriate headings, what you discover during your survey e.g. Very slow - old lady carrying shopping
- Invent tunes or sound effects for the characters you observed in your survey
- Put your musical inventions into an order you like
- Perform your music to your family and friends

ACTIVITY

Move your finger on the speed-o-meter & discover how Stravinsky used contrasting speeds (tempo) in this music.

SPEED-O-METER



Fast



Quite fast



Quite slow



Slow

THE STORY:

At the Easter Shrovetide Fair the people of St Petersburg met to celebrate in the square. Entertainments included stalls, roundabouts, dancing, a barrel organ and puppet theatre. After a drum roll the Showman invited everyone to his puppet show. He played his flute and 3 puppets – a Ballerina, Petrushka and Blackamoor - slowly came alive and performed a wild Russian dance before being returned to their boxes. Petrushka was sad because he loved the ballerina but she preferred the Blackamoor who danced with the Ballerina before becoming angry. The Ballerina screamed and Petrushka came to her rescue. The two puppets fought until a piercing scream rang out as the Blackamoor killed Petrushka with his sword. The crowd watching the show stood silent. The Showman picked up the broken puppet, which suddenly turned into an angry ghost of Petrushka. The Showman dropped the puppet and ran

LISTENING PLAN:

Scene 1 - The Shrove-tide Fair (morning) - Five Russian folk tunes interweave: - a) Bustling flutes joined by playful strings, spinning harps and trumpet fanfares. b) Heavy strings stamp out a Russian dance. c) The clarinet imitates the barrel organ as the flute flutters. d) Dainty flute with triangle and trumpet e) Slow bassoons lead to an emotional flute dance.

The orchestra combines before solo instruments alternate with Russian dance tunes. The speed (tempo) is reduced, the piano stamps, woodwind chirp, strings tiptoe (pizzicato) and a drum roll is joined by spiky woodwind.

Scene 2 - Petrushka's Cell - The orchestra crashes and a trumpet lingers. The woodwind lead to a rippling piano and fierce trumpets. The flutes and piano converse before an oriental oboe tune is accompanied by a cymbal. The piano plays a sad tune, the orchestra erupts but gives way to the clarinet. The piano and oboe lead to scary trumpets. The brass sway, trumpets fanfare and a drum roll provides a link to the next scene.

Scene 3 - The Blackamoor's Cell - Orchestral chimes, dramatic brass, eerie timpani and strings lead to the clarinets tinged with cymbal. Striding strings support the cor anglais but the brass interrupts. The cymbal and a side drum support the famous trumpet solo. The flute, bassoon and trumpet play a waltz-like tune before the harp joins a chirpy flute. The Blackamoor dances with the ballerina before the trumpet and flute return. Fanfares and shivering strings lead to squealing strings and a drum roll.

Scene 4 - The Shrovetide Fair (evening) - Spinning strings, swooping woodwind, brass fanfares and chirping oboes lead to dances for children's nurses (trumpets), bear (high clarinet with tuba), rowdy peasants (drunken strings and tambourine) and galloping coachmen (brass answered by clarinets and strings). The mood changes as the strings lead the orchestra into a chase. A trumpet leads to the puppets fight before trembling strings and chirping woodwind announce Petrushka's death. Pompous bassoons (the Police) enter the scene. The trumpet returns, the brass and woodwind sway and quiet pizzicato strings bring this tragic story to an end.