

Classics for Kids



VS



"Infernal Dance" from *The Firebird*

Igor Stravinsky
Born: June 17, 1882
Died: April 6, 1971

The "Infernal Dance" by Igor Stravinsky was composed for a ballet called *The Firebird*, which was first performed in June, 1910.

A ballet? As you listen to this music you may not think of ballerinas in pointed toe shoes. However, ballet is much more than pink tutus. It is the special art of telling a story through exciting dance, music and costumes. Ballet has been enjoyed for many centuries, but in the early 1900s it was a particularly popular form of entertainment, just like movies and rock concerts are today.

Stravinsky was born in St. Petersburg in 1882. His father was an opera singer, so Igor was exposed to music at an early age. He began formal piano lessons at the age of nine, and by the time he was sixteen was composing great music. Stravinsky studied composition with another famous Russian composer, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, while a law and philosophy student at St.

Petersburg University. Then, a simple twist of fate changed his life forever.

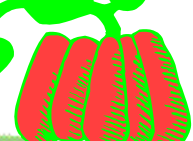
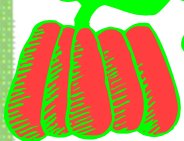
In 1909, Stravinsky wrote a piece called *Fireworks* as a wedding present for Rimsky-Korsakov's daughter. It brought him to the attention of the famous Russian Ballet. The company had just fired the composer for its next ballet, *The Firebird*, because he hadn't written any music. Serge Diaghilev, head of the company, turned to Stravinsky, and his music brought this legend to life. The rhythms and use of instruments were so unusual that dancers missed their entrances at first, and the composer had to explain the music to the orchestra members. However, *The Firebird* was a huge success, and Diaghilev and Stravinsky went on to create several ballets together.

You can find the story of *The Firebird* on the back of this page. At the point where the "Infernal Dance" appears, Prince Ivan, the hero, has been trapped in the woods outside the castle by the evil demon's subjects and the magical Firebird is leading these monsters in a wild dance. How does Stravinsky use the orchestra to paint this scene? Listen for some very unusual sounds. How would you dance to this music?

Listen and Pretend

This music is fast and syncopated. The main melody of the music is played by the bassoons and french horns. Try to find it woven in and out of the music.

Can you hear Prince Ivan, our hero, running through the forest? Many monsters are running after him. You and your friends could act out this story using your halloween costumes. Here are some ideas you can look at while you listen to the music

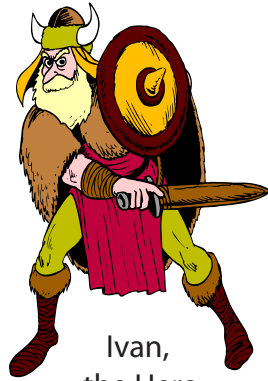


Show Time!

Cut out the characters from The Firebird and tape them onto popsicle sticks. Then make your own puppet show of the story.



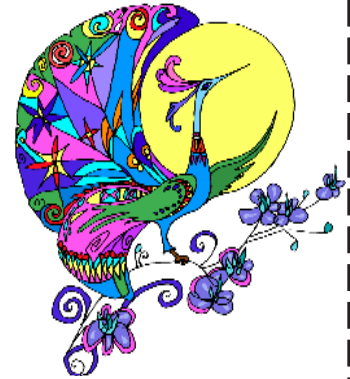
Kashchei,
the evil wizard



Ivan,
the Hero



A Princess



The Firebird

Make your own Pumpkin Face



The Firebird Story

"The Firebird was based on a Russian folktale. In the tale, there is an evil demon named Kashchei, whom no one could destroy. He has an enchanted garden that contains a tree with golden apples, the favorite food of the magical Firebird. One day, Prince Ivan wanders into the garden looking for the Firebird. He is able to capture the bird, but lets it go in return for one of its feathers. Immediately, thirteen enchanted princesses appear and dance around Prince Ivan. The prince falls in love with one of the princesses, Tsarevna. Because they are under Kashchei's magic spell, the princesses must return to his castle at sunrise. Ivan follows them and is captured by Kashchei's evil guardians. He is about to be turned to stone when he remembers the Firebird's magic feather and waves it in the air. The Firebird returns and leads Kashchei and his monsters in a wild dance—the "Infernal Dance." The dance is so exhausting that Kashchei and his followers fall fast asleep. The Firebird then tells Ivan that Kashchei's soul is in a huge egg. Ivan breaks the egg, which kills Kashchei and frees his kingdom. Prince Ivan marries Tsarevna and Firebird flies away, never to be seen again."

Have You Read?

Two Scarlet Songbirds: A Story of Anton Dvorak by Carole Lexa Schaefer. You can find more good books to read at

www.classicsforkids.com

