



The Nightingale and *The Fox* Listening Guide

Stravinsky's richly orchestrated *Nightingale* conjures up a magical, fairytale vision of Ancient China. The opera's exotically colourful orchestral palette combines with the other-worldly sound of the high soprano voice for the Nightingale to evoke sounds of nature in the deep forest. In contrast, the sound world of *The Fox* is created by a much smaller ensemble and relies on folk tunes to tell a fable.

The tracks listed below correspond to the complimentary CD provided to school group bookings only.

Not coming to the opera but looking to explore the music in your classroom? The *Nightingale* excerpts below can be found in the recording on the Naxos label, with Robert Craft conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra with a cast that includes Olga Trifonova, Robert Tear and Sally Burgess. The track numbers in parentheses correspond to this recording.

Track #	Musical excerpt	Connection to the story	Musical elements and significance	Strategies for Listening
THE NIGHTINGALE				
14	"Catching fish, heavenly spirit"	The Fisherman sings of the Nightingale and how her song makes him forget all of his worries.	The "Song of the Fisherman" is written in a fairly conventional manner typical of the Russian impressionistic style of the time, represented best in the fairy tale operas of Stravinsky's teacher, the great composer Rimsky-Korsakov. The melody has a nostalgic quality which seems to function as Stravinsky's farewell to a style of musical composition which, in his hands, will be radically changed.	How would you describe "Russian sounding" music? How would you characterize music from other cultures (French, Chinese, and African)? And why?
15	"From the sky a star in diamond dew fell scattered..."	The Nightingale makes her entrance, singing of dew which falls from stars onto the palace gardens below.	The Nightingale's music continues in the Russian impressionistic style. The sounds she produces are ethereal and magical. The role is sung by a coloratura soprano (a female voice type that is light, pure, flute-like and capable of great agility when way up high) which seems totally fitting for a creature which can fly, and whose song can mesmerize a powerful Emperor.	Impressionist music focused on suggesting an atmosphere instead of trying to evoke strong emotions. What atmosphere is Stravinsky trying to evoke? How does he achieve it?

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22	“Bring light, bring light, oh, quickly bring us light!”	At the palace, courtiers prepare for the arrival of the Nightingale who will sing for the Emperor.	We immediately enter into a different sound world with the beginning of Act II. With a loud bang of the drum, the entire Imperial Palace is preparing to receive the bird in a delirium of decorations and bells as choruses cry out on every side. The lush, romantic harmonies of Act I give way to a more rhythmical and mechanistic soundscape which suits the artificial atmosphere of the Emperor’s palace.	Close your eyes and visualize the world of the Emperor’s palace based on the music you hear in this excerpt. What is going on in the palace? How are people moving about? What do their clothes look like? How do they interact with one another?
30	“Where is he?...He flew away, great Emperor almighty”	The Japanese envoys bring the gift of a mechanical nightingale to the Emperor causing the real Nightingale to fly away. As a result, the Emperor banishes her from the kingdom.	In this scene, Stravinsky creates a kind of faux Chinese atmosphere by using oriental pentatonic scales (that is, five note scales as opposed to the seven note scales of the Western musical tradition). The music of this scene is unrestrained and jarring and filled with odd noises appropriate to a mechanical bird!	The pentatonic scale is often associated with music from Asian countries. What are some of the characteristics commonly found in the music of your cultural heritage?
36	“But sing, but sing once more!”	The Emperor lies dying, attended by the figure of Death. The Nightingale returns and upon hearing her sing, Death agrees to give back the Emperor’s life.	The music of the final act is once again in contrast to what came before. From the clattering noise of Act II, we’ve entered a more sombre world of scraping noises, dull colours and menacing choruses. It is the bright sound of the Nightingale which pulls us away from the darkness, seducing Death and ultimately reviving the dying Emperor.	How does the Nightingale’s voice differ from the voice of Death?

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THE FOX				
		<p>The Russian fairytale follows the Fox who tries to trick and catch the Cock. The Cat and the Ram rescue the Cock after each time it is deceived by the Fox. At the end of the opera, the Cock, the Cat and the Ram trick and strangle the Fox. In celebration of outwitting the Fox, the three friends sing and dance.</p>	<p>Stravinsky's choice of which musical instruments are used (known as "orchestration") is quite unique for this opera. The number of musicians is much less than what would be considered typical for an opera orchestra. Most often, orchestras have entire sections of each string instrument (violins, violas, cellos and basses), however Stravinsky uses only two violins, one viola, one cello and one bass. He also uses fewer instruments from the woodwind and brass families. The result of this reduction in musicians is a more transparent sound where each instrument is much more noticeable and exposed.</p> <p>Another unique aspect of the instrumentation of <i>The Fox</i> is the use of a very uncommon instrument known as a cimbalom, which consists of strings stretched out over a soundboard, producing sound when the strings are plucked or struck with hammers. The sound has a very distinct quality. The cimbalom, in addition to the reduced scale of the remainder of the instrumental ensemble, creates an orchestral texture very suggestive of a peasant orchestra, the sound of which is perfectly suited to the folk-like nature of the opera's story.</p> <p>In <i>The Fox</i> Stravinsky draws on typical Russian folk music including the repetition of short melodic phrases, syncopation (accenting normally weak beats) and irregular meters (changing the number of beats in a bar).</p>	<p>Try to distinguish which singers/voices represent which characters just by listening to the music – text, voice types, use of instruments, and singing style. What type of hints does Stravinsky offer the listener?</p> <p>If you had to direct the opera and set it in modern times, where might the action take place?</p>

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