

Modest Mussorgsky*

Life Dates: 1839-1881

Country of Origin: Russia

Musical Era: Romantic



"The artist believes in the future because he lives in it."

Modest Mussorgsky

Modest Mussorgsky was born in Karevo, Russia in 1839. He learned how to play the piano from his mother. He began composing at a young age and even tried to write an opera when he was 16 years old. He studied briefly with Balakirev, an important Russian composer, but his training was not complete. Because of this, Mussorgsky had a difficult time as a young composer. His early compositions were not successful and he often didn't finish them. Neither his teacher nor his peers respected him. Some of the other composers described him as being "almost an idiot."

When Mussorgsky was in his early 20s he had to manage his family's land and money. Soon after that, his mother died. This was a very traumatic event in his life and he quickly developed personal troubles and was unable to keep his job. However, he continued to compose music. Unfortunately, many works failed at first. For example, when Mussorgsky was writing his famous opera Boris Goudonov, which is based on a Russian tale, he changed it several times before it became a success. Mussorgsky was eventually accepted as a member of the Mighty Handful: five Russian composers who wrote music inspired by Russian literature, history, folklore and folk music.

Mussorgsky loved to create music that had an unrefined beauty. This ideal, combined with his sparse musical training, gave his music an earthy quality. He wanted to celebrate what was truly Russian and relate his music closely to life itself. He used melodies and rhythms to imitate the sound of Russian speech. Later in his life, friends who enjoyed discussing politics, art, religion, and philosophy inspired him. After he died in 1881, another composer edited and finished many of his works.

Questions from the reading: Were Mussorgsky's first compositions successful?
Did he finish every composition he wrote?
What aspects of his music make him important?

Questions for research: Name the other four composers who make up the "Mighty Handful"?
Who was the composer who finished Mussorgsky's works?

*Mussorgsky has several acceptable spellings. Another common spelling is Moussorgsky.

Lesson Plan for “Promenade”
from *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Modest Mussorgsky
(three sequential lessons to be administered over three class settings)

Standards: Music Elementary I, II, III, IV

Performance Indicators for Students:

- Read simple standard notation in performance and follow vocal or keyboard scores in listening (Standard Ic)
- Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior, including attentive listening, in a variety of musical settings in and out of school (Standard IIe)
- Describe music in terms related to basic elements such as melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, form, and style, etc. (Standard IIIb)
- Describe the music’s context in terms related to its social and psychological functions and settings. (Standard IIId)
- Identify from performance the titles and composers of well-known examples of classical concert music. (Standard IVb)

Objectives:

- As a group, students will use aural skills to notate the rhythm of a melody.
- Students will read and perform the rhythm of a melody.
- Students will recognize and respond to timbre differentiation.
- Students will use movement to enhance the understanding and expression of phrase structure.
- Students will combine aspects of the visual arts to gain understanding of this particular composition.

Materials:

- Scarves
- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Keyboard or other melody instrument

Listening Repertoire:

- “Promenade” from *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Prior Knowledge:

- Ability to read basic rhythmic notation (quarter notes and eighth notes)
- Ability to move expressively to music individually, in small groups, and in large groups
- Understanding of the instrument families within the orchestra
- Ability to distinguish between timbres of the instrument families

Procedures for Lesson #1: Rhythm Dictation

T.=Teacher S.=Students

- T. gives background of music and composer, tells S. that this music was inspired by the artwork of Mussorgsky's friend and is meant to describe a person viewing artwork in a gallery or museum.
- T. plays first four phrases at the keyboard without accompaniment. S. listen and count the number of phrases they hear. (Answer - 4)
- T. plays Phrase 1 on keyboard, S. listen and count the number of beats in this phrase. (Answer - 11)
- T. makes eleven dashes on the chalkboard for Phrase 1. _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
- T. repeats this process for the next three phrases.
- T. plays Phrase 1 again, S. listen and determine which beats have more than one sound (Answer - 4 and 6)
- T. writes in two eighth notes on beats 4 and 6. _ _ _ ♪ _ ♪ _ _ _ _ _
- T. repeats this process for Phrase 2. T. asks students "Are these phrases the same or different?" (Answer - Same)
- T. plays Phrase 3, S. listen to determine which beats have two sounds (Answer - 4, 6, & 10).
- T. writes in two eighth notes in beats 4, 6, and 10 _ _ ♪ _ ♪ _ _ _ ♪ _ _
- T. repeats this process for Phrase 4. T. asks students "Do these phrases have the same rhythm or are they different?" (Answer - same)
- S. listens to Phrases 1 - 4 to determine what type of note might go on the other beats (Answer - quarter note)
- T. writes in quarter notes on the remaining beats. (See Attachment 1 for completed chart.)
- S. speak rhythm on board, then clap rhythm.
- T. plays first four phrases of "Promenade" on recording (approximately 30 seconds). S. clap rhythm while listening.
- T. asks students to identify the instrument family that is featured in these phrases (Answer - brass)
- T. explains that the brass family will be featured later in the composition, but there will be a middle section that features other families of the orchestra.
- T. plays entire recording of "Promenade," S. clap rhythm on the board to the first four phrases, and raise their hand when they hear the brass section come in later on in the piece. (approximately 1:48 in length.)

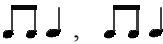
Indicators of success for Lesson #1:

- Assess understanding of rhythms and phrases by speaking and clapping rhythms appropriately.
- Assess ability to recognize the brass section by hands raised at appropriate times responding to listening.
- Assess understanding of phrases discussed question/answer from class participation.

Follow-up for Lesson #1:

- Review phrase and rhythm concepts during the next class.
- Add movement to enhance phrase structure.

Procedures for Lesson #2: Add Movement to Phrases 1-4 T.=Teacher S.=Students

- T. reviews background of music, composer, first four phrases and rhythms.
- S. listen to recording of “Promenade” clapping rhythms of Phrases 1 - 4, and raise hands when the brass section returns later in the piece.
- T. asks “Did you recognize a section similar to the opening of the piece where the brass family was featured more?” (Answer - yes)
- T. asks “Was this section in the middle or at the end?” (Answer - end)
- T. plays recording a second time. S. listen and decide if the end brass section contains four phrases just like the first section. (Answer - No, it is only two phrases at the end)
- T. isolates the circled rhythms on the board or chart. (see Attachment 1)
- S. clap these rhythmic patterns and walk “in place” the remaining quarter notes. 
- S. practice making arm gestures similar to painting in the air on these isolated patterns while listening to the opening four phrases.
- S. stand in a circle and count off by numbers 1 - 4, which will match phrases 1 - 4.
- T. passes out scarves.
- T. plays recording of first four phrases of “Promenade.” S. move expressively into the circle, “painting” with their scarves on the isolated rhythmic patterns, walking the quarter notes and “freezing” into a pose with their particular phrase is finished. This should take on a “free form” within the circle or room.
- T. & S. repeat this process if needed to make the movement secure. Only one group will move per phrase. The others will be “frozen” in poses.

Indicators of Success for Lesson #2:

- Assess understanding of rhythms and phrases by speaking and clapping rhythms appropriately.
- Assess ability to recognize the brass section by hands raised at appropriate times responding to listening.
- Assess understanding of phrases discussed by moving appropriately at the correct times.

Follow-up for Lesson #2:

- Review phrase and rhythm concepts during the next class.
- Review movement to enhance structure of phrases 1 - 4.
- Add movement to the entire piece.

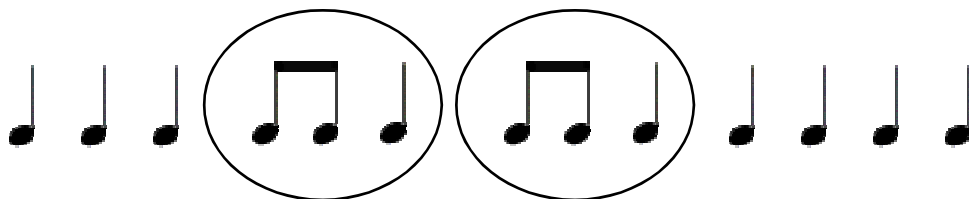
Procedures for Lesson #3: Adding movement to middle section, creating a “Human Portrait,” combining all aspects of the lesson. T.=Teacher S.=Students

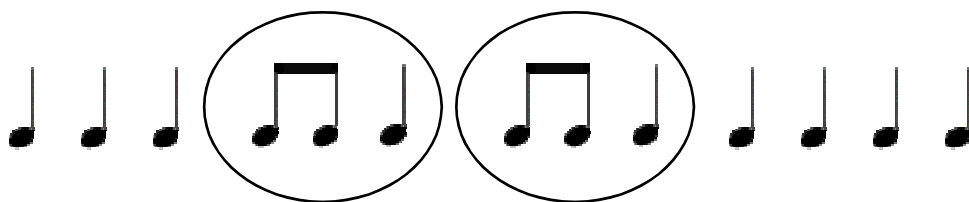
T. & S. review rhythms of phrases 1 - 4.

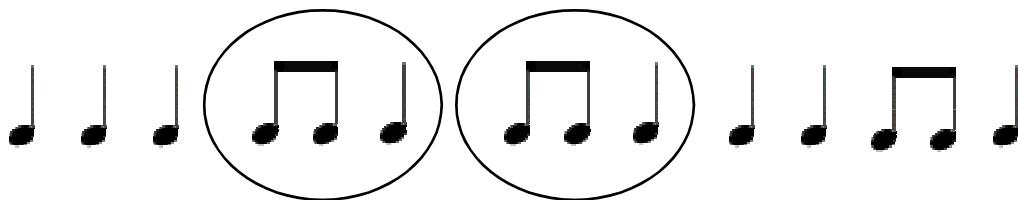
T. & S. review rhythmic pattern previously isolated in Lesson #2 and movements to imitate “painting in air” for phrases 1 - 4.

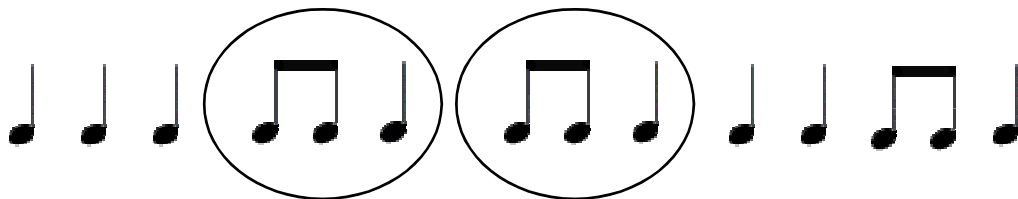
S. listen to entire recording of “Promenade,” add movements for phrases 1 - 4 while standing “in place,” freeze during the middle section and sit down when they hear the last two phrases when the brass section come in at the end.

Attachment 1 for "Promenade" from Pictures at an Exhibition

1.) 

2.) 

3.) 

4.) 

Attachment 2

Sheet Music from www.mfiles.co.uk

Promenade

from "Pictures at an Exhibition"

Modest Moussorgsky

J = 104 **Phrase 1** **Ph 2.**

f trumpet solo Brass

This system contains the first two phrases of the piece. It is written in a grand staff with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a time signature of 5/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 104. The first phrase, labeled 'Phrase 1', spans measures 1 to 4. The second phrase, labeled 'Ph 2.', spans measures 5 to 8. The first phrase is marked 'f trumpet solo' and the second phrase is marked 'Brass'. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes with some rests.

Phrase 3

trumpet solo Brass

This system contains the third and fourth phrases. It is written in a grand staff with a key signature of two flats and a time signature of 5/4. The third phrase, labeled 'Phrase 3', spans measures 9 to 12. The fourth phrase spans measures 13 to 16. The third phrase is marked 'trumpet solo' and the fourth phrase is marked 'Brass'. The music continues with eighth and quarter notes.

Phrase 4

trumpet solo Brass strings

This system contains the fifth and sixth phrases. It is written in a grand staff with a key signature of two flats and a time signature of 5/4. The fifth phrase, labeled 'Phrase 4', spans measures 17 to 20. The sixth phrase spans measures 21 to 24. The fifth phrase is marked 'trumpet solo', the sixth phrase is marked 'Brass', and the final measure of the system is marked 'strings' with an arrow pointing to the right. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes.

10

This system contains the seventh and eighth phrases. It is written in a grand staff with a key signature of two flats and a time signature of 5/4. The seventh phrase spans measures 25 to 28. The eighth phrase spans measures 29 to 32. The music continues with eighth and quarter notes.

12

strings
w/w/br./st.
w/w → str

Detailed description: This system contains measures 12, 13, and 14. Measure 12 is marked 'strings'. Measure 13 is marked 'w/w/br./st.'. Measure 14 is marked 'w/w → str'. The music is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

15

w/w → str.
w/w — str —
w/w — str —

Detailed description: This system contains measures 15, 16, and 17. Measure 15 is marked 'w/w → str.'. Measure 16 is marked 'w/w — str —'. Measure 17 is marked 'w/w — str —'. The notation continues with the same accompaniment and melodic lines.

18

str + br.
solo

Detailed description: This system contains measures 18, 19, and 20. Measure 18 is marked 'str + br.'. Measure 19 is marked 'solo'. The melodic line in measure 19 features a more active eighth-note pattern.

21

st.
Brass
main theme

Detailed description: This system contains measures 21 and 22. Measure 21 is marked 'st.'. Measure 22 is marked 'Brass'. A large slur labeled 'main theme' spans across both measures, covering the upper melodic line.

23

Br + w/w + str.

Detailed description: This system contains measure 23. It is marked 'Br + w/w + str.'. The 'main theme' slur from the previous system continues over this measure.