

Dance of the Cygnets

Teacher Resources

Activities in this pack:



Information



Activity 3 **Listen**



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Activity 1 **Learn**



Activity 4 **Move**



Activity 2 **Learn**



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Dance of the Cygnets

Composer: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Genre: Ballet Music; Program Music

Danse des petits cygnes is a famous dance from Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*.

Translated from French, it means “Dance of the Little Swans or cygnets”. It is very challenging to dance, because all four dancers must look and move identically throughout the piece while holding each other’s hands. The music is light and delicate using only the woodwind and stringed instruments of the orchestra.

Learning Intentions

By completing activities in this resource, students will:

- Listen to, recognise, and talk about a well-known example of orchestral music,
- Develop understanding of how a composer uses the elements of music to create meaning and support movement in a dance,
- Discuss how a composer manipulates the elements of music to paint a picture.





What sound does a baby swan make?

If you wanted to make these sorts of sounds on a recorder or another instrument, how would you do it?

Consider if the sound would be high or low, long, or short, loud, or soft and most importantly what sort of sound quality it might have e.g., harsh, airy, nasal etc.

Investigate how baby swans are born and learn to live in the water.

[Click here to listen to baby swans \(youtube.com\).](#)





Observe

Watch the link to the scene from the Ballet below:

[Click here to watch the Dance of the Cygnets](#)
([youtube.com](#)).

What words would you use to describe the movement of the 4 dancers?

What similarities do you see between the baby swan video and the dancers video?

How does the music suggest little swans rather than a large group of elephants?

How does the music show the energy of the little swans?

People often use the image of a swan looking serene about the water while below the water their legs and flippers are working hard – is this shown in the choreography (dance steps)?





Listen to the Dance of the Cygnets

Listen to the music without the visual images. Start with the first 20 seconds.

The opening 4 bars of introduction is played by the bassoon. Describe the sound of the bassoon. Listen to the opening again asking children to play the bassoon beat rhythm on their knees.

When the tune begins, it is played by 2 oboes. Describe the tune they play. Play the opening again and ask the children to draw the shape of the tune in the air as it is played.

Now listen again from the start. When the bassoon and oboes end – ask the students to describe how the music changes. (Stringed instruments, music is less choppy, more smooth sounding, the accompaniment rhythm is now shared between a plucked low sound and an offbeat sound)

[Click here to listen to the Dance of the Cygnets \(youtube.com\)](#)





Move like the birds

This piece has 3 sections:

Section A: Woodwind instruments prominent

Section B: Strings and Woodwinds share tunes

Section A: Woodwind instruments prominent same as before but with a coda to finish

Discuss the types of movement swans and other birds might make.

Decide on a bird movement for the A and B sections (e.g. A = little swan and B = pecking hens)

Encourage the class to move like birds in time with the pulse for each of the sections.

Play the whole piece. When the new section of music starts children should change their movement unprompted because they recognise a change. This way you can assess if they are hearing change in the music.



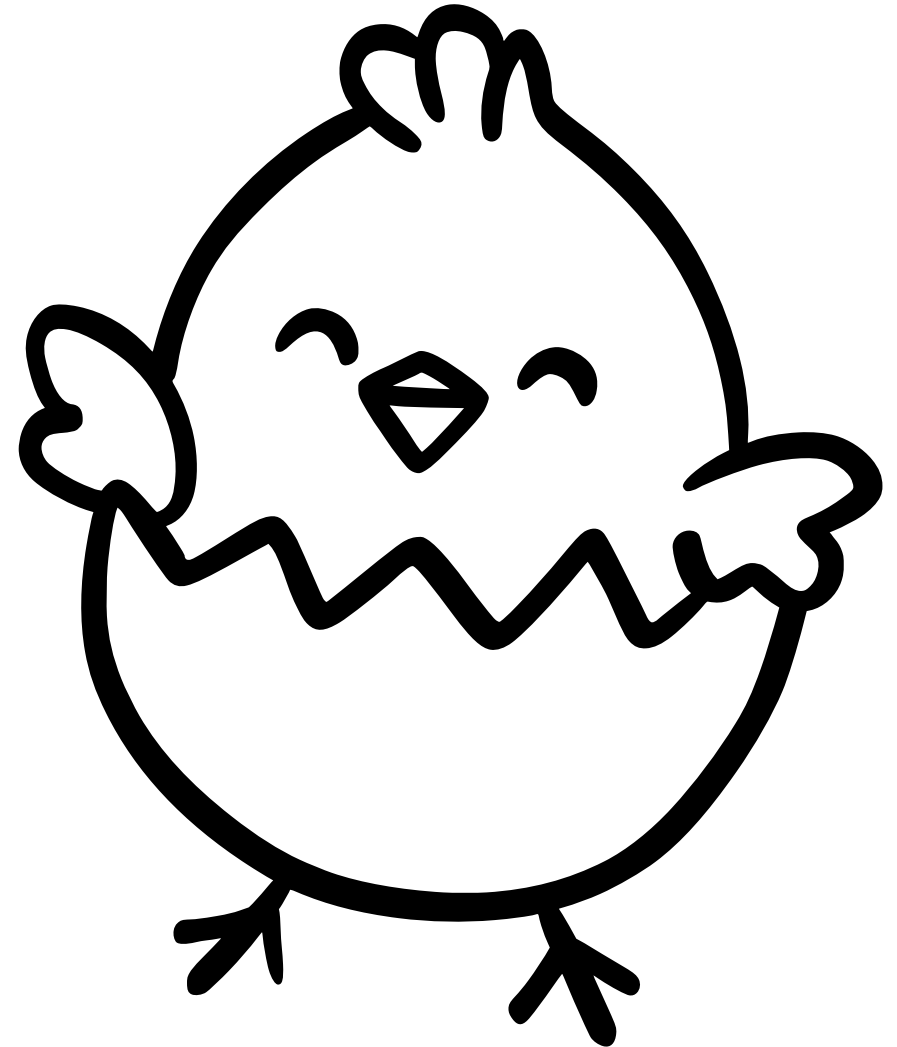


Compare the un-hatched chickens!

Listen to this other piece about baby birds called the ballet of the Unhatched Chickens. This piece of music is also telling a story behind a picture of some chickens still in the shell with their legs and heads out.

[Mussorgsky - Pictures at an Exhibition, -
Ballet of the Unhatched Chickens \(youtube.com\)](#)

Compare this piece to the Dance of the Cygnets and find 3 similarities and three differences.





Cross-Curricular Ideas

1. What is a ballet? How can you tell a story through dance? What other cultures tell stories through dance? Swan Lake is a famous Ballet. Investigate the story and see if you can find some video excerpts of it to watch as a class. Ask the students how they would use their bodies to show a bird.
2. True or False? Research the statements below to see if these are true facts about swans:
 - Swans mate for life and are very loyal.
 - Swans have up to 25,000 feathers
 - Swans are elegant birds known for their graceful swimming.
 - Cygnets are baby swans.
 - Swan necks have 23-25 vertebrae.
 - Swans can fly at 60 miles (almost 100km) an hour.
 - Swans use their necks for communication.
 - It is illegal to kill a swan in England
3. Read the story of the Ugly Duckling by Hans Christian Anderson. Discuss what the moral of the story might be with the class.

