Story Variations: Symphonic Depictions of Fairy Tales, Folktales, and Myths

Listening Lab Lesson 1: A Midsummer Night’s Dream

From the ASO’s Young Peoples Concerts Series
Our *Story Variations* program is made up of excerpts of works based on fairy tales, folktales, myths and legends.

When music is used as narrative it has descriptive qualities that enhance the dramatic effect of a story.

Each work on the program tells a story through music.
HOW DOES MUSIC TELL A STORY?

By creating descriptive imagery through sound

Dynamics
Timbre
Tempo
Themes
Leitmotif
Rhythm

Mood
Emotion
Characters
Setting
Action
Movement
Listen!!
Imagine!!

Forests
Lakes
Swans
Donkeys
Fairies
Magicians
Gods
Transformations
Castles
Superheroes
In this learning lab we will explore how musical elements convey setting and mood in a piece of music by listening to *A Midsummer Night’s dream* by Felix Mendelssohn.
A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Overture
Composed in 1826
By German Composer, Felix Mendelssohn
1809 – 1847
This music was inspired by the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a romantic comedy by the great English playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616).

Written during the 1590s, it portrays the adventures of four young Athenian lovers and a group of amateur actors, their interactions with the Duke and Duchess of Athens, Theseus and Hippolyta, and with the fairies who inhabit a moonlit forest.
NOW LET’S BEGIN!!
First:
• Ask your learners to listen to the music before revealing its title
• Have them describe the scene the music creates
Now, listen again!
The music transports us to an enchanted forest where all sorts of strange things occur: fairies that fly, switched identities, and a man transformed into a donkey.
VIOLINS depict scampering fairies…
Listen for the 
love theme 
played by the 
STRINGS.
Strange things happen in the woods at night: a man becomes a donkey!

Hear the donkey bray as the STRINGS play.
Listening Questions:

• Tempo- How fast or slow was the beat?
• Dynamics- Was the music forte (loud) or piano (quiet)? Did the music crescendo (gradually gets louder), decrescendo (gradually gets quieter) or stay the same?
• Tone color- Was the sound bright, medium or dark?
• What instruments did you hear?
• Texture- Was the music simple or did it have many layers?

• What do all these elements tell you about what’s happening in the music?

Recording Link
Activity:

After listening to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream, discuss the following:

• While you were listening, where did you imagine you were and what was happening?

• Brainstorm ways musical elements can help tell a story (i.e. sets a mood, helps you feel the character’s emotions, identifies a place or time period, surprises the audience).
Now!!

- Write your own scene inspired by A Midsummer Night’s Dream
- Illustrate it
- Compose a piece of music
- When you are done, send your creations to Susan Miville: smiville@austinsymphony.org
- And, we will post them on the ASO Facebook Page
Images
In order of appearance


Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1817, oil on canvas, 98 cm x 74 cm, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany.


Arthur Rackham, "...She never had so sweet a changeling…", *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare, NY: Doubleday, 1908.

Wilhelm Hensel, Dr. Felix Mendelssohn Bertoldy, 1847, oil on canvas, Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf, Germany.


William Blake, *Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing*, 1786, watercolor and graphite on paper, 47.5cm x 67.5 cm, Tate Britain, Presented by Alfred A. de Pass in memory of his wife Ethel 1910, N02686.


John Anster Fitzgerald, *Titania and Bottom*, 34.3cm x 20.9cm


Henry Meynell Reahm, *Titania welcoming her fairy brethren*, date unknown, watercolor, 37cm x 59cm.