

The Austin Symphony Presents

# Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird*

## Listening Lab 3:

### Exploring Accents and Emphasis in the “*Infernal Dance of King Kaschei*”

#### *About the Composer:*

- ◇ Igor Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum, Russia in 1882.
- ◇ He was a well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century composer of operas, ballets, and instrumental music.
- ◇ Stravinsky traveled to Paris in 1910 for the premiere of *The Firebird* ballet. He later immigrated to the United States and eventually became a US citizen.

#### *About The Firebird:*

- ◇ *The Firebird* was one of the first ballets that Stravinsky scored. He was only 28! The ballet was choreographed by Serge Diaghilev and was based on a Russian folktale, it was an instant hit with audiences.
- ◇ The Firebird is a mythical character in Russian folklore.
- ◇ The ballet draws from several different versions of the folktale and was part of a larger cultural movement to create a strong Russian national identity through the arts.
- ◇ In the ballet, Prince Ivan captures the magical Firebird and uses its powers to rescue the imprisoned princess from the evil King Kaschei. Kaschei is evil and immortal; he is a recurring character in Russian tales.
- ◇ [Click here](#) to listen to a recording of “The Infernal Dance.”

You can read more about Stravinsky and *The Firebird*  
by viewing our complete curriculum guide:

[Composer's Choice: An Exploration of Artistic Intent](#)



## Key Terms

### *Ballet:*

*A classical dance built on formalized steps and gestures that is usually accompanied by a small orchestra.*

### *Accents:*

*Emphasis placed on certain notes by changing their tone and or volume.*

### *Syncopation:*

*The disruption of a regular beat pattern by emphasizing the off beats.*



# The Mythical Firebird



Viktor Vasnetsov. "Ivan Tsarevitch returns with the caged Firebird." *The Flying Carpet*, 1880, oil on canvas, 165 cm x 297 cm, Nizhny Novgorod State Art Museum.

*The Firebird appears in many Russian folktales. She is always described as very beautiful, possessing magical powers, and providing help to those who believe in her but danger to those who don't. Many illustrators and painters have interpreted scenes from the folktale. On this page there are images created by three different artists.*



Ivan Bilibin, 1899 "Catching the Firebird's Feather," *Tsarevitch Ivan, the Firebird and the Gray Wolf*. Moscow: Department for the Production of State Documents.



Edmund Dulac, 1916, "There he found the princess asleep," *The Fire Bird*, Edmund Dulac's Fairy-Book, G. H. Doran: New York.



*Pine, Plum and Cranes*, 1759. Hanging Scroll, ink and color on silk. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Investigate: The symbolism of birds in other cultures. Many view birds as symbols of immortality. In Asia the crane is believed to be possessed of eternal youth. Create a story about a magical bird.

### **The Phoenix**

*The Phoenix is a mythological creature, which, according to ancient Greek folklore, continues to regenerate. Like the Firebird, the phoenix is a bird with beautiful gold and red plumage.*

*At the end of its life-cycle the phoenix builds itself a nest of cinnamon twigs that it then ignites; both nest and bird burn fiercely and are reduced to ashes, from which a new, young phoenix arises.*

*The new phoenix is destined to live, usually, as long as the old one, and continue the cycle. Due to this, the Phoenix has become a symbol of rebirth, immortality and indestructibility.*

*It is thought that the idea of the Phoenix came from the mythological Bennu-bird of Egypt, a deity associated with the sun, creation and rebirth.*



Jeff Dahl, 2007. A contemporary rendition of the Bennu-bird.

# Listening Guide

## “Infernal Dance” from *The Firebird*

### By Igor Stravinsky

In this lab we will focus on one movement from *The Firebird*. In the *Infernal Dance of King Kashchei*, the Firebird casts a spell on Kashchei’s evil minions causing them to dance wildly before falling asleep at the end of the movement. Stravinsky utilizes accents and syncopation to create a sense of excitement and drama.

### Accents

- ◇ Listen to the very beginning of the recording. The entire orchestra enters with an explosive accent.
- ◇ This loud, full orchestra accent returns at various times throughout the movement. What effect does this musical explosion have on the mood of the piece?
- ◇ The composer indicates accents in the music using a special symbol written above the note. Look at the musical excerpt below. Do you see the accent marks (>) in measure two and four?

### Syncopation

- ◇ The melody played by the Horns, Bassoon, and Tuba at the beginning of the movement starts on the weak part of each beat, creating a syncopated rhythm.
- ◇ This melody returns throughout the movement in different forms and played by different instruments. How many can you identify?
- ◇ Look at the excerpt below to see how this melody is noted in the music.
- ◇ Click the links below to hear the theme played slowly and at full speed.

[Slow Version](#)

[Fast Version](#)



### Exploring Descriptive Imagery

- Read the story of the Firebird
- Identify descriptive terms, nouns, adjectives, and verbs
- Listen to the music of “The Infernal Dance” and create a word bank of descriptive words; encourage the students to use words related to the story of the Firebird.
- From the word bank write a poem or a paragraph about what is happening in the music.
- Illustrate the poem using an Asian or Russian style of drawing.