

DUKAS
L'APPRENTI SORCIER

RAVEL
MA MÈRE L'OYE

KOECHLIN
LES BANDAR-LOG

ORCHESTRE PHILHARMONIQUE
DE STRASBOURG
MARC ALBRECHT

Paul Dukas (1865 – 1935)

1 **L'apprenti sorcier**

(The Sorcerer's Apprentice, Der Zauberlehrling)

Scherzo after a ballade by Goethe (1897) 10. 46

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

Ma mère l'oye

(Mother Goose, Mutter Gans, 1908 – 1912)

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(Pavane of Sleeping Beauty)

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9 **Les Bandar-log**

(Scherzo des singes), Op. 176 (1939-1940)

Symphonic poem after Kipling's "The Jungle Book" 18. 29

Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg

conducted by: **Marc Albrecht**

Total playing time: 57.26

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Paul Dukas: L'apprenti sorcier (= The Sorcerer's Apprentice)

The Frenchman Paul Dukas knew almost everything there was to know about music. He taught composition at the Paris conservatoire, and was strict, but fair to his students, making equally high demands of himself. One day, he simply threw half of his compositions into the fire, as he no longer considered them good enough. Luckily, he was happy with his *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (written in 1897). This is a musical version of the ballade *Der Zauberlehrling* by Wolfgang von Goethe, the famous German author. The story in the form of a poem tells of a sorcerer's apprentice who discovers that magic can be stronger than one thinks. In his music, Paul Dukas relates the narrative from beginning to end. The story of Goethe's poem is told below. First read it, then listen to the music.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

Making magic is anything but easy. There are hundreds of spells, and even more recipes for brewing magic potions. It is impossible to learn all this just from a book; therefore, every sorcerer starts off as an apprentice to an experienced master. It takes years for one to become a true magician.

Lessons in magic are terrific fun. But not every day in the life of a sorcerer's apprentice is equally exciting. Sometimes there are nasty little chores to carry out. When the master sorcerer leaves for the day, he tells his apprentice to mop the floor of the workplace, which is covered in dust and dirt that has leaked from the bubbling pans of magic potion. The sorcerer's apprentice has to fetch the water from the well with buckets, which is a tough job. Sweat pours from his forehead as he lugs along his heavy buckets. And mopping, with a large rag under his broom, is also very tiring.

Surely a sorcerer worth his weight in salt does not have to waste his time on this, the sorcerer's apprentice thinks. Wait a minute. He had recently learned a magic spell with which one could make piece of wood come to life. He puts down the broom, makes the magic gestures – it is all part of it – and solemnly pronounces the spell. Good grief. The broom is beginning to move. In addition, it is sprouting arms and legs, and is able to walk straight away. "Now, that is a useful spell!" the sorcerer's apprentice exclaims. Happily, he hangs the buckets on the broom, which sets off to the well energetically, fills its buckets and splashes the water over the floor. The broom circles cheerfully around the room, and mops the floor until it is sparklingly clean.

In no time, the workplace looks wonderful, and the apprentice is satisfied. "You can stop now, broom, that is enough," he calls out enthusiastically. However, this does not sound like a magic spell, of course, and a magic broom will only listen to a spell. The broom continues to fill and empty the buckets. Help! Things are beginning to get very wet here: the stupid broom cannot be stopped. No matter what the apprentice calls out, nothing helps. And the water on the floor is now up to his ankles.

"Oh no, this is going wrong," the sorcerer's apprentice thinks. He sees a magic axe hanging on the wall, powerful enough to split a rock. He grabs it and chops away at the broom: splinters go flying in all directions, and there are pieces of wood all over the soaking floor. Phew, what a relief, the broom can no longer do any harm. The sorcerer's apprentice sits down on a stool to rest after his scary adventure. Then, with growing horror, he sees that all the pieces of the broom are getting to their 'feet' one by one, and marching off quickly to the well. They fill their buckets and splash water over the floor to their hearts' content.

Frantically, the sorcerer's apprentice blurts out magic words and spells, but there is nothing he can do to get the army of brooms under control. Finally, almost everything is covered with water. Just before the valuable books of spells disappear under the surface, the sorcerer returns. One spell is sufficient, and the brooms submerge, immobile, under the water. Shaking with fear, the sorcerer's apprentice looks up to his master, expecting to be sent packing forever. But the sorcerer is wise and even has to suppress a smile. Then he says, strictly: "I think you have learned your lesson! Magic is not something to play around with!". As a punishment, the sorcerer's apprentice has to spend the next days getting rid of the water and mopping down the floor; never before has the workplace been so clean.

Maurice Ravel: Ma mère l'oye (= Mother Goose)

The French composer Maurice Ravel lived in a Paris suburb. He was not very fond of the view from his window: his neighbours' houses loomed above, grey and lacking in inspiration, and of course, inspiration is a very important to a composer. So he filled his rooms with objects that enchanted him, which could consist of just about anything: colourful little statues, funny holiday souvenirs or music-boxes. He was very fond of the nightingale that could be wound up: then the little bird warbled out his melody and flapped his wings. Perhaps this reminded Ravel of the tale of the *Chinese nightingale*, which was about an emperor and a similar little wind-up bird.

Ravel adored fairy tales. Mimi and Jean Godebski (the children of

good friends) hung on to every word when he told them the tales of *Mother Goose*. Mimi and Jean were taking piano lessons, so in 1910 Ravel composed five pieces for them inspired by the tale of *Mother Goose* (= *Ma mere l'oye*, in French). They tell of Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, Tom Thumb, and Princess Laideronette. The music is written for piano duet, thus is to be played by two people at one piano.

In 1911, Ravel received a visit from Sergei Diaghilev. This enterprising impresario from Russia had founded a now well-known ballet company: Les Ballets Russes. Diaghilev asked Ravel to write a new piece for his dancers. Like other fun-loving adults, Diaghilev enjoyed fairy tales. So he was delighted when Ravel suggested he rewrote the five piano pieces he had composed for *Mother Goose*, in order to create ballet music for a large orchestra. Ravel set to work and magically turned the piano sounds into subtle and beautiful orchestral music.

In the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* one can follow the story from the beginning to the end in Paul Dukas' music. However, Ravel went about his composition in a different way. He chose a fragment from each fairy tale, and turned it into beautiful music.

Part 1: Prelude. The ballet starts with an enchantingly attractive introduction. A musical 'once upon a time ...'.

Part 2: The Dance of the Spinning Wheel and Scene. Ravel demonstrates that one can even get a spinning wheel to dance in one's imagination. In the ballet, Mother Goose spins her fairy tales.

Part 3: The Pavane of Sleeping Beauty in the woods. Princess Florine (that is the name used for Sleeping Beauty in *Mother Goose*) has pricked her finger on the spinning wheel. Now the prediction made by the bad fairy will come true, and she will sleep for one hundred years. The courtiers are sad, and dance a stately pavane.

Part 4: Beauty and the Beast. Once upon a time, the beast was a handsome prince, but he had been transformed by a bad fairy into a frightful monster. Luckily, he comes across the attractive young Beauty. They start talking, but the beast is really rather ugly, and unfortunately, begins to growl. When he gets a little too enthusiastic, Beauty steps back, fearfully. She is surprised at herself: this must be a reaction that the Beast often has to face, when talking with others. In order to console him, she stretches out her hand in a friendly manner, whereupon the Beast is retransformed into the attractive youth of yesteryear.

Part 5: Tom Thumb. Together with his seven brothers and sisters, Tom Thumb has lost his way in the woods. Luckily, they have eaten a lot of bread on the way, and the crumbs are strewn over the path. They realize that they will be able to find their way home just by following these crumbs. Now their minds are at ease and they take a nap. But the birds (one can easily hear them in the music – listen out for the cuckoo)

eat up all the crumbs while they are asleep: what now? Ravel does not let one hear how it ends; but as the music is not all too dramatic, it most likely has a happy conclusion.

Part 6: Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas. Once upon a time, Laideronette was a beautiful young empress, but an evil witch has changed her into an awfully ugly girl. She meets a fellow-sufferer – a handsome prince, who has also been bewitched. In fact, he is even worse off, having been turned into a green snake. They become friends and travel to the country of the prince: an eastern country, with beautiful pagodas and Buddhist temples. The inhabitants have been transformed into dolls made of jewels, crystal and porcelain. Laideronette and the Green Dragon have deep feelings for one another, and their love breaks the spell. Everyone is retransformed into his or her former self. In Ravel's music, we hear only the happy ending of the fairy tale: the festive wedding of the prince and princess. The music sounds very eastern.

Part 7: The Enchanted Garden. Princess Florine has been asleep for a hundred years now. But when her prince appears, he kisses her and the gloomy woods surrounding her turn into an enchanted garden full of gorgeous flowers. In the ballet, all the dancers from the earlier fairy tales reappear on stage to celebrate the happy ending.

Charles Koechlin: The Bandar-log from *Jungle Book*

The composer Charles Koechlin also came from France, and enjoyed going his own way in life. His long beard made him look like an absent-minded professor, and he was always carrying out experiments in his compositions. At times, he used special scales and modes from the Middle Ages, dating back a good thousand years: at others, he enthusiastically set to with the newest instruments, or the latest rage in the field of composition technique. He really did not care whether people appreciated his music; as long as he thought his music was interesting, he was happy.

Koechlin spent no less than 50 years working on his *Jungle Book*, which was inspired by the similarly titled book by the English author Rudyard Kipling. The book tells of the little Indian boy called Mowgli, who was left by his parents as a foundling in the jungle, where he subsequently grew up with a pack of wolves. He lives through all kind of adventures with the jungle animals.

The part recorded here is the Bandar-log (written in 1939). In this adventure, Mowgli is kidnapped by a troop of monkeys called the Bandar-log. It is not such a strange name as it seems, as 'Bandar-log' is the Hindi (the language they speak in India) word for 'monkey'. The

other animals do not want anything to do with the monkeys, as they are slightly crazy: they do not have a leader and are totally disorganized. They just chatter about like little idiots, but think they are quite something, often crying out: "We are fantastic, we are free, we are the most marvellous animals in the jungle." However, this is really not the case. As soon as a nut falls to the ground, they go crazy and tumble over one another, all trying to grab a piece of that one nut. They do not even have a language of their own, and simply imitate the sounds of other animals. It is impossible to follow them.

In short, Mowgli has ended up with a bunch of hooligans, and Koechlin makes that abundantly clear. His music is wild and colourful. And like all good music, it is worth listening to often, as one keeps on hearing new things.

Luckily, there is a happy conclusion. At the end, the bear Baloo and the panther Bagheera save poor Mowgli from the exasperating monkeys, and peace returns to the jungle.

Ronald Vermeulen

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Marc Albrecht, conductor

Acclaimed for his interpretations of Wagner and Strauss, as well as for his commitment to contemporary music, Marc Albrecht is a regular guest at Europe's most prestigious opera houses and orchestras. In the early years of his conducting career, Albrecht spent several seasons at the opera houses of Hamburg and Dresden, and also was appointed personal assistant to Claudio Abbado at the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra in Vienna. In 1995 he embarked on a highly successful 6 year tenure as Music Director of the Staatstheater Darmstadt, and since 2006, he has held the position of Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. In March 2009, following the tremendous acclaim for his performances of Strauss' *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* which opened the season at the Netherlands Opera in September 2008, Marc Albrecht was appointed Chief Conductor Designate of both the Netherlands Opera and Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, positions he will take up in September 2011.

Marc Albrecht has appeared with many key orchestras in Europe including the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Staatskapelle Dresden, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony and the Orchestre National de Lyon. In 2006 he made his BBC Proms debut in London with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

