Classics for Kids

"Gnomes" from Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky
Born: March 21, 1839
Died: March 28, 1881

Modest Mussorgsky was born in the Russian village of Karevo. His mother gave him his first piano lessons, and it was clear early on that Mussorgsky was a very good pianist.

Modest went to military boarding school, and when he graduated, he joined the army as an officer. Then, Mussorgsky started studying music with Russian composer Mily Balakirev, and left the army to become a composer. He was part of a group of five Russian composers known as "The Five," or the "Mighty Handful."

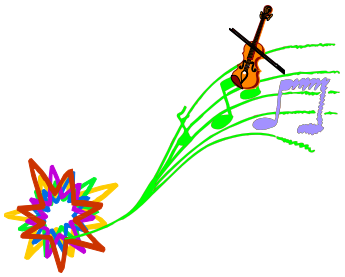
Mussorgsky had a hard time making a living as a composer, especially after his family lost all its money; so he found a government job, and continued to spend all his spare time composing.

In addition to his instrumental music, Mussorgsky wrote songs, and several operas. His operatic masterpiece is *Boris Godunov*, about a Russian Tsar who lived in the 1500's.

Mussorgsky wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* to honor his friend Victor Hartman, an artist and architect who died at the age of 39. After viewing a memorial exhibition of Hartman's work, Mussorgsky decided to create his own tribute - music depicting ten pieces of art in the show. *Pictures at an Exhibition* was originally written for piano, but there have been many orchestrations of the piece. The most famous is by Maurice Ravel.

The first picture in Mussorgsky's musical exhbition is a sketch for a nutcracker shaped like a gnome.

Modest Mussorgsky



Follow the listening map below as you listen to the music.

Picture This

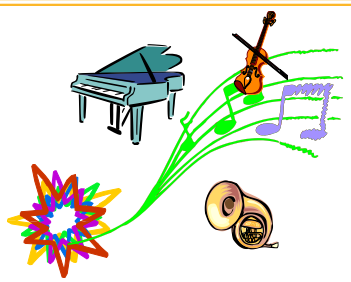
We can not see the painting of the "Gnomes" Mussorsky saw. We have the picture he painted with his music. Which gnome do YOU think matches the sounds you hear.

"Gnomes"

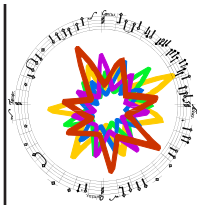
The gnome scurries into the music

The instruments try to play another tune.

He crashes down and shatters the rhythms.



The instruments try again to take back the music. You can hear them struggle with the gnome.



The gnome finally crashes down on the music and it ends!

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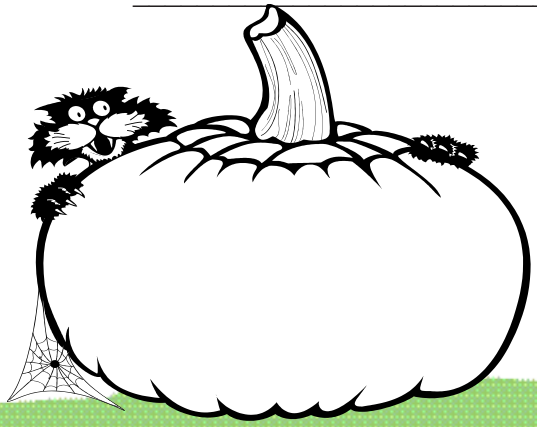
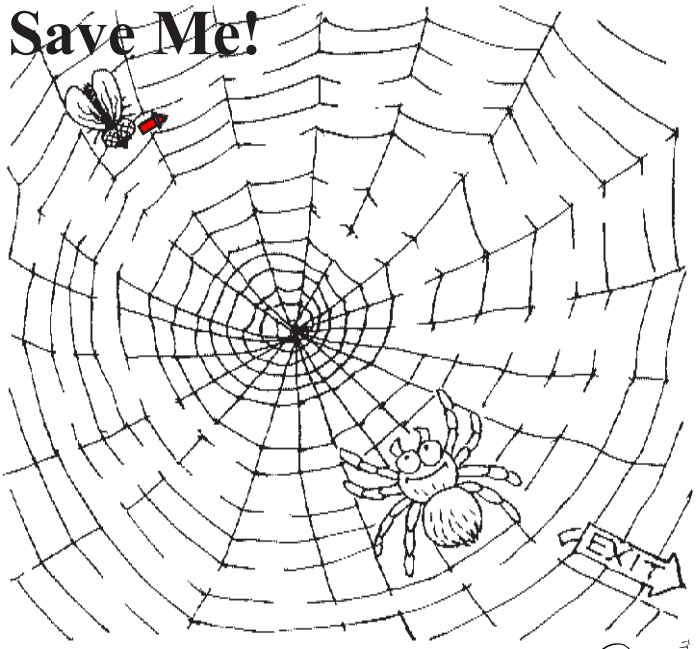
Time for Halloween

What are you going to be for Halloween? Mussorgsky was great at creating pictures with his music. He did this by choosing the right instruments to create his scenes. What instruments would you choose to describe the Halloween costumes above? Write down your answer and why you chose the instrument for each character.



Save Me!