

Carnival of the Animals

K-5 Discussion Guide

Camille Saint-Saëns' "Carnival of the Animals" is a humorous collection of 14 movements, depicting a wide variety of animals. The piece was originally scored for two pianos, two violins, viola, cello, double bass, flute/piccolo, C and Bb clarinet, glass harmonica, and xylophone. But this music has been arranged many times for many instruments. Astraios's version takes Lucien Garban's piano four-hands transcription and keeps the humor of the original version while exploring new instrument sounds.

The movements can be watched all together as a concert; can be watched as a concert with performances of Ogden Nash's accompanying humorous poems; or can be watched as individual movements. We provide this discussion guide as a starting point for ways to engage your students with the music. For the youngest students, we suggest allowing the students to act out the animals they hear.

Introduction et marche royale du lion (Introduction and Royal March of the Lion)

Q: What's a march? How do we hear the lion "roar"? What instruments make that sound?

Poules et coqs (Hens and Roosters)

Q: How do the instruments sound like pecking hens? How do they squawk like the birds?

Hémiones (animaux véloces) (Wild Donkeys Swift Animals)

Q: There are two pianists playing the same instrument. How do they move together?

Tortues (Tortoises)

This movement takes the melody from Jacques Offenbach's famous "Can-can," but plays it at a plodding slow tempo.

Q: How is the "Tortoise" movement different from the "Swift Animals" movement you just heard?

L'Éléphant (The Elephant)

Q: This movement is originally for double bass. How is the bassoon like a double bass? How is it different? How is the bassoon like an elephant? Why does a low sound make us think of an elephant?

Kangourous (Kangaroos)

Q: How do the instruments "jump" like kangaroos?

Aquarium

Originally scored for the now-rare glass harmonica, it is more common to use a glockenspiel these days. The glockenspiel is essentially a metal xylophone, that creates a crystal clear "PING" sound.

Q: How do the other instruments sound like they're swimming? Do they make fast, loud sounds, or long and smooth?

Personnages à longues oreilles (Characters with Long Ears)

It's been suggested that this movement is about music critics! The shortest of all the movements, here the trumpet and viola will imitate the "hee-haw" of a donkey.

Q: What sound does a donkey make?

Le Coucou au fond des bois (The Cuckoo in the Depths of the Woods)

A quiet movement suggesting a walk in the woods, with the distant sound of a bird. Originally for offstage clarinet, here the trumpet takes over the "cuckoo" of the bird call.

Q: Sometimes musicians are told to play "offstage," which means they're not standing near the other performers. Why is that a good choice for a piece about a birdcall?

Volière (Aviary)

This virtuosic movement shows off much of the range of the flute. The piano provides an excited fluttering in the background.

Q: An aviary is a collection of birds. How does the flute sound like a bird here? Why was the flute chosen to play this movement instead of the bassoon?

Pianistes (Pianists)

In this movement, the "animal" is a student pianist!

Q: This movement is about someone learning to play the piano. Do you play any instruments? Or do you have brothers or sisters learning to play an instrument?

Fossiles (Fossils)

Saint-Saens quotes his own "Danse macabre" in this movement, along with quotes from other composers. The xylophone is meant to depict the clacking of bones.

Q: What other songs do you hear in this movement? (Have the students listen at 0:30 to hear Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and *Au clair de la lune*)

Le cygne (The Swan)

Probably the most popular movement of the piece, this was the only one published during Saint-Saens' lifetime.

Q: In this movement, you can hear the swan swimming over the water. Which instrument is the swan? Why? Which instrument is the water? Why?

Final (Finale)

All the instruments gather in the grand finale. You can hear the donkeys (or music critics!) "braying" at the end. Who gets the last laugh?

Q: All the animals come together in this movement. Raise your hand when you hear an animal come back!

:10 - Lion

:45 - Swift Animals/Wild Donkeys

1:28 Hens & Roosters

1:39 Kangaroos

1:57 Long Ears