

HIGH SCHOOL NIGHTS

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR NOVEMBER 1, 2024

HOUSTON
SYMPHONY

We are excited for you and your students to attend the Houston Symphony at Jones Hall in November! Each piece on this program illustrates a story and was created by a composer whose ability to evoke character, setting, and mood using the modern orchestra of his day was second to none. Conducting this program is the celebrated Scottish conductor Sir Donald Runnicles, who is among the world's most highly regarded conductors of Wagner and Strauss.

The resources below were compiled for you to use as you see fit, to complement your current classroom objectives or pass along information to individual students attending who you think would benefit from certain ideas.

Houston Symphony Video Program Notes

I. RICHARD WAGNER'S OVERTURE TO TANNHÄUSER

Plot summary of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*

In Wagner's opera, the difference between spiritual and physical passion shows us deeper feelings about love and desire. Spiritual passion is more about ideal, uplifting love, while physical passion is more intense and connected to physical desire. Throughout the overture, Wagner highlights this conflict in several ways. Here are some questions to consider when you are listening during the performance:

Listen
Here!

1. What contrasting themes do you hear in the overture that move from calm, hymnlike melodies to more intense, rhythmic sections? How do these changes help illustrate the struggle between spiritual and physical passion?
2. Which instruments in the overture seem to express spiritual longing, and which ones suggest physical desire? How does the way these instruments are used contribute to the overall emotional effect?
3. How do sudden changes in dynamics, like crescendos and decrescendos, along with shifts in tempo, show the tension between spiritual and physical passion? Can you identify specific moments where these changes happen?

II. SELECTIONS FROM ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK'S *HÄNSEL UND GRETEL*

Selections from *Hänsel und Gretel*

1. Vorspiel (Prelude)
3. Hexenritt (The Witch's Ride)
4. Im Walde (In the Forest)
7. Knusperwalzer und Pantomime (The Witch's Waltz and Pantomime)

Videos to Learn More:

[Hänsel und Gretel: A Synopsis](#)

Listen
Here!

III. RICHARD STRAUSS'S *DON QUIXOTE*

Listen
Here!

Don Quixote is a symphonic work inspired by the novel written by Miguel de Cervantes. It tells the adventures of Don Quixote, the idealistic but delusional knight, and his squire, Sancho Panza. The piece is divided into a **theme** followed by **ten variations**, each portraying specific episodes from the story.



Videos to Learn More:

[A message from our soloists, Joan and Brinton](#)

[Behind the Music: Strauss's "Don Quixote"](#)

Don Quixote's **theme** is introduced 6-7 minutes into the piece, played by the cello:

Thema
Mäßig. (♩=80)

123

hervortretend

The musical notation shows the beginning of the theme in bass clef, 3/4 time. It starts with a 7-measure rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes, then a quarter note, and continues with a series of eighth and quarter notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The tempo is marked 'Mäßig' with a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute. The dynamic is 'hervortretend'.

The rest of the piece contains ten **variations** on these themes, each portraying a specific scene from the story. For example, variation 1 is written as follows:

Variation I.
Gemächlich (♩=84)
(mit breitem Strich)

16

157

mf

165

168

grazioso

The musical notation for Variation I is in bass clef, 4/8 time. It begins with a 4-measure rest, followed by a quarter note, and then a series of eighth notes. The tempo is 'Gemächlich' (84 bpm) and the dynamic is 'mf'. The instruction '(mit breitem Strich)' is present. The variation concludes with a 'grazioso' marking and a fermata over a final note. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals.

You might try:

- Play Don Quixote's theme and Variation I on your instrument. What patterns do you notice?
- Create your own variation inspired by Don Quixote's theme. What scene would your variation depict?
- Using the [solo cello part](#), taken from a piano reduction of Don Quixote, what other variations can you find?
- How does the solo cello interact with other instruments? You might especially consider [the solo viola](#), which represents Don Quixote's sidekick Sancho Panza.

Other Things to Listen for and Consider:

- Strauss was heavily influenced by Richard Wagner. Do you hear any Wagnerian elements in *Don Quixote*?
- Why do you think Strauss chose the cello to portray Don Quixote and the viola to represent Sancho Panza? Do you feel these instruments match their personalities?

We are looking forward to seeing you all at Jones Hall soon!