Game of couples, from Concerto for Orchestra
By
Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Lesson plan by Paul Pitts

Click here to watch the BSO perform this piece.

About the Composer

Béla Bartók was born in Hungary in 1881. A composer, pianist, ethnomusicologist, and teacher, he created music reflecting the traditions of his Hungarian upbringing. By age 11, Bartók was performing as a concert pianist and his programs included his own compositions. His most famous pieces include three piano concertos and the opera Bluebeard’s Castle. Though at times he struggled financially, he was respected internationally as both a composer and performer.

About the Composer

“Game of Couples” is the second movement of Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra, written for the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1944. In this movement, pairs of similar instruments take turns playing a long melody. The guided questions below can help students listen for the duets.

Guided Questions for Listening

What instruments do you hear at the beginning of the piece?
(Snare Drum and Bassoon)

How many Bassoons did you hear?
(two)

When two instruments play together, what is that called?
(Duet)

What other instruments duets do you hear in the piece?
(oboe duet, string pizzicato, flute duet, cello and bass, trumpet duet)

Is the tempo medium, fast or slow?
(medium or march tempo, quarter note = 94)

Can you clap the beat? Can you guess what time signature it is in?
(two four)

Now, imagine you are a dancer. Can you dance to the beat?
(Students get up and move around the room)

What are some words you can use to describe the mood of this piece?
(rhythmic, syncopated, mysterious, witty, playful)

How many duets are there in this piece?
(Five)

Can you name the instrumental duets?
(Bassoon, Oboe, Clarinet, Flute and Trumpet)
Teaching Resources

Click here for access to the full score

Click here for THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

FORM OF THE Giucoco delle coppie” (Game of the Couples)

Reh # 1 - Introduction – solo snare drum without snares – Video :03

Reh # 9 First Duet: Bassoons - Video :15

Reh # 25 Second Duet: Oboes - Video :36

Reh # 41 Strings four measure intro to Clarinet duet

Reh # 45 Third Duet: Clarinets - Video 1:03
Reh # 60  Fourth Duet: Flutes – Video 1:25

Reh # 90  Fifth Duet: Muted Trumpets – Video 2:06

Reh # 120 Snare Drum (without snares) – Video 2:48

Reh # 123  Brass Choral with Snare Drum answer – Video 2:52

Reh # 147  French Horns feature with Sn Dr answer – Video 3:28

Reh # 165  Bassoon Trio – Video 3:55

Reh # 181  Oboe and Clarinet Reprise – Video 4:18

Reh # 198  Clarinet, Flute, and Bassoon Reprise – Video 4:42

Reh # 228  Trumpet Duet Reprise with string and harp glissando – Video 5:25

Reh # 255  Ending with all woodwinds and Snare Drum ending – Video 6:00

References
1. [https://www.redlandssymphony.com/pieces/concerto-for-orchestra](https://www.redlandssymphony.com/pieces/concerto-for-orchestra)
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concerto_for_Orchestra_(Bart%C3%B3k)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concerto_for_Orchestra_(Bart%C3%B3k) Halsey Stevens Composer. Professor of Music, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1951–76. Author of *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*