

F.A.M.E. March 2006
Night on Bald Mountain
Composer: Modest Mussorgsky (1839 – 1881)

Suggested docent costume: Black pants and shirt (your own) with black cape (on cart.)

Introduction: *Room is darkened. Play "Night on Bald Mountain," #7, as poem is read by flashlight.*

Darkness
Darkness creeps and darkness crawls
Over cities, hills and walls.
Gloomy, gray and thickest black
Swirls along from front to back.

Darkness comes today with FAME
Artist, composer, you'll soon name.
So listen closely, children do
Or the darkness may get.....YOU!

What kind of mood are we trying to create today? (*Scary, frightening*) *Highlight Forms of Art Visual with flashlight.* What forms of art did I use to create that mood? (*music, poetry, fashion, and performance.*)

Think about the most frightening movie you ever saw. The movie had a script or a story that probably was scary. (*Indicate the literature portion of the visual.*) What other elements did the filmmaker use to make the movie frightening? (*Dark costumes and setting, movements indicating fear, scary music or any appropriate answer.*) *Turn lights on.*

All forms of art can communicate mood. Our composer for today used his artistic talents to create mood and tell stories through his music. His name is Modest Mussorgsky. Experts tell us to use mental pictures to remember names, so I have a visual memory trick to help us remember Mussorgsky's name. (*Show visual moo – sword – ski. Have students say name.*)

Music Description

Mussorgsky loved his Russian countrymen and the folk tales of his land because, as a little boy, he loved hearing the stories. As a composer, he used orchestral instruments instead of words to tell a story. This is called a symphonic poem. One of the stories he was attracted to was the tale of June 23rd, St. John's Eve, which is similar to Halloween. To add to the authenticity of the music's mood, it was actually written by Mussorgsky on the very night of St. John's Eve in 1867. In the story, a demon comes to life and witches and other ghouls from all over Russia fly to Bald Mountain (Mt. Triglav in southern Russia) in honor of the Black God, Chernobog, who takes the form of a black goat. During an awful thunderstorm, they celebrate a Black Mass, shriek, and perform dastardly deeds and pranks throughout the night. At the end of the piece, the storm subsides, dawn breaks, and church bells ring.

This old story describes what happens during a terrible thunderstorm. What other imaginary explanations for thunder have you heard? (*Greeks believed Zeus hurled thunderbolts. Roman's thought Jupiter was angry. The Vikings thought thunder was produced by their God, Thor, as his hammer struck an anvil while riding his chariot across the clouds.*) Now we know that lightening bolts are very hot and when that intense heat pierces the air, it creates a sonic boom we know as thunder. Before people knew these scientific explanations, they made up stories to explain events they didn't understand.

Activity: Musical pictures (*Pass out blank sheets of paper.*)

I'm going to play Mussorgsky's, *Night on Bald Mountain*. As you listen to his symphonic poem, draw what you think the music is telling you or close your eyes and visualize what you think is happening. See if you can hear the witches, goblins, and the heavy sounding melody that is Chernobog. Listen for the dramatic dynamics and changing rhythm that helps tell the story. (*Play #7, 4 minutes long*) What was the picture you drew or saw in your mind as you listened to the music. (*Allow a few students to share what they drew or visualized and discuss, if possible, how the use of dynamics and rhythm influenced their ideas.*) The music conveys the frightening elements of the unknown and allows the listener to imagine what might take place on such an evening. There is a happy ending, however, and good wins out in the end. How does the music let us know there's a happy ending? (*We hear the church bells indicating the dawn.*)

Biography (*Choose information appropriate to grade level.*)

Modest Mussorgsky was born in Russia into a family of wealthy landowners. He began taking piano lessons from his mother around the age of six. By the time he was nine, he was playing so well that he began performing for family and friends. During that time in Russia's history, the eldest son inherited the house and the land. The second son was expected to go into the military so at age 13, since he was the second son, Mussorgsky entered the Cadet School of the Guards in St. Petersburg. He was an army officer at the age of 17 and joined one of Russia's most aristocratic regiments. (*Show picture on page 135*) Even while learning how to be a soldier, Mussorgsky privately pursued his musical talent and wrote songs for his friends. While in the military, he met a music loving officer named Balakirev who was a passionate Russian nationalist. Mussorgsky eventually resigned his military appointment and became a full-time composer and musician.

Mussorgsky, along with Balakirev, were part of five Russian Nationalist composers known as the "Russian Five" who wanted to create orchestral works, ballets, and operas which were entirely Russian in style. Russia at this time was very influenced by France, Germany, and Italy. Most of the art and music in Russia was a poor imitation of what was being produced in these other countries. The "Russian Five" created a national school of composition that relied on the style and mood of Russian folklore. Through songs, they described Russian peasant life and reproduced the cadence of the Russian language. They were considered rebels but were proud of it. The five often produced collaborative music. One would write a piece and the others would critique and revise it. Such is the case with today's composition, *Night on Bald Mountain*. Mussorgsky's use of harmony was original and advanced for the times in which he lived. To conform to more orthodox forms, many of his pieces were revised by the group.

Several events altered Mussorgsky's life considerably. The liberation of the serfs or peasants in 1861 caused the loss of his family wealth, and he had to eke out a living as a government clerk. This left him little time to concentrate on composing. The frustration of not having time to compose coupled with his insecurities concerning his musical talent made him an unhappy man. In 1865, his mother died, leaving a profound impact on Mussorgsky. He began to drink excessively which contributed to his death at the early age of 42. (*Show picture page 114*)

Fantasia Video (*Night on Bald Mountain – 6min; Ave Marie – 7min.*) Please rewind to the beginning of "Night on Bald Mountain" when done.

Critics have called Mussorgsky "ahead of his time." One of his greatest gifts was the ability to paint pictures with music, allowing the listener to visualize the story he told. Walt Disney was also fascinated by Mussorgsky's musical story and used it in one of his Fantasia movies. Let's watch it now and compare our pictures of the story of Bald Mountain with Disney's visualization. (*Play "Night on Bald Mountain" by Modest Mussorgsky. If you have time, watch "Night on Bald Mountain" and "Ave Marie." Explain that Disney told his story of the struggle between good and evil combining the compositions of Modest Mussorgsky and Franz Schubert.*)