

# VI. Las Meninas

*Scenes from Childhood* in the style of ...

## 1. Context

This fascinating work has several sources of inspiration. The composer writes:

"One of the most remarkable accomplishments in the history of painting is the seventeenth century masterpiece by Velázquez entitled, *Las Meninas*, a compelling portrayal of the artist himself in the act of painting Philip IV and his wife, Mariana of Austria who, surprisingly, can only be seen in the reflection of a mirror placed at the back of the room that furnishes the setting for the scene: an impromptu gathering of 'little royals' (*las meninas*), that is, the Infanta Margarita and the various 'children-in-waiting' of the royal family, who are looking at either the King and Queen being painted, or glancing at someone who has just happened upon the entire scene.

Because of its multileveled content and structure, this work has charmed a variety of commentators and visual artists into comprehending, reading and interpreting its meanings, from Foucault to Dali, for example, to Picasso who, between August and December 1957, painted no less than 44 variations in his own inimitable style.

In my own variations on the *Scenes from Childhood*, Robert Schumann's masterful depiction of the preoccupations and games of little people, the final scene which contains the Schumann self-portrait/self-quotation, I have tried at once to recreate the feeling that, as Velázquez' teacher used to say, "the image must go beyond its frame," and offer changing points of view, the perspectives of numerous observers who happen upon the scenes: inevitable reinterpretations of the elements that make up the substance of evanescent perceptions."

The composer entitles this work for solo piano as transformative variations on *Kinderszenen* (variations on Robert Schumann's *Scenes from Childhood*). Indeed, in each movement, we recognize the theme of one of the children's scenes presented in the style of another composer to whom the movement is dedicated. For example, the section "à la mémoire d'Érik Satie" features the melody of Schumann's *Am Kamin* (*At the fireside*) in augmented note values (slow motion) superimposed over Satie's *Gymnopédie no 1* played with the left hand. With this ingenious convergence of style and superimposition, John Rea presents original reinterpretations of *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*) in the style of various composers.

## 2. Appreciation



### A) Games to acquaint students with the works

**Level:** primary grades 1 to 4

**Music excerpts:** tracks 7, 8, 9 (excerpts from Schumann's *Kinderszenen*)  
tracks 13, 14, 15 (excerpts from Rea's *Las Meninas*)

1. The teacher explains that composer Robert Schumann wrote a very beautiful work for piano entitled *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*). Thirteen movements are inspired by various childhood memories of the composer.
2. The teacher chooses a movement (eg: **track 9** *Frightening*), and suggests that a group of 3 or 4 students mime the scene which the title and music suggest.

3. At any time the teacher stops the music and the students must freeze. This is the “scene” representing the musical movement.
4. The exercise is repeated with other musical excerpts and students.
5. When the pupils are well-acquainted well with Schumann’s music **tracks 7, 8, 9** the teacher explains that composer John Rea transformed Schumann’s *Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood)* into a work entitled *Las Meninas*.
6. The class repeats the mime exercise with John Rea’s *Las Meninas* **tracks 13, 14, 15**. It is interesting to note the gestural differences inspired by Rea’s music compared to that of Schumann (eg: slower, more loaded or “wriggling” etc.)

### B) Finding superimposed sections



**Level:** primary grades 5,6 and secondary

**Music excerpts:** tracks 7, 8, 9 (excerpts from Schumann’s *Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood)*)  
 tracks 10, 11, 12 (excerpts from works by Evangelista, Chopin and Satie)  
 tracks 13, 14, 15 (excerpts from Rea’s *Las Meninas*)

**Reproducible forms:** RF18 and RF19

1. The teacher explains that to compose his piano work, *Las Meninas*, John Rea was inspired by two other artists who represented children’s portraits in their own way:
  - the picture *Las Meninas* by painter Diego Vélasquez **RF18**
  - *Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood)* for solo piano by composer Robert Schumann
  
2. Just as Picasso created 44 art variations of Vélaquez’ *Las Meninas* **RF19** John Rea composed music variations inspired by Schumann’s *Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood)*. Each variation is conceived in the style of some of his favourite composers. So, in each movement, the music of Schumann and that of another composer is simultaneously heard.

Movement of Schumann’s <i>Scenes from Childhood</i>	In the style of this composer	Movement of John Rea’s <i>Las Meninas</i>
1. <i>Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (Of Lands and Foreign Peoples)</i>	José Evangelista, <i>Monodías Españolas</i> (1989), no 11	I. <i>Of Lands and Foreign Peoples</i> to José Evangelista
8. <i>Am Kamin (At the fireside)</i>	Érik Satie, <i>Gymnopédie no 1</i> (1888)	XV. <i>At the fireside</i> in memory of Érik Satie
11. <i>Fürchtenmachen (Frightening)</i>	Frédéric Chopin, <i>Piano sonata no. 2 in B major Op. 36</i> (1839) (beginning of the 3rd movement, funeral march)	XVIII. <i>Frightening</i> in memory of Frédéric Chopin

3. The students guess which pieces inspired each movement of *Las Meninas*:
4. The class listens to an excerpt from *Las Meninas* (eg: track 13 *Of Foreign Lands and Peoples*)
  - The teacher then has them listen to two excerpts from *Kinderszenen* (eg: track 7 and track 8)
  - Students must guess which of Schumann's music inspired the first excerpt of *Las Meninas*.
5. The class repeats the exercise for the four excerpts by Rea, Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*) and works by other composers (Evangelista, Satie and Chopin.)

### 3. Creation



#### A) Exploring sound/improvisation

**Level:** primary and secondary

The challenge of this activity is to create variations on the first theme of *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*.)

#### 1. *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen* (*Of Lands and Foreign Peoples*.)

As John Rea does in *Las Meninas*, the students can transform the melody:

- by playing with the character
- by adding "ornamental musical elements"
- by superimposing another melody on to Schumann's work

#### 1. The students sing or play the beginning of Schumann's first theme:



#### 2. Modifying the character: the students are asked to sing or play the melody in a way that is:

- "tired"
- "urgent"
- "irritated"
- "a lullaby"
- "breathless"
- "secretive"
- "laughing"
- etc.

#### 3. Addition of "ornamental musical elements": while a group of students sings or plays the melody, others add:

- background C
- staccatos improvised in treble
- glissandi
- a rhythmic ostinato on percussion
- etc.

4. Superimposing two excerpts: half of the class sings or plays Schumann's melody while the other half sings:

- Twinkle, twinkle, little star:

Musical notation for 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, while the accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern.

- Au clair de la lune:

Musical notation for 'Au clair de la lune' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, while the accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern.

- Brother John:

Musical notation for 'Brother John' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, while the accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern.

Musical notation for 'Brother John' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, while the accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern.

- Ah les crocodiles:

Musical notation for 'Ah les crocodiles' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, while the accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern.

- We will rock you:



- À la claire fontaine:



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**B) Creation in the style of *Las Meninas***



**Level:** primary and secondary

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Each student composes their own variation on Schumann's theme using the same techniques as John Rea did in *Las Meninas*.

In their score they must choose and indicate by graphic notation or conventionally:

1. The character, "in the style of" (eg: Grumbler the Smurf, Spiderman, the Snow Queen etc.)
2. Ornamental elements (identified symbols)
3. A familiar melody (played in alternation or superimposed over Schumann's).

Variations for more advanced groups:

1. Using various melodies or excerpts from familiar works and superimposed.
2. The superimposition can be done using software (eg: Audacity.)

Reproducible form

RF18

*Las Meninas* painting  
by Velasquez



Reproducible form

RF19

***Las Meninas* painting by Picasso  
inspired by Velasquez**

