



PAUL DUKAS

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

Paul Abraham Dukas (1 October 1865 – 17 May 1935) was a French composer, critic, scholar and teacher. A studious man, of retiring personality, he was intensely self-critical, and he abandoned and destroyed many of his compositions. His best known work is the orchestral piece *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (*L'apprenti sorcier*), the fame of which has eclipsed that of his other surviving works. At a time when French musicians were divided into conservative and progressive factions, Dukas adhered to neither but retained the admiration of both. His compositions were influenced by composers including Beethoven, Berlioz, Franck, d'Indy and Debussy. In tandem with his composing career, Dukas worked as a music critic, contributing regular reviews to at least five French journals. Later in his life he was appointed professor of composition at the Conservatoire de Paris and the École Normale de Musique. Dukas died in Paris in 1935, aged 69. He was cremated and his ashes were placed in the columbarium at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice (French: *L'apprenti sorcier*) is a symphonic poem by the French composer Paul Dukas, written in 1896–97. Subtitled "Scherzo after a ballad by Goethe," the piece was based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1797 *Die Zauberling*. By far the most performed and recorded of Dukas's works, its notable appearance in the Walt Disney 1940 animated film *Fantasia* has led to the piece becoming widely known to audiences outside the classical concert hall. Dukas's work is part of the larger Romantic genre of programmatic music, although unlike other tone poems Dukas's work is descriptively programmatic, closely following the events described in the Goethe poem. The popularity of the piece became a matter of irritation to Dukas. In 2011, the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* observed, "The popularity of *L'apprenti sorcier* and the exhilarating film version of it in Disney's *Fantasia* possibly hindered a fuller understanding of Dukas, as that single work is far better known than its composer."

The poem begins as an old sorcerer departs his workshop, leaving his apprentice with chores to perform. Tired of fetching water by pail, the apprentice enchants a broom to do the work for him – using magic in which he is not yet fully trained. The floor is soon awash with water, and the apprentice realizes that he cannot stop the broom because he does not know how. The apprentice splits the broom in two with an axe, but each of the pieces becomes a whole new broom and takes up a pail and continues fetching water, now at twice the speed. When all seems lost, the old sorcerer returns, quickly breaks the spell and saves the day. The poem finishes with the old sorcerer's statement that powerful spirits should only be called by the master himself.