Festive Overture
by Dmitri Shostakovich

Background
Shostakovich wrote the Festive Overture (1954) in just three days, to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution. It was commissioned by the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, which needed a new work for their October Revolution celebration concert.

The Festive Overture opens with a brass fanfare that continues to build until the first theme. The brass section can also be heard prominently in restatements of the primary theme. In contrast, the secondary theme is a lyrical melody that is played by horns, cellos, and strings. After the second climax of the piece, an energetic coda leads to the finish.

Did you know? The October Revolution was a Marxist Communist Revolution in Russia, led by Vladimir Lenin. The Revolution overthrew the Russian government, which led to the Russian Civil War (1918-20), and then the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922.

Objectives
Students will learn what an overture is, and discuss how music can be used to celebrate an event. Students will think of an occasion to celebrate, and decide what kinds of music they would have at a celebration.

Materials
Recording of Shostakovich’s “Festive Overture”

Writing supplies

Art supplies, such as drawing paper and colored pencils

Activity
1. Have students listen to the piece once, and consider the following questions:
   - What are some words that describe the music? (Fast or slow, loud or soft, grand, important, exciting, happy)
   - What kinds of instruments are playing? (brass, percussion, strings, etc.)
   - What sort of event might this music have been written for? (A celebration, a party, an important person)
2. Tell the students a little about Shostakovich and why this piece was written:
   • Shostakovich was a Russian composer who wrote this piece to commemorate the Russian Revolution
   • He wrote the music in only three days for the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra
   • It was used to begin a celebratory concert

3. Now tell the students that this piece is called an overture. An overture is an orchestral piece that is used as an introduction, for a concert or to begin an extended piece of music. The beginning of the piece features a fanfare, which is “a short, lively tune played on brass instruments.” Fanfares are often used to announce or introduce something important (like the arrival of a king or queen!)

4. Ask students to consider the following questions:
   • Why was this piece used at the beginning of the celebration concert?
   • What makes the music exciting and grand? (Think about how the piece begins, the type of instruments, the number of people playing, the volume and speed of the music)

5. Have students think of an occasion to celebrate. Tell them they are going to be in charge of planning a special celebration:
   • What is the occasion?
   • Where will the celebration be?
   • How many people will attend?
   • What kind of music will there be?
   • What kinds of instruments and musicians will play?
   • What other activities will there be?

6. Students can write their ideas on paper, or make a drawing or painting of their special celebration.
This packet has been designed with the following organizational structure from the Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Frameworks as a guide:

**The Arts Discipline Strand: Music**

**The PreK-12 Standards for Music in this Strand:**

5. *Critical Response.* Students will describe and analyze their own music and the music of others using appropriate music vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.

**Connections Strand:**

6. *Purposes and Meanings in the Arts.* Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.

7. *Roles of Artists in Communities.* Students will describe the roles of artists, patrons, cultural organizations, and arts institutions in societies of the past and present.

8. *Concepts of Style and, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change.* Students will demonstrate their understanding of styles, stylistic influence, and stylistic change by identifying when and where art works were created, and by analyzing characteristic features of art works from various historical periods, cultures, and genres.

10. *Interdisciplinary Connections.* Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering.