IGOR (FEDOROVITCH) STRAVINSKY

Igor Stravinsky, one of the greatest masters of modern music, was born in Oranienbaum, near St. Petersburg, on June 17, 1882. The son of a famous bass singer at the Imperial Opera, Feodor Stravinsky, he was raised in an artistic atmosphere. He studied law until age nineteen, when Rimsky-Korsakov in Heidelberg encouraged him to study composition seriously and he studied theory with Kalafati. In 1907, Stravinsky studied with Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg and on January 22, 1908, his first symphony, which showed a mastery of technique, was performed in St. Petersburg. This was followed on February 29, by his critically successful set of songs for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, Le Faune et la Bergere.

In celebration of Maxmillian Steinberg's marriage to Rimsky-Korsakov's daughter (June 17, 1908), Stravinsky wrote an orchestral fantasy, Feu d'artifice, and when Rimsky-Korsakov died a few days later, he wrote a threnody as a tribute. Stravinsky's next orchestral work, Scherzo fantastique, was performed in St. Petersburg (February 6, 1909) and the famous impresario, Diaghilev, heard it and commissioned Stravinsky to write a work on a Russian subject. The result was the production of the first of Stravinsky's ballet masterpieces, L'Oiseau de feu (Paris, June 15, 1910) and the beginning of the successful collaboration between the composer and producer.

Stravinsky’s association with Diaghilev concentrated his activities in Paris and he moved there in 1911. His second ballet for the impresario, Petrouchka, (Paris, June 13, 1911), was a great success and was so new and original that it marked a turning point in 20th century modernism. The spasmodically explosive rhythms, the novel instrumental sonorities, with the use of the piano as an integral part of the (more)
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orchestra, and the innovation of two different keys sounded simultaneously, greatly influenced contemporary composers.

Two years later, Stravinsky created a work that was even more revolutionary -- *The Rite of Spring*, which was produced by Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes in Paris on May 29, 1913. Its impact was so great that there were demonstrations at the premiere by some members of the audience who thought a trick was being played on them; but progressive musicians viewed the work as the beginning of a new era in composition. In this score, Stravinsky severed all ties with traditional harmony and employed dissonant combinations without precedent in modern music.

Before the outbreak of World War I, Diaghilev produced Stravinsky's *La Rossignol*, a lyric fairy tale after Hans Christian Anderson (Paris, May 26, 1914). During the war years, Stravinsky worked mostly in Switzerland with Russian subjects still dominating. He wrote *Les Noces* for an unusual ensemble of chorus, soloists, four pianos and seventeen percussion instruments. It was during the last months of the war, that Stravinsky developed his theory that the impoverished world necessitated an economy in musical settings. This was demonstrated by *Histoire du Soldat*, the stage play for seven players, which includes several stylized modern dances. During the same period he wrote *Ragtime*, a work for eleven instruments, which was rhythmically derived from early American jazz music.

Continuing his association with Diaghilev, Stravinsky wrote the ballet *Pulcinella*, two one-act operas, *Marva* after Pushkin, and *Renard* to stories from Russian folk literature. The operas, produced by Diaghilev in Paris on June 3, 1922, were the last works in which Stravinsky used Russian subjects.

His next significant composition, a piano concerto, commissioned by Koussevitzky (Boston Symphony Orchestra, January 23, 1925 -- his first American tour), began his neoclassicist trend. This was followed by *Apollon Musagete*, a pantomime for string orchestra evocative of the court ballets of Lully (Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., April 27, 1928); *Capriccio* for piano and orchestra (Paris, December 6, 1929); his opera-oratorio, *Oedipus Rex* to a Latin text (Paris, May 30, 1927); and *Symphony of Psalms*, written for the 50th anniversary of the Boston Symphony (Brussels, December 13, 1930).

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Commissioned by Ida Rubenstein, Stravinsky composed a ballet, *Persephone*, to text by Andre Gide, which he conducted at the Paris Opera on April 30, 1934. In 1937, Stravinsky conducted *Jeux des Cartes* (a ballet in three deals), written to his own scenario derived from an imaginary poker game (Metropolitan Opera House, April 27, 1937), and in his work *Dumbarton Oaks* (Concerto) he continued his practice of neo-Baroque composition (Washington, D. C., May 8, 1938).

Stravinsky became a French citizen in 1934, but left France in 1938 to settle in Hollywood, and became an American citizen in 1945. Named a Charles Eliot lecturer at Harvard University from 1939-1940, Stravinsky continued to conduct his works in America and Europe. He wrote music in many styles and for many purposes. He composed *Circus Polka* (for a young elephant) in 1942 for the Ringling Brothers Circus; *Ebony Concerto* for clarinet and swing band, performed by Woody Herman (March 25, 1946); and, in 1951, he completed his opera, *The Rake's Progress*, after Hogarth's famous series of engravings, to a libretto by W. H. Auden and C. Kallman. And, in 1957, he wrote a ballet for twelve dancers, *Agon*, based on serial techniques, which was performed for his 75th birthday in Los Angeles.

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