

A PORTRAIT
Igor Stravinsky



1882–1971

Preface

Among the carefully adapted transcriptions of conversations between the veteran Stravinsky and Robert Craft, there is one especially telling passage. Referring to his 1920 ballet *Pulcinella*, the composer recalls the reaction to his arrangements of Pergolesi and other eighteenth-century musicians:

People who had never heard of, or cared about, the originals cried 'sacrilege': 'The classics are ours. Leave the classics alone.' To them all my answer was and is the same: You 'respect', but I love.

A great genius's love for all his models is what lies at the heart of Stravinsky's creativity. (It is worth noting that although he was apt to put inverted commas around the word 'heart', Stravinsky leaves the word 'love' to stand unqualified in the above quotation.) He made everything he touched become his own, whether it was the lush nationalist influence of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, or the extreme refinement of Anton Webern, whose music he discovered so late in life. No theme was deemed too cheap or outlandish a subject for transformation, and his inspiration was wide-ranging. Prokofiev thought him a disgraceful thief for pilfering other ballet composers' ideas in *Apollo*, but Stravinsky's genuine admiration for composers as unlikely as Gounod and Delibes was unlimited. Hungarian and Greek folk music, the antics of the music hall

entertainer Little Tich, and the jazz trumpeting of Shorty Rogers: all these were grist to his creative mill.

As the awed conductors who welcomed the eighty-year-old Stravinsky back to Russia so eloquently wrote at the time, the only figure with whom he could be compared was Picasso. Both artists experienced the great upheavals of the twentieth century, and reflected on them at leisure – though not always when expected – and they both retained their distinctive personal identities. The explosion of *The Rite of Spring*, born out of the complicated metres of the Russian folk tradition, and the more polite revolution of ‘back to Bach’ in the 1920s were both operations on a large scale; but Stravinsky – as refined and cultured a man as Richard Strauss, who in so many respects might be seen as his polar opposite – still amazes most in small but telling details. One thinks of the unforgettable phrases that punctuate *Apollo’s* dreamy Pas de deux, the perfectly orchestrated major chords so carefully placed throughout his middle-period scores, and the serial tintinnabulations that mark the *Requiem Canticles’* passport to eternity.

In 1962, Stravinsky made a moving declaration of his essential Russianness:

All my life I've spoken Russian, thought in Russian, my whole make-up is Russian. Perhaps in my music it's not at once obvious, but it's there in the background, in its hidden nature.

So this curious and lively traveller, twice exiled (once to Switzerland and France, then again to America), always carried his roots with him. No other twentieth-century composer succeeded in so many diverse fields or on such different scales. Any journey of reassessment takes one from the Stravinsky that is known and loved into the minefield of late Stravinsky, yet no matter how unfamiliar the territory one is guided safely and comfortingly by a voice that remains essentially Russian. Certainly the wider public will never come to love such final rituals as *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni* in the way that they do *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*, for Stravinsky did become unashamedly elitist in his old age (which was not very helpful when making a television film of his Biblical drama *The Flood*). Nevertheless, everything he did commands respect, and even his thorniest scores can be loved if one keeps listening.

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Track List

CD I

The Firebird

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| [1] | Introduction | 2:32 |
| [2] | Scene 1: Night. Kashchey's Enchanted Garden | 1:40 |
| [3] | Scene 1: The Firebird enters, pursued by Ivan Tsarevich | 2:16 |
| [4] | Scene 1: The Firebird's Dance | 1:11 |
| Philharmonia Orchestra / Robert Craft | | 8.557500 |

Three Movements for Piano (arranged from Petrushka)

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| [5] | Movement 1: Danse russe | 2:19 |
| [6] | Movement 2: Chez Pétrouchka | 4:33 |
| Peter Hill, piano | | 8.553871 |

The Rite of Spring. Part 1: Adoration of the Earth

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------|
| [7] | Introduction | 3:32 |
| [8] | The Augurs of Spring (Dances of the Young Girls) | 3:14 |
| [9] | Ritual of Abduction | 1:22 |
| [10] | Spring Rounds | 3:11 |
| [11] | Ritual of the Rival Tribes | 1:52 |
| [12] | Procession of the Sage | 0:40 |
| [13] | The Sage | 0:28 |
| [14] | Dance of the Earth | 1:16 |
| Philharmonia Orchestra / Robert Craft | | 8.557508 |

Three Pieces for String Quartet

- | | | |
|------|-------|------|
| [15] | No. 1 | 0:55 |
|------|-------|------|

16	No. 2	2:10
	Goldner Quartet	8.554315

Berceuses du chat

17	On the Stove	0:42
18	At Home	1:06
19	Dodo	1:24
20	The Cat has...	0:52
	Ingrid Silveus, mezzo-soprano / Schirmer Ensemble / Brett Kelly	8.554367

The Soldier's Tale (Dances from Part 2)

21	Tango	2:08
22	Valse	1:55
23	Ragtime	2:08
	Northern Chamber Orchestra / Nicholas Ward	8.553662

Les Noces

24	Scene 4: The Wedding Feast	10:07
	Alison Wells, soprano / Susan Bickley, mezzo-soprano / Martyn Hill, tenor / Alan Ewing, bass / Simon Joly Chorale / International Piano Quartet / Tristan Fry Percussion Ensemble / Robert Craft	8.557499

Pulcinella

25	Serenata: Larghetto (Pergolesi: Il Flaminio. Act I. Polidoro)	2:57
26	Scherzino: (Gallo: Trio Sonata No. 2. Movement 1)	1:50
27	Allegro: (Gallo: Trio Sonata No. 2. Movement 3)	1:12
28	Andantino: (Gallo: Trio Sonata No. 8. Movement 1)	1:31
29	Allegro (Pergolesi: Lo frate 'nnammorato. Act I. Vanella)	1:44
	Ian Bostridge, tenor / Bournemouth Sinfonietta / Stefan Sanderling	8.553181

30

Symphonies of Wind Instruments (1920 version)

Twentieth Century Classics Ensemble / Robert Craft

7:52

8.557508

Piano Sonata

31

Movement 2: Adagietto

Peter Hill, piano

5:21

8.553871

TT 77:04

CD 2

- [1] **Our Father (Otche nash)** 1:22
Gregg Smith Singers / Robert Craft 8.557504

- [2] **Oedipus Rex**
Epilogue 6:37
Edward Fox, narrator / Jennifer Lane, mezzo-soprano / Martyn Hill, tenor /
Joseph Cornwell, tenor / David Wilson-Johnson, bass-baritone /
Andrew Greenan, bass / Simon Joly Chorale / Philharmonia Orchestra /
Robert Craft 8.557499

- Apollon musagète (1947 version)**
[3] Pas de deux: Apollo and Terpsichore 4:06
[4] Coda: Apollo and the Muses 3:24
London Symphony Orchestra / Robert Craft 8.557502

- Symphony of Psalms**
[5] Movement 3: Psalm 150 11:34
Simon Joly Chorale / Philharmonia Orchestra / Robert Craft 8.557504

- Concerto for Two Pianos**
[6] Movement I: Con moto 5:44
Benjamin Frith, piano / Peter Hill, piano 8.553386

- Violin Concerto**
[7] Movement 3: Aria II 5:01
Jennifer Frautschi, violin / Philharmonia Orchestra / Robert Craft 8.557508

Concerto in E flat 'Dumbarton Oaks'

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|------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------|
| [8] | Movement 1: Tempo giusto | 4:53 |
| | Northern Chamber Orchestra / Nicholas Ward | 8.553662 |

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| [9] | Tango | 3:35 |
| | Peter Hill, piano | 8.553871 |

Dances concertantes

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------|
| [10] | Marche – Introduction | 2:06 |
| | Bournemouth Sinfonietta / Stefan Sanderling | 8.553181 |

Symphony in Three Movements

- | | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------------|-------------|
| [11] | Movement 3: Con moto | 6:04 |
| | New Zealand Symphony Orchestra / En Shao | 8.553403 |

Concerto in D

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|-------------|
| [12] | Movement 2: Arioso | 2:46 |
| | Bournemouth Sinfonietta / Richard Sudt | 8.550979 |

Mass

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| [13] | Sanctus | 3:17 |
| | Gregg Smith Singers / Orchestra of St Luke's / Robert Craft | 8.557504 |

Orpheus

- | | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------------|-------------|
| [14] | Scene 3: Apotheosis | 2:37 |
| | London Symphony Orchestra / Robert Craft | 8.557502 |

The Rake's Progress

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| [15] | 'I was never saner' | 4:11 |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|

- | | | |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| [16] | ‘I burn! I freeze!’ | 1:49 |
| | Samuel Ramey, bass / Munich Radio Orchestra / Julius Rudel | 8.555355 |

Agon

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| [17] | Second pas de trois: Bransle simple | 0:54 |
| [18] | Bransle gay | 0:45 |
| [19] | Bransle double (Bransle de Poitou) | 1:22 |
| | Orchestra of St Luke's / Robert Craft | 8.557502 |

Canticum sacrum

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| [20] | Movement 2. Surge, aquilo | 2:22 |
| | Jon Humphries, tenor / David Evitts, baritone / Gregg Smith Singers /
Twentieth Century Classics Ensemble / Robert Craft | Not released |

Requiem Canticles

- | | | |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| [21] | Libera me | 1:17 |
| [22] | Postlude | 2:07 |
| | Simon Joly Chorale / Philharmonia Orchestra / Robert Craft | Not released |

TT 79:22



Igor Stravinsky: A Portrait

by

David Nice

Chapter I – Ripened in Ignorance

In October 1962 Igor Stravinsky made a return visit to Oranienbaum, by then renamed Lomonosov. This town, on the Gulf of Finland to the west of St Petersburg, is the site of a lavish eighteenth-century palace and gardens. It is also where Stravinsky was born over eighty years earlier on 17 June 1882 (5 June in the old-style Julian calendar, which remained in use in Russia until February 1918). Even if the octogenarian composer and his assistant Robert Craft had known where to look among long rows of unpainted wooden summer houses topped by television aerials, they would not have found the one occupied by the Stravinsky family several times during Igor's infancy, as it had been pulled down in the 1930s.

In any case, Oranienbaum had little part to play in the selective history Stravinsky later recreated while in search of times past. More significant were the far-flung country estates belonging to the sisters and families of his mother Anna. These made fitting summer retreats for daughters of a high-ranking bureaucrat in the service of the Tsar. Equally significant was the city life of his father Fyodor, whose singing career landed the young Igor right in the centre of the capital's vibrant theatrical life. Audiences in St Petersburg's Maryinsky Theatre hailed Fyodor Stravinsky as a bass-baritone of distinction from the moment he made his 1876 debut as Mephistopheles in Gounod's *Faust*, only three years after graduating from the Conservatoire across the road. As a character artist, he

was especially proud of his association with the new operas of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Ballet was the young Igor's first passport to the blue and gold temple of the Maryinsky, but it was an operatic event that marked 'the beginning of my conscious life as an artist and musician'. The occasion was the fiftieth-anniversary performance in November 1892 of the fantastical opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila* by Mikhail Glinka, the composer widely considered to be the founding father of Russian art music. Fyodor sang the Rossinian role of the comic suitor Farlaf; but his son seems to have been more impressed by glimpsing Tchaikovsky in the foyer, less than a year before the great man's death. Stravinsky was soon taking advantage of the pass provided by his father to absorb as much of the Maryinsky's operatic repertoire as he could – and that meant standards by Donizetti and Verdi in addition to the great Russian imperial operas. He was also able to study many of these works from the scores in Fyodor's extensive library.

The other half of Stravinsky's St Petersburg childhood, which he described as a life spent indoors, was frequently oppressive: the gloom of the family apartment at Number 66 Kryukov Canal, situated in a heavy block right opposite the Maryinsky, was often intensified by his father's fluctuations between austerity and bad temper. The sickly, nervous Igor also endured a stream of grim Dickensian governesses, and was very conscious of the fact that his parents lavished much more attention on the handsome first-born of their four sons, Roman, who was to die tragically young in 1893. Happier times were spent in the company of his uncle Alexander

Yelachich (the husband of his mother's sister Sophia) on his estate at Pavlovka in the Samara district south-east of Kazan. Here, Igor's horizons were broadened by Chekhovian discussions typical of the Russian liberal intelligentsia, and by the musical tastes of Alexander, who was a gifted amateur. He was an incipient sufferer of the tuberculosis that was rife on his mother's side of the family, but his frail health was supposedly boosted by the healing powers of kumiss (fermented mare's milk), which was readily available at Pavlovka.

The other family estates were in marked contrast. Stravinsky found his peevish aunt Katerina, chatelaine of Pechisky in Ukraine, unendurable; but at Ustilug there was more alluring feminine company to contrast with the all-male broods of the Stravinskys and Yelachiches. Acquaintance with another Katerina, his first cousin – whom contrary to his recollections he first met at Ustilug when he was eight, and Katerina nine – bred a special kind of love at first sight. 'From our first hour together we both seemed to realise that we would one day marry,' Stravinsky reminisced in *Expositions and Developments*. 'Perhaps we were always more like brother and sister. I was a deeply lonely child, and I wanted a sister of my own... We were from then until her death extremely close, and closer than lovers sometimes are.'

In the years surrounding their predestined marriage at the beginning of 1906, the clever and spiritual Katerina was Igor's musical soulmate. She joined him in four-hand piano arrangements of Beethoven, and later copied his work in her fair, round hand. At the time of their first meeting, however, his own talents were



Stravinsky at the age of fifteen, 1897

ill-defined, for he only commenced piano lessons when he was nine. His two lady teachers no doubt encouraged his sight-reading, but they were probably less indulgent of his freewheeling improvisations. 'I was unable to write down a single one,' he told the music critic Grigory Timofeyev in 1908, attributing this defect to a shortage of theoretical knowledge. 'In a word, I ripened in ignorance.'

In 1901 the mists of ignorance finally began to clear at the hands of two theoreticians and composers, Fyodor Akimenko and Vasily Kalafati, with whom Stravinsky took private lessons in parallel with his official law studies at St Petersburg University. Akimenko and Kalafati were both graduates of Rimsky-Korsakov at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, yet it was through neither them nor his father that Stravinsky properly met the grand old man of Russian music. That occasion took place in Heidelberg the following summer through the offices of Rimsky-Korsakov's son Vladimir, who was one of Igor's fellow law students. The Stravinskys were touring German spas in desperate search of a cure for the cancer that would prove fatal to Fyodor later that year. The young Igor presented Rimsky-Korsakov with some short, rather gauche pieces, including a clumsy Scherzo for piano, only to find them received in a manner that was far from what he had hoped.

Nevertheless, Rimsky-Korsakov clearly sensed enough individual talent in Stravinsky both to warn him against the doctrinaire grind of the Conservatoire and to take him under his wing as a private pupil the following summer. Indeed, he adopted the role of father figure for the recently bereaved young man, and gave him some much needed advice on structural basics as he struggled with

his Piano Sonata in F sharp minor. Though showing no glimmer of originality, this work (which takes Tchaikovsky's 'Grand Sonata' of 1878 as its principal model) confidently displays its big-boned panache in a manner that is a world away from the fledgling exercises of the previous year. In his teaching, Rimsky-Korsakov treated form and orchestration as one inseparable entity, so it is hardly surprising that his first major task for his protégé was a Symphony in E flat. The role model for all up-and-coming Russian orchestral composers was Alexander Glazunov, and Stravinsky's tuneful if heavily scored work is clearly a homage to that master of the well-made and carefully crafted symphony.

Of the four movements that constitute Stravinsky's Symphony, Op. 1, Rimsky-Korsakov preferred the Scherzo, which was premiered along with the ensuing *Largo* by the St Petersburg Court Orchestra under Hugo Wahrlich in April 1907. The work is the delightful offspring of many sprightly examples that make up the best Russian symphonies of the late nineteenth century. Stravinsky knew this was a line he could bend to his own more contemporary tastes, which were partly fostered by the challenging new Evenings of Contemporary Music that had given new life to the St Petersburg musical scene. His song settings of Sergey Gorodetsky's mystical verses and Pushkin's discreetly erotic *Faun and Shepherdess* (a post-wedding gift to Katerina in 1906) blend Russian musical traditions with newly fashionable French Impressionism. However, it was with the two scintillating orchestral scores that succeeded his Symphony that Stravinsky gave notice of an individual talent.

The *Scherzo fantastique*, written in 1907, buzzes with kaleidoscopic invention and pointillist orchestral detail; gone are the heavier brass of the Symphony. Stravinsky was later to disown its programmatic basis in Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bees*. Its sequel, *Feu d'artifice* ('Fireworks') fulfils its brief more succinctly and is less prone to drift into meandering late-Romantic sensuousness. Much as Rimsky-Korsakov and other older reactionaries may have complained about the triumph of sonority over substance, both these works remain indebted to the harmonic spice which Rimsky-Korsakov himself injected into his later operas, culminating in his satirical swansong *The Golden Cockerel*. Sadly, Stravinsky's second father followed the first to the grave in the spring of 1908 before setting eyes on the score of *Feu d'artifice*. A grief-stricken Stravinsky promptly composed *Chant funèbre* ('Funeral Song') in which:

...all the solo instruments of the orchestra filed past the tomb of the master in succession, each laying down its own melody as its wreath against a deep background of *tremolo* murmurings simulating the vibrations of bass voices singing in chorus.

We can only take the composer's word for it, since this sole specimen of a more introspective young Stravinsky has vanished forever.

It was, however, the composer's flashier side that provided a vital lifeline. The impresario Sergey Diaghilev was present both at Stravinsky's 1909 Conservatoire

performance of *Feu d'artifice* (in a piano transcription), and at the 1910 premiere of the *Scherzo fantastique* in a concert promoted by the distinguished St Petersburg pianist-conductor Alexander Siloti, an influential figure who was quickly rising to prominence. Diaghilev sat at the centre of Russia's finest artists, who gathered under the banner of the World of Art movement. They twinned an unfashionable taste for eighteenth-century painting with a passion for novelty. At a series of Paris concerts in 1907, the musically trained Diaghilev successfully unveiled to the West the exoticism of Russian music. This was followed by a lavish production of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* in 1908, starring the great Russian bass Fyodor Chaliapin. Ballet overshadowed opera in the next season, however, and the legend of the Ballets Russes was born.

On the strength of Stravinsky's two dazzlingly orchestrated scherzos, Diaghilev looked to the composer for arrangements of a Chopin nocturne and waltz for a new version of Mikhail Fokine's ballet *Chopiniana*, to be renamed *Les Sylphides*. For what would be his biggest choreographic gamble yet, Diaghilev did not at first think of the young Rimsky-Korsakovite as broad-shouldered enough to take on what he emphatically called 'the *first* Russian ballet, since there is no such thing'. In the autumn of 1910 he changed his mind, with far-reaching consequences.



Stravinsky transcribing folk music from a blind gusli player while his mother, Anna (holding her grandson, Fyodor), looks on, Ustilug, 1909

This is the introductory chapter of Igor Stravinsky: A Portrait.
The full biographical essay, illustrated with photographs, is available to buy.
For more details, please visit www.naxos.com.