

## Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

### Brief Bio:

- Born near St. Petersburg; father sang in Imperial Opera; young Igor had piano lessons but parents intended him to go into law
- In 1902 he submitted scores to **Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov**, who took him as a student. Rimsky was his musical advisor until his death in 1909
- The *Ballet Russe*: **Sergai Diaghilev** was Russian ballet Impresario living in Paris; commissioned him to write ballet *The Firebird* (1910), based on Russian legend. Next was another ballet, *Petrushka* (1911); these two secured his career. Next was *Rite of Spring* (1913)
- Stravinsky went to Switzerland during WWI; by this time, Russian Revolution had also happened; this was the end of his country as he knew it. Returned to Paris in 1920, stayed there until 1939, involved in various new musical trends. In 1939 was invited to lecture at Harvard; WW II broke out and US was his home for rest of his life; eventually became US Citizen.

**Russian Period:** Stravinsky's ballets for the *Ballet Russe* are known as his Russian Period works. The works emphasize Russian folk culture, mythology and historical stories

- Early works show influence of Rimsky-Korsakov, especially in orchestration; also a bit of French Impressionism. *The Firebird* is mixture of Rimsky-Korsakov and Debussy.
- ***Petrushka***: The ballet is set at a Shrovetide (pre-Lenten) fair. Petrushka is a puppet, one of three who are major characters in the ballet
  - The piece contains many examples of 20<sup>th</sup> Century composition techniques. A few:
    - **pandiatonicism**: use of diatonic materials without tonal reference, e.g. no chromatically altered notes, but no emphasis on tonal goals
    - **bitonality**: a particularly famous example opens second scene in Petrushka's room
      - simple materials are juxtaposed: two triads a tritone apart (one in inversion)

- reference to **folk music** (as in Mahler): a character plays street organ (hurdy-gurdy)
- Primitivism**: another new art movement, strong in Russia, but the artists also went to Paris to show their work. Resulted in many art and music/theater works 1910-1919 emphasizing “primitive” subjects: pagan rituals, village weddings, pre-Lenten carnival celebrations, stories of peasants. Other non-Russian artists also contributed: Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin all created art works emphasizing peasant life or primitive aspects. An example is [The Dance by Henri Matisse](#)
- Matisse’s painting and the total art movement sets stage for **Rite of Spring** (1913). Piece is subtitled *Scenes of Pagan Russia*, fits right in primitivism movement. Stravinsky said “I dreamed a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death.”
  - The piece uses various techniques to portray primitivism:
    - Rhythm**: extreme rhythmic complexity, rhythmic barbarism, poly-rhythm (juxtaposition of two incompatible or dissimilar rhythms)
    - Polytonality**: numerous examples, including one with E-flat Maj/min 7th chord against F-flat major; also uses irregular accent for barbarism
    - Melody**: many melodies derived from Russian folk songs
    - Orchestration** is massive, allowing for **huge sound mass** and unusual colors: calls for winds in 5s; 8 horns, 4 tpts, tpt in D, Bass Tpt, 3 trb, 2 tba, 2 Wagner tubas, lots of percussion, strings. Also, Stravinsky liked to use **extreme ranges**
- Les Noces** (1914-17; orchestrated 1923, his last Russian Period work): “The Wedding,” a multi-disciplinary work: intended to be staged as ballet, but also has singing. Stravinsky said: “[The libretto] is a suite of typical wedding episodes told through quotations of typical talk... as a collection of clichés and quotations of typical wedding sayings [where the listener] is overhearing scraps of conversation...”
  - Musically, this is a work using “**tonality by assertion**:” instead of establishing pitch center with tonal relationships, center is asserted through insistence; e.g. opening uses just 3 main pitches over and over; pitch center is clear. (after opening, more pitches added; new set is octatonic)

## Neo-Classical Works

- ***L'Histoire du Soldat*** (1918): some consider this his first Neo-classical work. A theatrical work which could be produced relatively simply; could be performed on portable stage with small group of musicians and actors. There is part for narrator, who relates action; actors can either mime or speak parts.
  - Innovative techniques include complex rhythms, parodies of familiar forms and dances and misalignment of melody and harmony
- ***Pulcinella*** (1920) first of Stravinsky's works that everyone agrees is neo-classical
  - Uses music attributed to Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-36), re-interprets that music in new ways. Some parts of the ballet could perhaps have been written by Pergolesi except for some odd orchestration details (extreme ranges), some metric anomalies; other parts sound definitely 20<sup>th</sup> century