



Igor STRAVINSKY

The Firebird

Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky (17 June 1882 – 6 April 1971) was a Russian-born composer, pianist, and conductor. He is widely considered one of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century. Stravinsky's compositional career was notable for its stylistic diversity. He first achieved international fame with three ballets commissioned by the impresario Serge Diaghilev and first performed in Paris by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes: *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) and the *Rite of Spring* (1913). The last of these transformed the way in which subsequent composers thought about rhythmic structure and was largely responsible for Stravinsky's enduring reputation as a musical revolutionary who pushed the boundaries of musical design. His "Russian phase" which continued with works such as *Renard*, the *Soldier's Tale* and *Les Noces*, was followed in the 1920s by a period in which he turned to neoclassical music. The works from this period tended to make use of traditional musical forms (concerto grosso, fugue and symphony), drawing on earlier styles, especially from the 18th century. In the 1950s, Stravinsky adopted serial procedures. His compositions of this period shared traits with examples of his earlier output: rhythmic energy, the construction of extended melodic ideas out of a few two- or three-note cells and clarity of form, and of instrumentation.

The Firebird is a ballet and was written for the 1910 Paris season of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, with choreography by Michel Fokine. The scenario by Alexandre Benois and Fokine is based on Russian fairy tales of the magical glowing bird that can be both a blessing and a curse to its owner. Premiered in Paris on 25 June 1910, the work was an instant success with both audience and critics. The ballet has historic significance not only as Stravinsky's breakthrough piece, but also as the beginning of the collaboration between Diaghilev and Stravinsky that would also produce *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, *Pulcinella* and others. The ballet is based on the Russian legend of the Firebird, a powerful good spirit whose feathers supposedly convey beauty and protection upon the earth. Other characters from Russian lore are also included: the heroic Prince Ivan Tsarevich and the evil sorcerer Kashchei, from whom Ivan must rescue the princess he loves. It is only through the intervention of the Firebird, whose life he spares early in the ballet, that Ivan is able to destroy Kashchei and his followers and marry the princess. The folk origins of the story inspired Stravinsky to borrow a few folk melodies in his score. Yet most of the ballet, especially the fluttering dance of the Firebird and the memorable wedding march at the ballet's conclusion, was his own creation. A final obstacle arose when the principal ballerina refused to dance the role of the Firebird, declaring that she detested the music, and had to be replaced. The ballerina's objections notwithstanding, Stravinsky achieved instant recognition as one of the most original and powerful composers of his generation.