



IGOR STRAVINSKY

Histoire du Soldat

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) was a Russian (and later, a naturalized French and American) 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 Sergei Diaghilev: *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. 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. His "Russian phase" 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, and often paid tribute to the music of earlier masters. 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 small cells and clarity of form, instrumentation and utterance. Stravinsky displayed a taste in literature that was wide and reflected his constant desire for new discoveries. The texts and literary sources for his work began with a period of interest in Russian folklore, which progressed to classical authors and the Latin liturgy and moved on to contemporary France and eventually English literature. He also had an inexhaustible desire to explore and learn about art, which manifested itself in several of his Paris collaborations.

Histoire du soldat (***L'Histoire du soldat***, translated as ***The Soldier's Tale***), is a theatrical work "to be read, played, and danced" ("lue, jouée et dansée") by three actors and one or several dancers, accompanied by a septet of instruments. The piece was conceived by Igor Stravinsky and Swiss writer C. F. Ramuz based on a Russian folk tale (*The Runaway Soldier and the Devil*) drawn from the collection of Alexander Afanasyev. The libretto relates the parable of a soldier who trades his fiddle to the devil in return for unlimited economic gain. The music is scored for a septet of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, cornet (often played on trumpet), trombone, and percussion, and the story is told by three actors: the soldier, the devil, and a narrator, who also takes on the roles of minor characters. A dancer plays the non-speaking role of the princess, and there may also be additional ensemble dancers. Towards the end, the narrator explains the moral of the story:

You must not seek to add
To what you have, what you once had;
You have no right to share
What you are with what you were.

No one can have it all,
That is forbidden.
You must learn to choose between.

One happy thing is every happy thing:
Two, is as if they had never been.