



Igor STRAVINSKY

Pulcinella Suite

Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky (17 June 1882 – 6 November 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 latter 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.

Pulcinella is a one-act neoclassical ballet by Igor Stravinsky based on an 18th-century play *Quatre Polichinelles semblables* ("Four identical Pulcinellas"). *Pulcinella* is a stock character originating from *commedia dell'arte*. The ballet premiered at the Paris Opera on 15 May 1920 under the baton of Ernest Ansermet. The dancer Léonide Massine created both the libretto and choreography, and Pablo Picasso designed the original costumes and sets. The ballet was commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev.

The story of *Pulcinella* is taken from a manuscript from Naples, dating from 1700, containing a number of comedies portraying the traditional character of the popular Neapolitan stage. The particular story used is entitled *Quatre Polichinelles semblables* ("Four identical Pulcinellas"). The one-act ballet features Pulcinella, his girlfriend Pimpinella, his friends Furbo, Prudenza and Rosetta, and Florindo and Cloviello. The story starts with Florindo and Cloviello serenading Prudenza and Rosetta. The two women are unimpressed and reply by showering the suitors with water. Prudenza's father, a doctor, appears and chases them away. A new episode begins with Rosetta with her father appearing. Rosetta dances for Pulcinella and they kiss. But Pimpinella sees this and interrupts the scene. Florindo and Cloviello arrive and jealous of Pulcinella, they beat him up. Pulcinella is then stabbed, but this is actually a mockery to get Pimpinella to forgive Pulcinella. Furbo disguised as a magician appears and resurrects Pulcinella's body in front of everybody. Pimpinella indeed forgives Pulcinella, Prudenza and Rosetta succumb to Florindo's and Cloviello's wooing. The ballet ends with the marriages of the couples.

A few years later, Stravinsky created a *Pulcinella* concert suite, featuring music from the ballet. The premiere of the Suite from *Pulcinella* took place on December 22, 1922, with Pierre Monteux (who also led the first performances of *Pétrouchka* and *The Rite of Spring*) conducting the Boston Symphony.

This piece marked the end of Stravinsky's "Russian" period. He referred to *Pulcinella* as "my discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible. It was a backward look, of course— the first of many love affairs in that direction— but it was a look in the mirror, too." The neoclassicism created in *Pulcinella* proved to be one of the most important artistic movements of the twentieth century, with effects that continue to resound today.