



# Igor STRAVINSKY

## *Symphony in Three Movements*

**Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky** (17 June 1882 – 6 April 1971) was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor. As one of the most influential figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music, it might be a surprise to some to learn that Stravinsky's path to music was not always a certainty. Despite his father's career as a bass opera singer at the Kiev Opera House and the Mariinsky Theatre, as well as his own musical studies in piano beginning at the age of 9, Stravinsky's parents did not allow him to pursue music and forced him to attend St. Petersburg University for law. During his studies, he transcribed a string quartet by Alexander Glazunov – whom he greatly admired – to piano, and presented the score to the composer without invitation. Glazunov reluctantly flipped through Stravinsky's score, declaring it "unmusical". Despite the rejection, he managed to begin studying with his other idol, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, after meeting his son in university. A year after Rimsky-Korsakov's death, Stravinsky was discovered by Serge Diaghilev, owner of the Ballet Russes. Stravinsky – who was obsessed with ballet ever since seeing Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* at the age of 8 – was commissioned to compose a ballet based on the Russian fairytale, Firebird. Stravinsky's ballet, *The Firebird*, debuted in 1910 to widespread critical acclaim, making Stravinsky an overnight sensation. Stravinsky would compose another successful ballet, *Petrushka*, for Diaghilev in 1911, before completing his third (and most controversial) ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913). The premiere in Paris caused a near-riot, as its unconventional use of dissonance, rhythm, and choreography split the audience of wealthy Parisians and Bohemians into two belligerent factions. During this period, Stravinsky had relocated to Switzerland, and following the outbreak of WWI and the Russian Revolution, he was unable to return home. He would live in France, gaining the friendships of Coco Chanel and Pablo Picasso, before moving to the United States in 1939. He moved to Hollywood in 1941, where his influence grew as he became acclimatized to American culture. He was a major figure among the large number of famous artists that settled in Los Angeles during World War II, and left a legacy that includes a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame, a posthumous Grammy Award for Lifetime Achievement, and a spot on Time Magazine's list of 100 most influential people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In general, his music is divided into three distinct periods: the Russian period (c. 1907–1919, his "primitive" period, under the tutelage and influence of Rimsky-Korsakov), the Neoclassical period (c. 1920–1954, demonstrating a return to music of the Classical period and themes from the ancient Classical world, such as Greek Mythology), and the Serial period (c. 1954–1968, under the persuasion of his friend, Robert Craft, he composed in the twelve-tone method developed by Arnold Schoenberg).

Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* (1946) was his first major composition and conducting debut in the United States. Stravinsky was inspired by his previous works, as he revisited *The Rite of Spring* in an (incomplete) attempt to re-score it, as well as documentaries about World War II, calling the work his "war symphony".

The first movement (*Overture – Allegro*) was inspired by war film showing Japanese scorched earth tactics in China. An aggressive and dissonant tone is set through a series of powerful orchestral strikes, and is followed by a seemingly unmeasured collection of pounding, percussive hits on the piano and strings, reminiscent of *The Rite of Spring*. The hellish sonic landscape continues, as different sections of the orchestra take turns of bubbling intensity, with jabbering and stabbing chords burning down to an eerie calmness, as the earth has been reduced to nothing but ash.

The second movement (*Andante – Interlude: L'istesso tempo*) begins with a relatively consonant and classical bed, presenting a combination of neo-classical melodies and harmonies with Stravinsky's signature percussive drive. Despite the relative calmness of this section, the music develops in an ominous direction, with the use of increased multi-tonality and anxious pace.

The third movement's (*Con moto*) opening depicts the notorious goosestep of Nazi soldiers, with a march-beat and a brutish brass orchestration. This entrance withers down into a fugue, perhaps portraying the increased Allied involvement in the war. The dissonance continues along with the battle between the two powers, which blossoms into a resolution which is simultaneously triumphant and messy.