



# Igor STRAVINSKY

## *Concerto for Violin and orchestra*

**Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky** (17 June 1882 – 6 April 1971) was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor, later of French (from 1934) and American (from 1945) citizenship. He is widely considered one of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century and a pivotal figure in modernist music. Stravinsky's compositional career was notable for its stylistic diversity. He first achieved international fame with three ballets commissioned by the impresario Sergei Diaghilev and first performed in Paris by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes: *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913). The last transformed the way in which subsequent composers thought about rhythmic structure and was largely responsible for Stravinsky's enduring reputation as a revolutionary who pushed the boundaries of musical design. His "Russian phase", which continued with works such as *Renard*, *L'Histoire du soldat*, and *Les noces*, was followed in the 1920s by a period in which he turned to neoclassicism. The works from this period tended to make use of traditional musical forms (concerto grosso, fugue, and symphony) and drew from earlier styles, especially those of 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 instrumentation. Stravinsky was born on 17 June 1882 in the town of Oranienbaum on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, 25 miles west of Saint Petersburg. His father, Fyodor Ignatievich Stravinsky (1843–1902), was an established bass opera singer in the Kiev Opera and the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg and his mother, Anna Kirillovna Stravinskaya (née Kholodovskaya; 1854–1939), a native of Kiev, was one of four daughters of a high-ranking official in the Kiev Ministry of Estates. Igor was the third of their four sons; his brothers were Roman, Yury, and Gury. The Stravinsky family was of Polish and Russian heritage, descended "from a long line of Polish grandees, senators and landowners". It is traceable to the 17th and 18th centuries to the bearers of the Sulima and Strawiński coat of arms. The original family surname was Sulima-Strawiński; the name "Stravinsky" originated from the word "Strava", one of the variants of the Streva River in Lithuania.

Stravinsky's **Violin Concerto in D** is a neoclassical violin concerto in four movements, composed in the summer of 1931 and premiered on October 23, 1931. It lasts approximately twenty minutes. It was used by George Balanchine as music for two ballets. The Violin Concerto was commissioned by Blair Fairchild, an American composer, diplomat, and the patron of the young Polish violinist Samuel Dushkin. Willy Strecker of B. Schotts Söhne, Stravinsky's music publisher at the time (and also a friend of Dushkin's), asked Stravinsky to compose a concerto for Dushkin. Though Stravinsky was reluctant, citing unfamiliarity with the instrument, Strecker assured the composer that Dushkin would consult about technical matters. Stravinsky noted in his autobiography that Dushkin's availability for such advice was a factor in his undertaking the Violin Concerto. He also sought the opinion of composer and violist Paul Hindemith, who allayed Stravinsky's fears, suggesting that his unfamiliarity with the instrument might help him come up with new possibilities. Stravinsky met with Dushkin at Strecker's residence in Wiesbaden and decided to go ahead.

Early in the compositional process, Stravinsky devised a chord which stretches from D4 to E5 to A6. One day while he and Dushkin were having lunch in a Paris restaurant, he sketched the chord on a napkin for the violinist, who thought the chord unplayable, to Stravinsky's disappointment. On returning home, however, Dushkin tried it out on his violin and was surprised to discover it was actually quite easy to play. He immediately telephoned Stravinsky to say that it could be played after all. The composer later referred to this chord as his "passport to the Concerto". Stravinsky began sketching the Concerto in Paris early in 1931, with composition beginning in earnest in Nice, where the first two movements were completed and the third begun. In the summer, Stravinsky moved to the Château de la Véronnière in Voreppe in Isère, where he completed the third movement and wrote all of the fourth. The manuscripts are dated May 20, 1931 for the first two movements and June 10, 1931 for the third, all in Nice, with no date given for the fourth. The full orchestral score is signed and dated "Voreppe (Isère) la Vironnière, 13/25. Sept. 1931". Though Stravinsky told his publisher he wanted to write "a true virtuoso concerto", "the texture is always more characteristic of chamber music than orchestral music". He also observed "I did not compose a cadenza, not because I did not care about exploiting violin virtuosity, but because the violin in combination was my real interest. But virtuosity for its own sake has only a small role in my Concerto, and the technical demands of the piece are relatively tame".