



Igor STRAVINSKY

Scherzo fantastique

Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky was a Russian composer and conductor with citizenship in France (from 1934) and the United States (from 1945). 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 father was an established bass opera singer, and Stravinsky grew up taking piano and music theory lessons. While studying law at the University of Saint Petersburg, he met Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and studied under him until Rimsky-Korsakov's death in 1908. Stravinsky met the impresario Sergei Diaghilev soon after, who commissioned Stravinsky to write three ballets: *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913), the last of which brought him international fame after the near-riot at the premiere, and changed the way composers understood rhythmic structure. Stravinsky's compositional career is divided into three periods: his Russian period (1913–1920), his neoclassical period (1920–1951), and his serial period (1954–1968). Stravinsky's Russian period was characterised by influence from Russian styles and folklore. *Renard* (1916) and *Les noces* (1923) were based on Russian folk poetry, and works like *L'Histoire du soldat* blended these folktales with popular musical structures, like the tango, waltz, rag, and chorale. His neoclassical period exhibited themes and techniques from the classical period, like the use of the sonata form in his Octet (1923) and use of Greek mythological themes in works like *Apollon musagète* (1927), *Oedipus rex* (1927), and *Persephone* (1935). In his serial period, Stravinsky turned towards compositional techniques from the Second Viennese School like Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* (1954) was the first of his compositions to be fully based on the technique, and *Canticum Sacrum* (1956) was his first to be based on a tone row. Stravinsky's last major work was the *Requiem Canticles* (1966), which was performed at his funeral. While some composers and academics of the time disliked the avant-garde nature of Stravinsky's music, particularly *The Rite of Spring*, later writers recognized his importance to the development of modernist music. Stravinsky's revolutions of rhythm and modernism influenced composers like Aaron Copland, Philip Glass, Béla Bartók, and Pierre Boulez, all of whom "felt impelled to face the challenges set by [*The Rite of Spring*]," as George Benjamin wrote in *The Guardian*. In 1998, *Time* magazine named Stravinsky one of the 100 most influential people of the century. Stravinsky died of pulmonary edema on 6 April 1971 in New York City. Stravinsky is widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century. In 1998, *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people of the century. Stravinsky was not only recognized for his composing; he also achieved fame as a pianist and as a conductor; Philip Glass wrote in 1998, "He conducted with an energy and vividness that completely conveyed his every musical intention. Here was Stravinsky, a musical revolutionary whose own evolution never stopped. There is not a composer who lived during his time or is alive today who was not touched, and sometimes transformed, by his work."

Stravinsky's *Scherzo fantastique*, op. 3, composed in 1908, is the second purely orchestral work by Igor Stravinsky (preceded by the Symphony in E-flat op.1). Despite the composer's later description of the work as "a piece of 'pure', symphonic music", the work was inspired by Maurice Maeterlinck's 1901 essay "La Vie des Abeilles" (The Life of Bees), as is made clear in a letter of 18 June 1907 from the composer to his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov. Ten years later, Léo Staats adapted it as a ballet for the Opéra Garnier, with the title *Les Abeilles*, which was objected to by Maeterlinck. In July 1907, Stravinsky wrote to Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov that he planned a "fantastic scherzo", to be called *Bees*. He started work on it in the same month and completed it on 30 March 1908. Rimsky-Korsakov saw the score and liked it, but he died in 1908 and never heard the work performed. Stravinsky dedicated the work to Alexander Siloti, who conducted the first performance on 6 February 1909 at the Siloti Concerts in St Petersburg. Stravinsky's *Feu d'artifice* (*Fireworks*) received its first performance at the same concert. Sergei Diaghilev was present and was impressed by this music, leading him to offer Stravinsky the first of his commissions for ballet music. The score was first published around 1909 by the Russian sheet music publisher P. Jurgenson. Stravinsky later claimed that he conceived the *Scherzo Fantastique* as abstract music. On 10 January 1917 it was performed as a ballet blanc at the Paris Opera House, with choreography by Léo Staats to a scenario based on Maeterlinck's essay "La Vie des Abeilles" (the life of [the] bees). Stravinsky had not authorised this performance, and Maeterlinck objected to it. *Scherzo fantastique* is scored for piccolo, 3 flutes (2nd doubling alto flute, 3rd doubling 2nd piccolo), 2 oboes, cor anglais, 3 clarinets in A (3rd doubling clarinet in D), bass clarinet in A, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets in A, contralto trumpet in F, cymbals, celesta, 3 harps and strings. Stravinsky reduced the number of harps to 2 in 1930.