



# IGOR STRAVINSKY

## *Scènes de ballet*

**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."

***Scènes de ballet*** is a suite of dance movements composed in 1944 by Igor Stravinsky. It was commissioned by Broadway producer Billy Rose for inclusion in the revue *The Seven Lively Arts* that opened at the Ziegfeld Theater on December 7, 1944. *The Seven Lively Arts* brought together a number of notable performers: Beatrice Lillie, Bert Lahr, Benny Goodman, and "Doc" Rockwell as well as showgirls – "the prettiest around at the moment," according to *The New York Times* review. The solo dancers for the *Scènes de ballet* were Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin (who was also the choreographer). Although Rose had requested a 15-minute work, "the music was cut to a fraction of its original length when *The Seven Lively Arts* ... opened in New York." *Scènes de ballet* is a score of between 16 and 18 minutes duration, written in 1944. It was commissioned by Billy Rose for a Broadway revue. The music occasioned one of the best-known Stravinsky anecdotes. Rose telegraphed Stravinsky: "YOUR MUSIC GREAT SUCCESS STOP COULD BE SENSATIONAL SUCCESS IF YOU WOULD AUTHORISE ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT RETOUCH ORCHESTRATION STOP BENNETT ORCHESTRATES EVEN THE WORKS OF COLE PORTER." To which Stravinsky telegraphed back: "SATISFIED WITH GREAT SUCCESS." On 8 December 1944, Lewis Nichols wrote a generally favorable review of the show, although he observed: "Markova and Dolin also have a couple of numbers, one to Stravinsky music, which probably is not the best they ever have done. Stravinsky himself later observed: "*Scènes de ballet* is a period piece, a portrait of Broadway in the last years of the War. It is featherweight and sugared—my sweet tooth was not yet carious, then—but I will not deprecate it, not even the second *Pantomime*, and all of it is at least well made."