



Igor STRAVINSKY

Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments

Igor Stravinsky (17 June 1882 – 6 April 1971) was born in Lomonosov (then Oranienbaum) and died in New York. He was one of the most important composers of the 20th century, and a leader in modernism in music. He was brought up in Russia. When the Russian Revolution started, he moved to Switzerland and then to Paris, and finally, when World War II started in 1939, he moved to the United States. Stravinsky wrote music in different styles. At first, he wrote music similar to his teacher Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. He loved his native Russian music. He wrote music which had very complicated chords and rhythms. It is lively music, and some of his best-known works of this kind were written for the Ballets Russes of Sergei Diaghilev: *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, *Les noces*, *Pulcinella* and *Apollo musagète*. They were written from 1910 to 1928. Then he changed his style and wrote in what is called a “neo-classical” way. He based it on music from the Classical music period but changed it. His only full-length opera *The Rake's Progress* was written in this way. In his later years he wrote serial music. (*Early years*) Igor was the third of four children, all boys. As a child he spent the winter months in St Petersburg and the summers in the country where several of his relatives on his mother's side had large estates. Igor was not particularly good at school, but he often went to see the operas in which his father Fyodor was performing. Fyodor was an opera singer with a fine bass voice. He sang at the opera house in Kiev and later at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. Igor also went to ballets and even heard Tchaikovsky conduct in 1893, at the end of his life. For a time, Stravinsky studied law at the university of St Petersburg, but gave up in 1906. Then he married one of his cousins. They soon had a son and a daughter. Meanwhile, since his school days, Igor played the piano, and had lessons in harmony and counterpoint. He enjoyed improvising and he started to be interested in composing. He wrote some short piano pieces and showed them to the composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the father of a friend. Rimsky-Korsakov told him he ought to continue to have private music lessons instead of going to the conservatoire. Shortly after this, Stravinsky's father died. Igor went to stay with Rimsky-Korsakov. He met many musical people there, and Rimsky-Korsakov taught him how to write for the different instruments. In 1905, he began to take twice-weekly private lessons from Rimsky-Korsakov, whom he came to regard as a second father. These lessons continued until Rimsky-Korsakov's death in 1908.

Stravinsky's **Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments** was written in Paris in 1923–24. This work was revised in 1950. It was composed four years after the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, which he wrote upon his arrival in Paris after his stay in Switzerland. These two compositions are from Stravinsky's neoclassical period, and represent a departure from the composer's previous Russian style, in which he produced works such as *The Rite of Spring*. This concerto numbers among many works for piano written about the same time to be played by the composer himself. This is also true of *Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra* (1929), his *Sonata* of 1924 and his *Serenade in A* (1925). He kept the performance rights to himself for several years, wanting the engagements for playing this work for himself, as well as urgently desiring to keep "incompetent or Romantic hands" from "interpreting" the piece before indiscriminating audiences. (*Orchestration*) The concerto, as described in its name, is scored for solo piano accompanied by an ensemble of wind instruments. The instrumentation of the wind section is what would be found in a standard symphony orchestra: two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, two bassoons (second bassoon doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, and tuba. The work also calls for double basses (divisi in 3) and a timpano. Although combining winds and piano was unusual at the time, the form had been explored earlier in the twentieth century and would be explored later. (*Première*) The concerto debuted under Serge Koussevitzky at the Opera of Paris on 22 May 1924 under the direction of the composer, who played the piano. Koussevitzky had requested such a work of Stravinsky. Stravinsky made his British radio debut in the British premiere of the work, on 19 June 1927, with the Wireless Symphony Orchestra (the forerunner of the BBC Symphony Orchestra) conducted by his friend and champion Edward Clark.