RAVEL Mother Goose · La valse
STRAVINSKY The Rite of Spring

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

Mother Goose, five children's pieces · Ma Mère l’oye, cinq pièces enfantines
1. The Sleeping Beauty’s Pavanne · Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant [1.39]
2. Hop-o’-my-thumb · Petit Poucet [3.37]
3. Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas · Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes [3.31]
4. Conversations of Beauty and the Beast · Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête [4.17]
5. The Fairy Garden · Le jardin féerique [3.37]
6. La valse [12.36]

Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1971)
The Rite of Spring · Le sacre du printemps
Part One: Adoration of the Earth · L’Adoration de la Terre
7. Introduction [3.41]
8. The Augurs of Spring, Dances of the Young Girls · Les Augures printaniers, Danses des adolescentes [3.29]
9. Ritual of Abduction · Jeu du rapt [1.24]
10. Spring Rounds · Rondes printanières [3.49]
11. Ritual of the Rival Tribes · Jeux des cités rivales [1.56]
12. Procession of the Sage · Cortège du sage [0.43]
13. The Sage, Dance of the Earth · Le Sage, Danse de la terre [1.42]

Part Two: The Sacrifice · Le Sacrifice
14. Introduction [4.08]
15. Mystic Circles of the Young Girls · Cercles mystérieux des adolescentes [3.16]
16. Glorification of the Chosen One · Glorification de l’élue [1.34]
17. Evocation of the Ancestors · Evocation des ancêtres [0.53]
18. Ritual Action of the Ancestors · Action rituelle des ancêtres [3.09]
19. Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One) · Danse sacrale (l’élue) [5.08]

Total timings: [64.01]
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**The Rite of Spring · Le sacre du printemps**

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RAVEL Mother Goose · La valse

SYMPHONY The Rite of Spring

Maurice Ravel was ever drawn to the pictorial and theatrical possibilities of music, indeed a good many of his works were prompted by extra-musical influences, ranging from Greek legends to children’s stories. A meticulous composer and detailed, sophisticated orchestrator, Ravel was often painstakingly slow in completing his orchestral compositions. The results, however, were always well worth the wait – producing some of the finest, most intricately orchestrated jewels of the repertoire. The ballet, Daphnis et Chloé, for example, occupied Ravel between 1909, when first commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev for his company, the Ballets Russes, until the middle of 1912. As a measure of Ravel’s thoroughness, during the same time period, Diaghilev commissioned and produced two Stravinsky ballets, The Firebird and Petrushka, with the young Russian composer already finishing a third, the infamous Rite of Spring by the time Daphnis was performed. However, Ravel’s work ethic prevailed and most of his output, unlike that of many of his contemporaries, remains solidly in the repertoire the world over.

Ravel’s Mother Goose Suite (Ma mère l’oye) was initially composed for the children of cultivated friends, Cipa and Ida Godetski, themselves dedicatees of his piano Sonatine. The young children, Mimie and Jean were at the early stages of piano lessons, and Ravel, who was at least as happy in the company of young children as he was with adults, clearly spoiled his new friends, with gifts of toys and, indeed, music. Much later in life, Mimie set down her memories of the composer:

Of all my parents’ friends I had a predilection for Ravel, because he used to tell me stories that I loved. I used to climb on his knee and indefatigably he would begin ‘Once upon a time …’ And it was Laideronnette, Beauty and the Beast and, above all, the adventures of a poor mouse … Between 1906 and 1908 we used to have long holidays at my parents’ house in the country ... It was there that Ravel finished, or at least brought us, Ma mère l’oye. But neither I nor my brother was of an age to appreciate such a dedication and we regarded it as something entailing hard work. Ravel wanted us to give the first performance, but the idea filled me with cold terror. *

Ravel was a tremendous pianist and perhaps his enthusiasm had rather won over the practicalities of such young, and clearly not overly keen children giving a world premiere. Although he took pains to make sure that young hands would be able to cope with the pianistic demands of the Suite, Mimie and Jean did not give the premiere, and the duty was duly taken over by two more confident and competent children, Jeanne Leleu and Geneviève Durony, in April 1910. The following year, at the behest of his publisher Durand, Ravel orchestrated the suite and this eventually led to the idea of the work being extended into a ballet. The original orchestral version, performed here, presents the suite as it was originally intended, as five short, beguilingly crystalline visions of childhood.

The literary sources of the suite stem from the delightful stories of Charles Perrault and Countess Marie d’Aulnoy, remarkable individuals who both can lay claim as founders of the modern fairy tale. The first piece ‘The Sleeping Beauty’s Pavane’ is as brief as it is thoughtful and dreamlike, evoking the sleeping princess watched over by the good fairy. ‘Petit Poucet’ depicts Tom Thumb, his haphazard route through the forest portrayed by the oboe, sprinkling breadcrumbs behind him as he wanders into the dangers of the forest, while the birds sneak up behind him, tweeting their joy at the unexpected snack. ‘Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas’, conjures up the princess, disfigured by a horrid witch’s spell. She meets the similarly blighted green dragon, and together they venture forth.
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Through whirling clouds, waltzing couples may be faintly distinguished. The clouds gradually scatter: one sees an immense hall peopled with a whirling crowd. The scene is gradually illuminated. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the fortissimo. Set in an imperial court, about 1855.

Thus Ravel lays out the scenario for La valse in the published score of 1920, but all is not quite as delightful as it seems. The composer had thoughts about the piece as early as 1906 in praise of the waltz king Johann Strauss II, which would be an, ‘apoehtosis of the Viennese waltz’ and would incorporate within it, ‘the fantastic whir of destiny’. The early sketches for the work named as Wien (Vienna) came to little, though Ravel did pay homage to the dance in his Valses nobles et sentimentales of 1911. It was not until after the First World War, during which he volunteered as a driver in the transport corps after several refusals on health grounds for other active enlistings, that he re-engaged with his Strauss tribute. But now the world and the waltz had changed. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had fallen, Ravel’s adored mother had died suddenly in 1917 and his experience of war must have coloured his view of the frivolity of a 19th-century dance in the bloody nightmare of the 20th century.

In 1919, Ravel again set to work on the project, at the request of impresario Sergei Diaghilev who was considering its inclusion in his Ballets Russes season of 1920, despite the lukewarm receptions of Ravel’s previous Ballets Russes venture, Daphnis et Chloé, in 1912. Ravel completed the work with uncharacteristic speed, but as Diaghilev listened to a play-through of La valse, the young Francis Poulenc recalled:

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The piece opens like a musical version of an archaeological excavation: glimpses of waltz rhythm are unearthed, followed by distant almost half-remembered melodic fragments seeking to be re-united. Gradually, the dance begins to form, heralded by the harp. A concise reconstruction of waltz variations follows and the work is set for a glorious climax until, as Lincoln Kirstein observed, ‘the big themes shatter, rhythms dissolve, a persistent beat grows tenuous, and as a succession of feverish motifs dissolve, the climax becomes chaos.’ Although Ravel did not subscribe to the notion of La valse describing a Europe in turmoil or decay, the waltz, at least, disappears before our eyes, as its very definition, the three-beat pulse is itself destroyed in the last two measures.

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The most famous and beloved riot in recent musical history ensued at the Rite's opening night on 29th May 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. The venue was not a venerable institution, but a new-build of only a few weeks, which had a rather functional feel when compared to the luxuries to be found in the established Parisian theatres. Like Hendrix at Woodstock, or Callas at Covent Garden, everybody, whether they were anybody or not, seems to have been in attendance. Anger, excitement, confusion and scuffle was the order of the day: the initial folksong-based bassoon introduction, the vicious, non-balletic stamping chords, the 'knock-kneed, long-braided Lolitas jumping up and down' to Nijinsky's controversial choreography, the scenario and tent-like costumes by Roerich, the audience cliques' goading, the ill-feeling of the Parisian public toward recent avant garde Russian influence in the ballet – all have been blamed for the punch-ups, cock-ups and calamities of the night. Stravinsky himself was also bright with anger, and he knew what was on offer. It seems that Pierre Monteux, the conductor, was the only unflappable presence in the theatre, calmly guiding the orchestra through to the end, Stravinsky praising him as 'nerveless as a crocodile'. Some sources suggest that many of the major players in the Ballets Russes were clear that uproar was inevitable. Certainly not a situation Diaghilev would have lost any sleep over.

The succeeding Ballets Russes performances were, of course, sold out, and the following year Stravinsky rejoiced in a concert performance at the Casino de Paris which he described as 'a triumph such as composers rarely enjoy... At the end of the Danse sacrale the entire audience jumped to its feet and cheered' and the composer was carried to the local square in celebration. Newspaper headlines were equally good news marketing for Diaghilev, composer and company, Le
observation, ‘But the extraordinary thing was, Stravinsky said not a word!’ Certainly Stravinsky was rarely short of a quote or two, describing Ravel on various occasions as an orchestrator as fastidious as a ‘Swiss clocksmith’, as ‘ordinary’ compared to Satie, and (alongside Rimsky-Korsakov and Berlioz) as an orchestrator of note, but, ‘not the best composer’. Stravinsky’s remarks are often to be taken with varying amounts of salt; he also thought of Ravel as the only musician to immediately comprehend The Rite of Spring (Le sacre du printemps), and was a great admirer of his efforts during the First World War, noting his age and esteemed position in France. The two composers indeed had a brief friendship and, by way of the extraordinary Diaghilev, even collaborated on a performing version of Mussorgsky’s incomplete opera, Khovanshchina, in March–April 1913, in Switzerland, a matter of weeks before the infamous premiere of The Rite of Spring on 29th May 1913.

The most incorrigible, indefatigable supremo of the ballet world in the 20th century, Sergei Diaghilev had little problem bending most composers to his bidding. He cajoled, charmed and coerced not only Stravinsky and Ravel, but Debussy, Satie, Richard Strauss, De Falla, Prokofiev – a mighty handful of the early 20th century’s greatest talents, to compose for his company. Diaghilev’s firm, guiding hand and his steady stream of exceptional dancers, choreographers, set designers and artists – Pavlova, Karsavina, Nijinsky, Fokine, Massine, Picasso, Bakst and Roerich included — formed his ground-breaking and super-talented Ballets Russes. Diaghilev knew not only how to acquire the best talent, but how to hold them together, keep them working and, most importantly, how to promote his seasons. The Spring of 1913 would be one of his finest creations.

Stravinsky had already been guided by Diaghilev to produce The Firebird and Petrushka, which were great successes in the 1910 and 1911 seasons. For the 1913 season, the 29-year-old composer had completed Vesna svyashchennaya, the initial idea coming to him, ‘while I was still composing The Firebird. I had dreamed a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death.’ Working his material into two parts, the work was eventually completed in Clarens, Switzerland, 1912.

The most famous and beloved riot in recent musical history ensued at the Rite’s opening night on 29th May 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. The venue was not a venerable institution, but a new-build of only a few weeks, which had a rather functional feel when compared to the luxuries to be found in the established Parisian theatres. Like Hendrix at Woodstock, or Callas at Covent Garden, everybody, whether they were anybody or not, seems to have been in attendance. Anger, excitement, confusion and scuffle was the order of the day: the initial folksong-based bassoon introduction, the vicious, non-balletic stamping chords, the ‘knock-kneed, long-braided Lolitas jumping up and down’ to Nijinsky’s controversial choreography, the scenario and tent-like costumes by Roerich, the audience cliques’ goading, the ill-feeling of the Parisian public toward recent avant garde Russian influence in the ballet – all have been blamed for the punch-ups, cock-ups and calamities of the night. Stravinsky himself was also bright with anger, and he knew what was on offer. It seems that Pierre Monteux, the conductor, was the only unflappable presence in the theatre, calmly guiding the orchestra through to the end, Stravinsky praising him as ‘nerveless as a crocodile’. Some sources suggest that many of the major players in the Ballets Russes were clear that uproar was inevitable. Certainly not a situation Diaghilev would have lost any sleep over.

The succeeding Ballets Russes performances were, of course, sold out, and the following year Stravinsky rejoiced in a concert performance at the Casino de Paris which he described as ‘a triumph such as composers rarely enjoy ... At the end of the Danse sacrale the entire audience jumped to its feet and cheered and the composer was carried to the local square in celebration. Newspaper headlines were equally good news marketing for Diaghilev, composer and company, Le
Ménestrel punning with the ‘Massacre du printemps’ and New York Times joined the fray with ‘Russian Dancer’s Latest Offering – The Consecration of Spring – A Failure’. Success for the work was guaranteed.

The Rite of Spring is still regarded as the touchstone for all approachable modernist music, and it never disappoints. Its cleverly constructed concatenation of rhythms, folksong and brilliant, brutalist orchestration quickly removed it from the ballet and installed it as a concert hall favourite, which over the years has, in the right hands, lost none of its bite. Stravinsky himself was well aware that this was a work without sequel, and in time, he added to the mystique and his own ritual part in its creation:

*I was guided by no system whatever in *Le sacre du printemps*. When I think of the other composers of that time who interest me – Berg, who is synthetic (in the best sense), Webern, who is analytic, and Schoenberg, who is both – how much more theoretical their music seems than *Le sacre*, and these composers were supported by a great tradition, whereas very little immediate tradition lies behind *Le sacre du printemps*. I had only my ear to help me. I heard and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which *Le sacre* passed.

© M Ross

*Translations from Roger Nichols: *Ravel Remembered (Faber, 1987).

St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra

The St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Russia’s oldest symphonic ensemble, was founded in 1882. In that year, by Order of Alexander III, the Court Musical Choir was established – the prototype of today’s Honoured Collective of the Russian Federation. Thus, in 2007, the orchestra celebrated its 125th anniversary. The Musicians’ Choir was founded to perform in the ‘imperial presence’ – at receptions and official ceremonies and at the balls, plays and concerts at the Imperial Court.

The pinnacle of this type of activity was the participation of the choir in 1896 in the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II. In 1897 the Court Choir became the Court Orchestra, its musicians having been transferred from the military and given the same rights as other actors of royal theatres. In the early 20th century the orchestra was permitted to perform at commercial concerts for the general public. The series of concerts ‘Orchestral Collections of New Music’ saw the first Russian performances of Richard Strauss’ symphonic poems *Ein Heldenleben* and *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Mahler’s First Symphony, Bruckner’s Ninth Symphony and Skryabin’s *Poem of Ecstasy*. There was a ‘historical series’, concerts featuring the works of a single composer and a series of subscription concerts, some of which were accompanied by a lecture or an introductory address. Among the conductors were world-renowned musicians such as Richard Strauss, Arthur Nikisch, Alexander Glazunov and Serge Koussevitsky. In 1917 the Orchestra became the State Orchestra and following the Decree of 1921 it was incorporated into the newly founded Petrograd Philharmonic, the first of its kind in the country. Shortly afterwards an unprecedented number of great Western conductors began to come to conduct the orchestra. Their names enjoy unquestioned authority in today’s musical world: Otto Klemperer (who also conducted the subscription concerts), Bruno Walter, Felix Weingartner and many more. Soloists Vladimir Horowitz and Sergey Prokofiev (the latter performing his piano concertos) appeared with the orchestra. On the initiative of foreign conductors, the orchestra began to play modern repertoire – Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Berg, Hindemith, Honegger, Poulenc and continued to premiere the music of contemporary Russian composers. Back in 1918, directed by the
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composer, the orchestra had premiered the Classical Symphony of Prokofiev, and in 1926 Shostakovich made his debut when Nikolay Malko conducted Shostakovich’s First Symphony in the Great Hall of the Philharmonia. In 1934 the orchestra was the first in the country to receive the title of the Honoured Orchestra of the Republic. Four years later Evgeny Mravinsky, the First Prize winner of the National Conductors Competition, joined the orchestra and for the next 50 years he gradually transformed it into one of the best orchestras in the world.

For the performance of Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich symphonies, the orchestra rapidly became ‘the model’. The orchestra’s virtuosity put it on a par with the orchestras of von Karajan and Walter and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra as the best interpreters of Mozart during the Viennese festival dedicated to Mozart’s 200th anniversary. Unique in the musical world was also the creative alliance of Mravinsky and Shostakovich. Many of the symphonies were premiered by Mravinsky and they became the centerpieces of the repertoire, both at home and abroad on tour. We may imagine how deeply Shostakovich appreciated this collaboration when he dedicated the Eighth Symphony to Mravinsky. The orchestra also performed in this period and beyond with other famous conductors including Leopold Stokowski, Igor Markevich, Kurt Sanderling, Arvid Jansons, Mariiss Jansons, Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Evgeny Svetlanov.

In 1988 on the initiative of the orchestra, Yuri Temirkanov became its principal conductor. Recently Milanese “Corriere della sera” eloquently indicated the result of the more than twenty-year collaboration: “Yuri Temirkanov and the St.Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra are something unique in world music panorama … Amazing musicians, everyone is a soloist, but in perfect ensemble and confluence with others”. Highlights of recent years include: performing Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony in the U.N.O. at a concert dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the WWII Victory; opening the Carnegie Hall season (the first among soviet orchestras), participation in the 2nd Moscow World Orchestras Festival and opening of the Rostropovich Week Moscow Festival; participation in Enescu Festival (Rumania) and in MiTo (Italy). Traditionally, busy tour schedule: concerts in Le Théâtre des Champs Elysées (Paris), Musikverein (Vienna), La Scala (Milan), Carnegie Hall (NY). The repertoire of the orchestra was enriched by Russian premiers: Il canto sospeso by Nono, The Third and the Last Testament by Obukhov, Fifth Symphony by Grechaninov, Polish Requiem by Penderecki (under the author’s baton); and world premieres: … al niente by Kancheli, Symphonies by Segerstam, Slonimsky and Tishchenko.

Yuri Temirkanov

Since 1988 Yuri Temirkanov has been the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, with whom he regularly undertakes major international tours and recordings. Other positions he holds include Music Director of the Teatro Regio di Parma, and Music Director Emeritus of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Born in the Caucasus city of Nal'chik, Yuri Temirkanov began his musical studies at the age of nine. When he was 13, he attended the Leningrad School for Talented Children where he continued his studies in violin and viola. Upon graduation, he attended the Leningrad Conservatory where he completed his studies in viola and later returned to study conducting, graduating in 1965. After winning the prestigious All-Soviet National Conducting Competition in 1966, Mr. Temirkanov was invited by Kiril Kondrashin to tour Europe and the United States with legendary violinist David Oistrakh and the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra.
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Maestro Temirkanov is a frequent guest conductor of major orchestras in Europe, Asia and the United States. He holds the distinction of being the first Russian artist permitted to perform in the United States after cultural relations were resumed with the Soviet Union at the end of the war in Afghanistan in 1988. He has appeared with leading European orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Dresden Staatskapelle, London Philharmonic, London Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome and La Scala, Milan.

After making his London debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1977, he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor, and then in 1992 named Principal Conductor, a position he held until 1998. From 1992 to 1997 he was also the Principal Guest Conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra and from 1998 to 2008 Principal Guest Conductor of the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra. A regular visitor to the USA, he conducts the major orchestras of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. He was the Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra from 2000 till 2006, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre until 2009.

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He has received many distinguished awards in Russia. In 2003, President Vladimir Putin bestowed the President’s Medal on Maestro Temirkanov. In 2002, he received the Abbiati Prize for Best Conductor, and in 2003 was named Conductor of the Year in Italy. Recently, he was made an Honorary Accademician of Santa Cecilia.

Mother Goose and The Rite of Spring recorded at the Great Philharmonic Hall, St Petersburg, December 2010.
La valse recorded at the Great Philharmonic Hall, St Petersburg, July 2010.

Engineer - Neil Hutchinson
Editor - Ilya Petrov and Alexander Gerutsky
Producer - Anna Barry
Cover image - Shutterstock
Design - Andrew Giles

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