

Igor Stravinsky



born
June 17, 1882
Oranienbaum, Russia
died
April 6, 1971
New York, New York

“
My music is best
understood by
children and animals.
—Igor Stravinsky
”

Ee'-gor Strah-vin'-skee

A composer of the twentieth century.

Igor Stravinsky's father was a singer with an **opera company**. As a child, Igor attended his father's opera performances. He began piano lessons at 9. Surprisingly, and in spite of Igor's musical talent, his parents wanted him to become a lawyer rather than a musician. Igor spent several semesters studying law at the University of St. Petersburg, in Russia. But he also continued his music studies, including composition lessons with a well-known Russian composer, Nicolay Rimsky-Korsakov.

Stravinsky much preferred music to the practice of law but wasn't sure he could make a living as a musician. Nevertheless, upon graduation and marriage to Catherine Nosenko, he embarked upon a career in music. In 1908, his first **symphony** was performed. He was 26. This work, as well as others, came to the attention of the director of the Ballet Russe, a famous **ballet company**. The Ballet Russe **commissioned** Igor to write several works. A number of these ballet suites, including *Firebird* (the Listening Example) and *Petrouchka*, were performed with much success.

In 1913, the premiere of one of Stravinsky's most famous orchestral works, *The Rite of Spring*, nearly caused a riot in the concert hall. The work was very different from what concert audiences were used to hearing. In fact, many in the audience did not even consider it music! In 1919 (age 37), Stravinsky moved to Paris, France, and continued to write ballets for the Ballet Russe. He eventually became a French citizen. He would not return to Russia for over 40 years. Between 1925 and 1939 he traveled several times to the United States, conducting performances of his works.

Due to the world war in Europe and the death of his wife, Stravinsky moved from France to Massachusetts in 1939 (age 57). He remarried in 1940, became a United States citizen in 1945, and moved to California where he lived for the rest of his life. To celebrate his new citizenship, he wrote an orchestral arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner*.

After moving to California, Stravinsky began taking commissions from a variety of sources, including the Ringling Bros. Circus, a jazz band, and an opera company. He continued to compose **ballets**. In 1962 (age 80), he returned to Russia for the first time since 1919, and was welcomed by Russian concert audiences. In the final years of his life, he wrote fewer large orchestral works and more shorter works for smaller groups of instruments.

Igor Stravinsky was meticulous, neat, and precise. These traits were apparent in his musical scores, which were extremely well crafted and carefully written. No matter where he lived, Stravinsky's composing routine varied little. Every day had to be carefully planned. Mornings were spent in his tidy office writing music. Afternoons were devoted to office work and correspondence. Throughout his life, Stravinsky ignored the opinions, advice, and suggestions of others regarding his music, and did not seem to care whether or not critics or audiences liked his music.

Igor Stravinsky

What I composed	Orchestra	Concerto	Chamber Music	Keyboard	Opera	Theater/Film	Ballet	Band	Choral	Vocal Solos
Igor Stravinsky	>	>	>	>	>	>	>	>	>	

Stravinsky Factoids:

- Stravinsky met **Claude Debussy** while visiting in Paris.
- Until World War I, Stravinsky composed music which was very influenced by the **Romantic** era. Then, suddenly, he decided Romantic music was "obsolete" and began composing very rhythmic and harsh sounding music.
- He composed a *Circus Polka* in honor of a young elephant for Ringling Bros. Circus. Although his later works greatly influenced many twentieth century composers, his early works are the most popular with audiences today.

1882: Birth of Igor Stravinsky; *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain is published.

1896: Opening of the Niagara Falls, New York, hydroelectric plant.

1905: Albert Einstein formulates *Special Theory of Relativity*.

1926: A. A. Milne writes *Winnie the Pooh*.

1938: Benny Goodman's band brings new style to jazz music.

1945: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his fourth term as President of U.S., dies and is succeeded by Vice President Harry S. Truman.

1950: Korean War begins.

1971: Death of Igor Stravinsky; Apollo 14 and its crew land on the moon.

What in the world
is happening?

Listen!

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) *The Firebird, Berceuse and Finale*



In 1909, when Stravinsky was 27, he was asked by Sergi Diaghilev, the artistic director of the Ballet Russe, to write a **ballet** based on the Russian legend, the Fire-Bird. Stravinsky wrote in his book, *Chronicle of My Life*: "It was highly flattering to be chosen from among musicians of my generation, and to be allowed to collaborate in so important an enterprise side by side with personages who were generally recognized as masters in their own spheres..." The work was finished by May, 1910, and premiered in June at the Paris (France) Opera. Stravinsky attended the rehearsals and actively helped in the preparation of the production. The ballet was a huge success and marked a major step in his artistic career. The ballet was first performed in the United States in 1944 with costumes and sets by Marc Chagall, the famous artist.

The melodies of *The Firebird* are influenced by Russian folk songs. The ballet is a succession of five dances. This movement, *Berceuse* (lullaby) and *Finale*, is the last dance. Throughout the ballet, the hero, Ivan, is protected from a sorcerer by the magic feather of the Firebird. The Firebird reveals to Ivan that by breaking a special egg, the sorcerer will die. Once this has been done, a group of knights, who had been turned to stone by the sorcerer, come to life again. Ivan then receives the love of the a beautiful princess. Imagine this story as you listen to the music.

- What instrument is playing the haunting melody or lullaby at the beginning of the *Berceuse*?
- Listen carefully and raise your hand when you think the music is depicting the return to life of the knights and general rejoicing.

TIMING

- :01 The French horn plays a soft solo. This section is the *Berceuse*, or lullaby.
- :40 Strings enter, very softly, then the flute and woodwinds as the piece builds.
- 1:38 Listen for the timpani and brass. These instruments suggest that the piece is developing toward something bigger.
- 1:58 The end of the *Berceuse* and the beginning of the *Finale* with a powerful, fast melody played by brass and strings.
- 2:25 The melody is played half as fast as before.
- 3:02 Listen for the bass drum, trumpet, and strings. Hear the full, rich chords.

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An orchestra once complained to Stravinsky that a piece he wrote for them was too short. "Well, then," Stravinsky said, "play it again."

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