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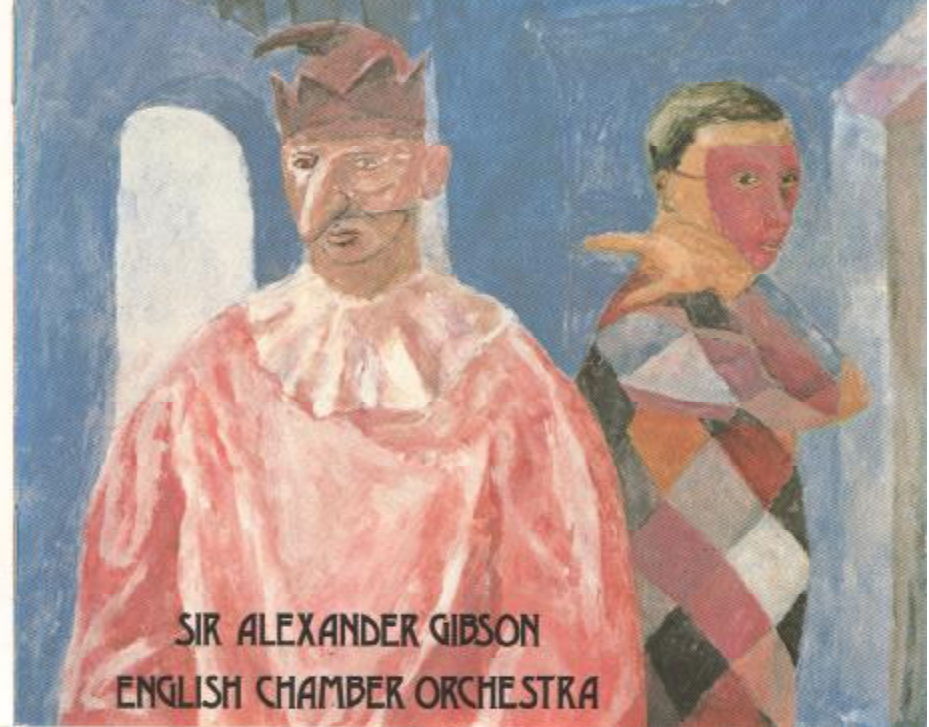


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Chandos
DIGITAL

STRAVINSKY

PULCINELLA SUITE DANSES CONCERTANTES



SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON
ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

In a sense, this is a record of two ballets by Stravinsky – but to call it that is to stretch a point in each direction. It's in a rather complex manner that *Pulcinella* (of which the Suite forms about two-thirds) is "by" Stravinsky: and it's in an abstract manner that *Danses concertantes* is a ballet.

Horse-breeding parlance might well characterize *Pulcinella* as "by Stravinsky out of Pergolesi". But in crediting such a conjunction we must not forget the groom that instigated the conception and attended the birth. This was Serge Diaghilev, the impresario of the Russian Ballet to whom Stravinsky, through the original productions of *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, owed the beginnings of his international celebrity.

The year after the notorious première of *The Rite*, the more general cataclysm of World War I turned Stravinsky's life upside down. By the end of the conflict he had settled in Switzerland and begun a fruitful collaboration with the Swiss writer C. F. Ramuz. The works they wrote together – and especially *The Soldier's Tale*, first performed in Lausanne in September 1918 under Ernest Ansermet's direction – showed a sharp turn away from the gigantic orchestral apparatus of *The Rite* towards more modest means and a more ascetically restricted expressive and dynamic range.

Diaghilev, who had resumed ballet productions in London that same month, was jealous of his former protégé's "other" life, and when the two men met in Paris

early in 1919 he suggested a new project quite different in nature from their previous collaborations. As Stravinsky recalled the event years later in *Expositions and Developments* (one of the books derived by Robert Craft from his conversations with the composer), Diaghilev said: "Don't protest at what I am about to say. I know you are much taken by your Alpine colleagues, but I have an idea that I think will amuse you more than anything they can propose. I want you to look at some delightful eighteenth century music with the idea of orchestrating it for a ballet." The composer in question was Pergolesi, who in those days had not yet attained even his sketchy present fame. Stravinsky's initial reaction was blankly negative. But in putting forward a musical source well suited to carry the next phase of Stravinsky's conversion to neoclassicism, Diaghilev, who had helped to make musical history before and would do so again, showed how shrewdly he observed the artistic currents of his time, and in hindsight it is no surprise at all that Stravinsky soon reversed himself and took the bait.

The one-act ballet that resulted was first produced at the Théâtre de l'Opéra in Paris on 15 May 1920 with choreography by Massine and scenery and costumes by Picasso and with Ansermet conducting. Like the musical impetus, the idea of using a *commedia dell'arte* story was due to Diaghilev. Critically, the combination met with a mixed reception, but its success with the public was complete. The ballet as a whole, based on a variety of

Pergolesi's instrumental and operatic works, comprised 18 numbers. About two years after the première Stravinsky – as adept at recycling his own works as those of others – made the concert suite, which Pierre Monteux and the Boston Symphony Orchestra give its first performance on 22 December 1922. Ballet and suite alike are scored for an orchestra of 33 players, omitting clarinets and percussion, and contrasting the main string body, mock-baroque fashion, with a concertino of two solo violins, viola, cello, and bass. The suite, however, dispenses with the soprano, tenor, and bass soloists who sing the operatic pieces in the stage version.

The wit and grace of Stravinsky's brilliant piece of recreation need no movement-by-movement road-map to make their pithy point. Much of Pergolesi's original musical fabric is preserved, but constant touches of invention, in harmony and particularly rhythm as well as in the obvious sphere of instrumentation, throw a fresh light on it. It all sounds like a drastic change from the volcanic manner of the early ballets. Yet even in Stravinsky's most comprehensive shifts of tone, a basic continuity is to be felt. The composer of *Pulcinella* is clearly the composer of *Petrushka*, and of the later ballets like *Apollo*, *Orpheus*, and *Agon*.

The same is true of *Danses concertantes*, composed in 1941/42 for the Werner Janssen Orchestra, which Stravinsky conducted in the first performance in Los Angeles on 8 February 1942. The instrumentation here is

even more economical than that of *Pulcinella*, producing a prodigious range of colour and texture from only 24 instruments. In style, sections of the work are closely related to the Symphony in C, completed a year and a half earlier. The beginning of the *Pas d'Action*, in particular, is a variant of the opening of the main *Tempo giusto* in the symphony's finale. But this descent, and the affinity with the chamber-orchestral writing of the 1938 *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto*, are balanced on the other temporal side by a strikingly forward-looking feature in the language of the music, and most notably of its central variation movement. Where *Pulcinella's* melodic idiom is pre-eminently one of tunes, whole passages in *Danses concertantes* are much more linear in conception, their abstractness thus foreshadowing such pieces as the Septet of 1953 and the increasingly rigorous serial writing of Stravinsky's last period.

Abstractness, it should be said, is in no way antithetical to charm. *Danses concertantes* is one of its composer's most easily approachable works, and its gently astringent appeal and rhythmic zest have led several choreographers (among them Balanchine in 1944, Macmillan in 1955, and Lew Christensen in 1959) to turn this abstract concert ballet into a real one. Given the absence of a specific story, the home listener can indulge in the choice of either listening to the music "pure" or imagining any action he chooses to it.

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Sir Alexander Gibson C.B.E.

Sir Alexander Gibson was born in Motherwell. He was educated at Dalziel High School, Glasgow University, the Royal College of Music, the Mozarteum in Salzburg and the Accademia Chigiano in Siena. He spent two years as Assistant Conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra before going to Sadler's Wells in 1954 as a Staff Conductor. He was appointed Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra in 1959. Three years later he founded Scottish Opera and became its Artistic Director.

In establishing Musica Viva in 1960 and, more recently, Musica Nova, he demonstrated his commitment to the performance of contemporary music and has conducted an impressive number of both world and British premières of works by many of today's major composers.

His recordings have won him two Grand Prix du Disque awards and in 1978 he became one of the few recipients of the Sibelius Medal "for his outstanding contribution to the appreciation of Sibelius's music throughout the world". He is the first and only musician to be appointed an Honorary Member of the Royal Scottish Academy and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He was created CBE in 1967 and was made a Knight Bachelor in the Queen's Jubilee Honours list in 1977.

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STRAVINSKY
SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON
ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)



PULCINELLA: SUITE
for Orchestra (1922)
After Giambattista Pergolesi

- 1 I Sinfonia (1:50)
- 2 II Serenata (3:00)
- 3 III Scherzino; Allegro; Andantino (4:06)
- 4 IV Tarantella (2:05)
- 5 V Toccata (0:50)
- 6 VI Gavotta con due Variazioni (4:03)
- 7 VII Vivo (1:28)
- 8 VIII Minuetto
Finale (4:40)

TT=22:34

DANSES CONCERTANTES
for Chamber Orchestra (1942)

- 9 I Marche – Introduction (2:01)
- 10 II Pas d'Action *Con Moto* (3:18)
- 11 III *Thème Varié Lento* (8:58)
Variation 1 *Allegretto*
Variation 2 *Scherzando*
Variation 3 *Andantino*
Variation 4 (Coda) *Tempo giusto*
- 12 IV Pas de Deux (5:22)
Risoluta; Andante sostenuto
- 13 V Marche-Conclusion (0:50)

DDD TT=20:48

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