



SEATTLE SYMPHONY
COLLECTION

A large, dark silhouette of the character Petruschka from Igor Stravinsky's opera "The Firebird" is the central background element. The figure has a long, pointed beak, a large, ornate headdress, and a long, thin, bent arm. The silhouette is filled with intricate, glowing red patterns. The background is a solid, vibrant orange-red color.

Igor
STRAVINSKY

Petrushka
Song of the Nightingale

Seattle Symphony
Gerard Schwarz

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Petrushka and The Song of the Nightingale

In the spring of 1909, Paris witnessed an historic series of performances by a troupe of Russian dancers, musicians and theatre artists. The *Ballets russes*, or “Russian Ballet,” as the company called itself, brought to the French capital a new kind of theatrical experience. Pushing beyond many conventions of nineteenth-century ballet, the Russians performed with astonishing passion and energy. Their sets also were unlike anything Parisians had ever encountered. One French critic wrote: “While our designers strive for realism and *trompe l’oeil*, the Russians ... are Impressionists on a giant scale. Their skies are brushed in with sweeping broom-strokes, ... the pointed minarets of their palaces are splashed in without thought of detail or relief. These are tremendous sketches.”

The first Paris season of the *Ballets russes* was a triumphant achievement for the company’s director, Sergey Dyagilev. A former music student and art critic, Dyagilev had turned to producing concerts, opera and ballet performances, first in Russia and then in France. He was no ordinary impresario. Knowledgeable about many of the latest developments in the arts and committed to fostering creativity, Dyagilev wanted above all to produce new and innovative work. He therefore set about commissioning some of the finest artists of the day to contribute to *Ballets russes* presentations. Over the coming years Picasso, Rouault and Bakst designed sets for the company. Fokin, Nijinsky and Massine choreographed. And original music came from Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc, Prokofiev, Falla and Igor Stravinsky, whose work for the *Ballets russes* proved especially important.

Stravinsky was a young and little-known composer when Dyagilev heard two of his early pieces during a visit to St Petersburg, early in 1909. Impressed by the music, he engaged Stravinsky to orchestrate some piano pieces by Chopin and other composers, and then to write an original ballet score. This was *The Firebird*, which was first performed in June 1910. Its success cemented a partnership between Stravinsky and Dyagilev, one that

would produce even more striking results in the years ahead.

The composer and impresario decided that their next project would be a ballet depicting ritual sacrifice in pre-historic Russia. That would be *The Rite of Spring*. But as Stravinsky began composing it, in the fall of 1910, a different idea came to him quite unexpectedly. In his autobiography, the composer recounts:

Before tackling *The Rite of Spring*, which would be a long and difficult task, I wanted to refresh myself by composing an orchestral piece in which the piano would play a most important part.... I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggios. The orchestra in turn retaliates with menacing trumpet blasts. The outcome is a terrific noise which reaches its climax and ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of the poor puppet. Soon afterwards Dyagilev came to visit me. ... He was much astonished when, instead of the sketches of *The Rite*, I played him the piece I had just composed and which later became the second scene of *Petrushka*. He was so much pleased with it that he would not leave it alone and began persuading me to develop the theme of the puppet’s sufferings and make it into a whole ballet.

Stravinsky suspended work on *The Rite of Spring* and turned his attention to this new composition, *Petrushka*, completing it in the spring of 1911. The work received its première in June of that year, with Vaslav Nijinsky in the title role.

Stravinsky’s music vividly reflects the ballet’s scenario. *Petrushka* is set in St Petersburg during the 1830s. As the work begins the pre-Lent Carnival is underway, and a bustling crowd packs the square. Among the entertainments is a marionette theatre presided over by a Showman, a shadowy figure who introduces three puppets: a Ballerina, a Moor and Petrushka, a clown. The

Showman stirs them into motion by playing a flute, and they perform a lively Russian dance. Their movements become increasingly energetic, and finally they astonish the onlookers by stepping from the stage and dancing unaided through the crowd.

The scene changes to Petrushka's small room, whose cheerlessness stands in marked contrast to the festive atmosphere of the previous scene. The Showman's magic has given his puppets life, and with it the pain of human emotions. Petrushka is in love with the Ballerina, but his awkward courtship sends her fleeing. (Stravinsky's original idea of a work featuring piano is evident here.) Soon the Ballerina finds a more attractive partner in the Moor. But the jealous Petrushka interrupts their waltz, provoking the Moor's rage.

The final scene returns to the square, where the Carnival is in full swing. People dance in groups, a trained bear performs, masqueraders stroll about. Suddenly Petrushka rushes from the Showman's little theatre, the Moor in hot pursuit. Quickly the Moor catches his adversary and cuts him down with his sword. Arriving too late, the Showman assures horrified onlookers that the lifeless body they see is only that of a wooden puppet. As the crowd disperses, and the Showman starts to carry off the slain Petrushka. Just then, he hears the ghost of the puppet laughing, in Petrushka's signature theme, from the roof of the theatre.

In 1908, Stravinsky began composing an opera based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Nightingale*. He completed the first act but set the work aside when he received Dyagilev's commission for *The Firebird*. Not until the winter of 1913-14 did he return to it and write music for the second and third acts.

Dyagilev mounted a production of *The Nightingale* in May 1914. Although Stravinsky thought it visually beautiful, he was disturbed that the later portions of the score were distinct in tone from the earlier first act. Through his work for the *Ballets russes* Stravinsky had arrived at a compositional idiom far more modern than the one in which he had begun his opera. Inevitably the music of *The Nightingale* reflected this evolution.

In 1916 Stravinsky addressed the opera's stylistic

discrepancy by fashioning an orchestral work drawn from only the last two acts. When Dyagilev proposed to use the resulting tone poem as a ballet score, he found that the music already embodied a serviceable story.

The Song of the Nightingale (Le chant du rossignol), as the ballet was called, is set in the palace of the emperor of China. A Nightingale, famous for its singing, has been brought to court and proceeds to enchant the emperor with its song. Soon, however, envoys from Japan present a mechanical bird. It also sings, and while the emperor marvels at this novelty the Nightingale slips away unnoticed. Eventually, however, the avian toy breaks and sings no more. Soon the emperor takes ill, and Death sits by his bedside. Finally the real Nightingale returns. Its song enchants even Death, and when the courtiers come to bear the Emperor to his funeral, they find him fully recovered.

The opening section of Stravinsky's score suggests the scurrying of palace servants as they anticipate the visit of the celebrated Nightingale. Stravinsky's music entails brilliant orchestration and various forms of musical *chinoiserie*. The Emperor enters to a "Chinese March" (as it is described in the score). Here Stravinsky composes a kaleidoscope of quasi-Chinese melodic figures that often move at different speeds to create startling rhythmic dislocations. The Nightingale's song brings florid phrases for the flute, while strings and celeste convey the enchantment its song creates.

By contrast, the mechanical bird sings in a contrived fashion, with unimaginative lines and clumsy accompaniment. Stravinsky suggests Death's presence with eerie, macabre music. When the Nightingale reappears and sings to Death, its voice is represented not only by a flute but by solo violin and viola. The composition closes with the reprise of a broad trumpet melody, a theme associated in the opera with the humble fisherman who first befriends the Nightingale.

Paul Schiavo

Gerard Schwarz



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Gerard Schwarz serves as Music Director of the Eastern Music Festival and Conductor Laureate of the Seattle Symphony. A renowned interpreter of 19th-century German, Austrian and Russian repertoire in addition to contemporary American composers, Schwarz recently completed his final season as music director of the Seattle Symphony after an acclaimed 26 years. His previous positions as Music Director include New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the New York Chamber Symphony. As a guest conductor he has worked with many of the world's finest orchestras and opera companies. His discography of over 350 releases showcases his collaborations with the Seattle Symphony, the Berlin Radio Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Czech Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra and L'Orchestre National de France, among others. His pioneering recordings of American symphonists Diamond, Hanson, Hovhaness, Piston and William Schuman have received high critical praise, as have his cycles of works by Brahms, Mahler, Rimsky-Korsakov, Robert Schumann, Shostakovich, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky and Wagner. Schwarz has received hundreds of honours and accolades including two Emmy Awards, 13 GRAMMY® nominations, six ASCAP Awards and numerous *Stereo Review* and *Ovation Awards*. He holds the Ditson Conductor's Award from Columbia University, was the first American named Conductor of the Year by *Musical America* and has received numerous honorary doctorates. The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences gave Schwarz its first "IMPACT" lifetime achievement award.

Seattle Symphony



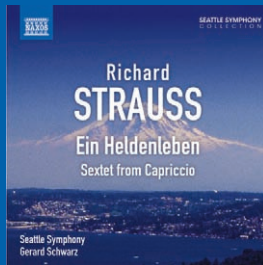
Gerard Schwarz conducts the Seattle Symphony in Benaroya Hall, Seattle
Photo courtesy of Yuen Lui Studio

2011, the Symphony is heard live from September through July by more than 315,000 people. For more information on the Seattle Symphony, visit www.seattlesymphony.org.

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Playing Time
57:00

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Paris was one of the great centres of European art, and Sergey Dyagilev and his *Ballet russes* brought to the city a succession of epoch-shattering productions that revolutionised ballet. Whilst composing *The Rite of Spring* for Diaghilev, Stravinsky broke off its composition to write *Petrushka*, the story of a puppet suddenly brought to life. Choreography was by Fokin and Nijinsky danced the title role. It remains one of the twentieth century's greatest ballets. Using music from Acts I and II of his opera *Le rossignol*, Stravinsky's *Song of the Nightingale* is a brilliantly orchestrated symphonic poem, richly evoking Chinese music and the allure of the Orient.



Igor
STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)

Petrushka (1911, revised 1947)

A Burlesque in

Four Scenes

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | The Shrove-Tide Fair | 10:10 |
| 2 | Petrushka's Cell | 4:24 |
| 3 | The Moor's Cell | 7:01 |
| 4 | The Shrove-Tide Fair (evening) | 14:24 |

The Song of the Nightingale

(Le Chant du rossignol) 21:01

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | Introduction | 2:26 |
| 6 | Chinese March | 3:29 |
| 7 | Song of the Nightingale | 3:24 |
| 8 | Game of the Mechanical
Nightingale | 11:42 |

Seattle Symphony • Gerard Schwarz



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at the Seattle Center Opera House, USA

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Joanna Nickrenz (*Song of the Nightingale*) • Recording Engineer: John M. Eargle
Assistant Engineers: Al Swanson, Laura Wirthlin (*Petrushka*) • Associate Engineer: Al Swanson
(*Song of the Nightingale*) • Production Associate: Phyllis Bernard (*Song of the Nightingale*)

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Inlay photo of Gerard Schwarz by Ben VanHouten

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