

Concert Program for September 16 and 17, 2011

David Robertson, conductor
Dominique Labelle, soprano
Kelley O'Connor, mezzo-soprano
Thomas Cooley, tenor
Richard Paul Fink, baritone
St. Louis Symphony Chorus
Amy Kaiser, director

SMITH/
arr. Stravinsky *The Star-Spangled Banner*

STRAVINSKY *Petrushka* (1910-11)
(1882-1971) The Shrove-Tide Fair—
Petrushka's Cell—
The Moor's Cell—
The Shrove-Tide Fair (Towards Evening)
Peter Henderson, piano

Intermission

STRAVINSKY *Les Noces (The Wedding)* (1921-23)
Part I
At the Bride's House—
At the Bridegroom's House—
The Departure of the Bride—
Part II
The Wedding Feast

Dominique Labelle, soprano
Kelley O'Connor, mezzo-soprano
Thomas Cooley, tenor
Richard Paul Fink, baritone
Peter Henderson, piano
Patti Wolf, piano
Molly Morkoski, piano
Nina Ferrigno, piano
Benjamin Herman, timpani
William James, percussion
John Kasica, percussion
Thomas Stubbs, percussion
Henry Claude, percussion
Zachary Crystal, percussion
Alan Schilling, percussion
St. Louis Symphony Chorus
Amy Kaiser, director

Intermission

STRAVINSKY *The Rite of Spring* (1911-13)
Part I: The Adoration of the Earth
Introduction—
The Augers of Spring; Dances of the Young Girls—
Ritual of Abduction—
Spring Rounds—
Ritual of of the Rival Tribes—
Procession of the Sage—
Dance of the Earth

Part II: The Sacrifice
Introduction—
Mystic Circles of the Young Girls—
Glorification of the Chosen One—
Evocation of the Ancestors—
Ritual Action of the Ancestors—
Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)

David Robertson is the Beofor Music Director and Conductor.

Thomas Cooley is the Sarah E. Rainwater Ward and Charles S. Rainwater Guest Artist.

Amy Kaiser is the AT&T Foundation Chair.

The concert of Friday, September 16, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from

Dr. Virginia V. Weldon.

The concert of Saturday, September 17, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from

Ms. Lesley A. Waldheim.

The St. Louis Symphony Chorus is supported in part by a grant from the Edward Chase Garvey

Memorial Foundation.

These concerts are presented by Thompson Coburn LLP.

These concerts are part of the Wells Fargo Advisors Series.



David Robertson Beofor Music Director and Conductor

A consummate musician, masterful programmer, and dynamic presence, David Robertson has established himself as one of today's most sought-after American conductors. A passionate and compelling communicator with an extensive knowledge of orchestral and operatic repertoire, he has forged close relationships with major orchestras around the world through his exhilarating music-making and stimulating

ideas. In fall 2011, Robertson embarks on his seventh season as Music Director of the 132-year-old St. Louis Symphony, while continuing as Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, a post he has held since 2005.

Following summer appearances with the New York Philharmonic, Santa Fe Opera, Aspen Music Festival and School nationally, and at the Lucerne Festival and BBC Proms abroad, Robertson opens the 2011-12 St. Louis Symphony season with this weekend's all-Stravinsky program. Season highlights with the St. Louis Symphony include the world premiere of Steven Mackey's piano concerto, *Stumble to Grace*, a St. Louis Symphony co-commission, and the orchestra's eighth consecutive appearance at New York's Carnegie Hall.

Robertson's guest engagements in the U.S. include performances with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Ensemble ACJW, and the New York Philharmonic, where Robertson is a regular guest conductor. In May 2012, Robertson returns to the Metropolitan Opera to conduct Britten's *Billy Budd* with Nathan Gunn and James Morris in the leading roles. Internationally, guest engagements include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, where Robertson appears regularly, the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, as part of Music Viva, and several concerts with the BBC Symphony. In addition to his fresh interpretations of traditional repertoire, this season Robertson conducts world premieres of Graham Fitkin's Cello Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and cellist Yo-Yo Ma; John Cage's *Eighty* with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks; *Providence*, a newly commissioned work by Dutch composer Klaas de Vries, with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; and new works by Yann Robin and Michael Jarrell with the New York Philharmonic.

A champion of young musicians, Robertson has devoted time to working with students and young artists throughout his career. On February 5, 2012, he conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's and a choir of New York City students in the Carmina Burana Choral Project at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium. The program will include Orff's cantata, as well as new works written by three high school aged composers based on musical themes of *Carmina burana*.



Dominique Labelle

Soprano Dominique Labelle could easily lay claim to the title “diva.” Instead, she prefers the term “musician,” and takes greatest pride in her work with colleagues and her explorations of repertoire from the Baroque to new music. Recent engagements include Handel’s *Messiah* with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal conducted by Kent Nagano and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gerard Schwartz;

Yehudi Wyner’s *Fragments from Antiquity* with the Lexington Symphony and 10 performances with Nicholas McGegan at the Göttingen Handel Festival, including a Gala tour celebrating his tenure as its artistic director. She and McGegan will also perform Handel’s *Orlando* and *Alexander’s Feast* with San Francisco’s Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra. Recent appearances with another favorite collaborator, Hungarian conductor Iván Fischer, include Countess Almaviva in Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* at Teatro Pérez Galdós in Las Palmas and in Budapest; Bach’s Mass in B minor in Washington, D.C.; Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Mozart’s Requiem in New York with the Orchestra of St. Luke’s.

Labelle’s forays into contemporary music include Shostakovich’s *Seven Romances on Poetry of Alexander Blok* at the Mt. Desert Festival of Chamber Music; Britten’s *Les Illuminations* with the New England String Ensemble and Susan Daveny Wyner; and John Harbison’s *The Rewaking* with Lydian String Quartet on the Musica Omnia label. Her recent discography includes Monsigny’s *Le Déserteur* with Opera Lafayette and Ryan Brown on Naxos, and Handel’s *Arminio* on Virgin Classics, which was the winner of the Handel Prize.

You may learn more about the artist at dominiquelabelle.com.

Dominique Labelle most recently performed with the St. Louis Symphony in December 2009.



MAUREN STRIETZ

Kelley O'Connor

Possessing a voice of uncommon allure, musical sophistication far beyond her years, and intuitive and innate dramatic artistry, the Grammy Award-winning mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor has emerged as one of the most compelling performers of her generation. During the 2011-12 season, the California native's impressive calendar includes the world premiere of a new oratorio by John Adams, *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, commissioned and performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel. O'Connor brings "her smoky sound and riveting stage presence" (*The New York Times*) to performances as Ursule in Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict* with Opera Boston, and to her signature role as Federico García Lorca in a Peter Sellars staging of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* at Teatro Real in Madrid. She sings her first performances of Ravel's *Shéhérazade* with Michael Christie at the Colorado Music Festival, and Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Edinburgh Festival. Other highlights include a program of Bach Cantatas with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Jahja Ling and the Cleveland Orchestra, Handel's *Messiah* with the San Francisco Symphony, Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony with Donald Runnicles and the Atlanta Symphony, as well as with the Kansas City Symphony, and Mozart's Requiem with Louis Langrée and the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra at Lincoln Center, Peter Oundjian and the Toronto Symphony, and Iván Fischer and the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall. She returns to Atlanta for Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, led by Robert Spano, which she also sings with the Calgary Philharmonic.

In June 2011 the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra released a recording of Peter Lieberon's *Neruda Songs*, featuring O'Connor. *Neruda Songs* has highlighted her prominence as one of the world's leading concert artists in two significant European debuts: performances with David Zinman and the Berliner Philharmoniker as well as with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich. Additionally, the work served as her Carnegie Hall debut in a performance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Bernard Haitink.

Highlights of the 2010-11 season included the artist's return to the New York Philharmonic for staged performances of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, under the baton of Alan Gilbert, and her Lyric Opera of Chicago debut as Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the company's new production by Neil Armfield, conducted by Rory Macdonald.

Kelley O'Connor most recently performed with the St. Louis Symphony in April 2011.



MELODY SCHMIDT

Thomas Cooley

Sarah E. Rainwater Ward and Charles S. Rainwater
Guest Artist

The American tenor Thomas Cooley is quickly establishing a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic—and beyond—as a singer of great versatility, expressiveness, and virtuosity.

Highlights of the 2011-12 season include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 at the Oregon Bach Festival with Hellmuth Rilling, with the Kansas City Symphony and Michael Stern, and with conductor Eiji Oue in Osaka, Japan; Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Atlanta Symphony and Robert Spano; Haydn's *The Seasons* with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Nicholas McGegan; Bach's Mass in B minor and Handel's *Messiah* with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and McGegan; Mozart's *Coronation Mass* with the Handel and Haydn Society and Harry Christophers; and Handel's *Solomon* with Kenneth Montgomery in The Netherlands.

Recent seasons also included Berlioz's Requiem at Carnegie Hall with Spano; Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* with the Atlanta Symphony and Donald Runnicles; his debut with the Cleveland Orchestra; Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* with the National Arts Center Orchestra and Carlo Rizzi; Haydn's *The Creation* with the Indianapolis Symphony and Douglas Boyd and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra with McGegan; Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'été* and *L'Enfance du Christ* with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; Acis in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* with Music of the Baroque; concerts with the International Bach-Academie Stuttgart; and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in Singapore and Germany.

Cooley was a member of the ensemble at the Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz for four years, where he sang Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, Belmonte in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, the title role in *Idomeneo*, and Almaviva in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

Cooley's recordings include the role of Mathan in Handel's *Athalia* with Peter Neumann and the Kölner Kammerchor (MDG) and the premiere recording of Vivaldi's *Dixit Dominus* (Deutsche Grammophon). He has also recorded Mozart's Requiem with the Windsbacher Knabenchor (Sony) and Mozart's Mass in C minor with the Handel and Haydn Society and Christophers (Coro Allegro).

You may learn more about the artist at thomascooley.com.

Thomas Cooley most recently performed with the St. Louis Symphony in November 2008.



Richard Paul Fink

Richard Paul Fink has been acclaimed internationally as a leading dramatic baritone in appearances that have included the Metropolitan Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Berlin State Opera, Opera National de Paris, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Washington Opera, as well as at the Bregenz and Ravinia Festivals. His repertoire comprises of some of the most challenging roles of the baritone canon such as the title role in Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, Telramund in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Pizarro in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, the title roles in Verdi's *Nabucco* and *Rigoletto*, as well as Iago in *Otello*, Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca*, and many others. Fink has been especially identified with the role of Alberich in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which he has sung in many cycles at the Metropolitan Opera under James Levine. He sang his first performances of this role for the Dallas Opera and was subsequently invited to perform Alberich in 2000 for the world renowned Seattle Opera Ring Cycle. He has been highly praised as Klingsor in Wagner's *Parsifal*, a role he has sung under some of the most famous conductors of our day such as James Levine, Claudio Abbado, Christoph Eschenbach, James Conlon, and Valery Gergiev. Fink has participated in two very prestigious world premieres: appearing in John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* at the Metropolitan Opera under James Levine and in John Adams's *Dr. Atomic* at the San Francisco Opera under Donald Runnicles. He also starred in the European and Chicago premiere of the same work.

Fink returned to the Metropolitan Opera during the 2010-11 season as Alberich in the new Robert LePage production of *Das Rheingold*. He also appeared at the Metropolitan Opera in the company premiere of John Adams's *Nixon in China* in the role of Henry Kissinger and returned to Los Angeles Opera for performances of Britten's *Noyes Fludde*. In the summer of 2011, Fink sang *Das Rheingold* at Teatro La Fenice and sang his first performances of the title role of Berg's *Wozzeck* at the Santa Fe Opera. In the 2011-12 season, Fink will return to the Metropolitan Opera to perform in Wagner's *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. He will also appear with Lyric Opera Kansas City in *Nixon in China*.

During the 2009-10 season he was heard as Alberich in the Seattle Opera's Ring Cycle. He then appeared as Telramund in a new production of *Lohengrin* at the Houston Grand Opera and made his debut at the Los Angeles Opera as Alberich in their three complete cycles of *The Ring*.

Richard Paul Fink makes his St. Louis Symphony debut with these concerts.



Amy Kaiser AT&T Foundation Chair

One of the country's leading choral directors, Amy Kaiser has conducted the St. Louis Symphony in Handel's *Messiah*, Schubert's Mass in E flat, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, and sacred works by Haydn and Mozart as well as Young People's Concerts. She has made eight appearances as guest conductor for the Berkshire Choral Festival in Sheffield, Massachusetts, Santa Fe, and at Canterbury Cathedral. As Music Director

of the Desoff Choirs in New York for 12 seasons, she conducted many performances of major works at Lincoln Center. Other conducting engagements include concerts at Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival and more than fifty performances with the Metropolitan Opera Guild. Principal Conductor of the New York Chamber Symphony's School Concert Series for seven seasons, Kaiser also led many programs for the 92nd Street Y's acclaimed *Schubertiade*. She has conducted over twenty-five operas, including eight contemporary premieres.

A frequent collaborator with Professor Peter Schickele on his annual PDQ Bach concerts at Carnegie Hall, Kaiser made her Carnegie Hall debut conducting PDQ's Consort of Choral Christmas Carols. She also led the Professor in PDQ Bach's Canine Cantata "Wachet Arf" with the New Jersey Symphony.

Kaiser recently led master classes in choral conducting at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, served as faculty for a conducting workshop with Chorus America and as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts. An active guest speaker, Kaiser teaches monthly classes for adults in symphonic and operatic repertoire and presents Pre-Concert Conversations at Powell Hall.

Amy Kaiser has prepared choruses for the New York Philharmonic, the Ravinia Festival, the Mostly Mozart Festival, and Opera Orchestra of New York. She also served as faculty conductor and vocal coach at the Manhattan School of Music and the Mannes College of Music. An alumna of Smith College, she was awarded the Smith College Medal for outstanding professional achievement.

St. Louis Symphony Chorus 2011-2012

Amy Kaiser
Director
Marella Briones
Assistant Director
Gail Hintz
Accompanist
Susan Patterson
Manager

David Albro
Nancy Davenport Allison
Rev. Fr. Stephan Baljian
Nick Beary
Rudi J. Bertrand
Annemarie Bethel-Pelton
Paula N. Bittle
Michael Bouman
Richard F. Boyd
Keith Boyer
Pamela A. Branson
Bonnie Brayshaw
Marella Briones
Daniel Brodsky
Leon Burke, III
Buron F. Buffkin, Jr.
Leslie Caplan
Alissa Carlson
Victoria Carmichael
Christopher Catlin
Mark P. Cereghino
Dan Cook
Derek Dahlke
Laurel Ellison Dantas
Deborah Dawson
Mary C. Donald
Stephanie Engelmeyer
Ladd Faszold
Jasmine Fazzari
Heather Fehl
Angelica Feliciano
Robin Fish, Jr.

Alan Freed
Mark Freiman
Amy Telford Garcés
Lara Gerassi
Susan Goris
Susan H. Hagen
Rebecca Hatlelid
Nancy Helmich
Ellen Henschen
Jeffrey Heyl
Matthew S. Holt
Allison Hoppe
Mary Huebner
Heather Humphrey
Kerry Jenkins
Paul V. Kunnath
Debby Lennon
Sharon Lightfoot
Gregory C. Lundberg
Gina Malone
Jan Marra
Lee Martin
Matthew Mayfield
Dan Mayo
Andrew McDermott
Elizabeth Casey McKinney
Scott Meidroth
Lolita K. Nero
Elsa Toby Newburger
Michael Oelkers
Duane L. Olson
Nicole Orr
Heather McKenzie
Patterson
Susan Patterson
Shelly Ragan Pickard
Sarah Price
Robert Reed
Valerie Christy Reichert
Kate Reimann
Samuel Reinhardt

David Ressler
Gregory J. Riddle
Patti Ruff Riggle
Terree Rowbottom
Jennifer Ryrie
Susan Sampson
Patricia A. Scanlon
Mark V. Scharff
Paula K. Schweitzer
Holley Sherwood
Lisa Sienkiewicz
Janice Simmons-Johnson
John William Simon
Steven S. Slusher
Charles G. Smith
Shirley Bynum Smith
Rachel L. Smith
Joshua J. Stanton
Adam Stefo
J. David Stephens
Greg Storkan
Maureen Taylor
Natanja Tomich
Pamela Triplett
David R. Truman
Greg Upchurch
Caetlyn Van Buren
Samantha Wagner
Nancy Maxwell Walther
Keith Wehmeier
Paul A. Williams
Christopher Wise
Mary Wissinger
Young Ok Woo
Young Ran Woo
Lucy Wortham
Pamela Wright
Susan Donahue Yates
Elena Zaring
Carl S. Zimmerman

Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes

BY PAUL SCHIAVO

Ideas at Play

In the spring of 1909, a troupe of Russian performing artists converged on Paris for a short season of ballet and opera presentations. Encouraged by the enthusiastic response of Parisian audiences, the ensemble established itself permanently in the French capital as the Ballets Russes, or “Russian Ballet.”

This was no ordinary company. Its director, Sergey Diaghilev, was committed to artistic innovation and soon made the creation of new works his priority. The results were breathtaking. Abandoning the conventions of 19th-century dance, the Ballets Russes performed with a passion and athleticism miles removed from the conservative pleasantries of traditional French ballet. Their sets also were unlike anything Paris had seen in the theater. One French critic noted that “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 broomstrokes... These are tremendous sketches.”

More importantly, the Ballets Russes productions reflected an emerging modernist sensibility, one that would develop rapidly in Paris during the ensuing decade, thanks in no small measure to Diaghilev’s foresight. The company became the spiritual home to some of the most innovative artists of the early modern period. Picasso, Roualt, Cocteau, Nijinsky, and others scarcely less famous all worked on productions for Diaghilev’s enterprise. So, too, did a number of outstanding composers, most notably Igor Stravinsky.

Stravinsky’s first ballet score for the Ballets Russes, *The Firebird*, proved his first masterpiece. With its success, at its June 1910 premiere, the composer and Diaghilev cemented a strong bond which, while not always untroubled, lasted some two decades and proved one of the most fruitful artistic partnerships in history.

That partnership resulted in a remarkable series of ballets and operas. The most famous are three great dance scores Stravinsky composed between 1910 and 1913, works that secured his international reputation. Two of those compositions frame our concert. Between them, we hear one of Stravinsky’s seldom-performed but most strikingly original pieces for the Ballets Russes.

Igor Stravinsky *Petrushka*

Born: Oranienbaum, Russia, June 17, 1882 **Died:** New York, April 6, 1971
First performance: June 13, 1911, in Paris; Pierre Monteux conducted the orchestra of the Ballets Russes **STL Symphony premiere:** November 9, 1928, Emil Oberhoffer conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** September 23, 2007, David Robertson conducting **Scoring:** Four flutes and two piccolos, four oboes and English horn, four clarinets and bass clarinet, four bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets and two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, celesta, piano, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 34 minutes



Nijinsky, summer 1907

In Context: 1911 *Gustav Mahler dies; Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen becomes the first man to reach the South Pole; Marie Curie wins the Nobel Prize in Physics*

Following the success of *The Firebird*, Stravinsky and Diaghilev began planning a new ballet. This would be *The Rite of Spring*, whose genesis is discussed below. But Stravinsky's creativity took an unexpected turn. In his autobiography, the composer related:

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... Soon afterwards Diaghilev 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.

While Stravinsky rushed to complete the new composition, Diaghilev assembled a stellar group of artists to collaborate on its presentation. When *Petrushka* premiered in June 1911, Vaslav Nijinsky danced the title role, the choreography was by Michel Fokine, and Pierre Monteux conducted.

The Music Stravinsky's music vividly relates the ballet's story, which is set in St. Petersburg. As the curtain rises, the pre-Lent Carnival is in progress, and crowds of people stroll in the square. Stravinsky quotes a number of Russian folk songs to suggest the popular ambiance of the scene, and a hurdy-gurdy plays an antique tune. Suddenly there appears a Showman, a sinister figure who pulls back a curtain to reveal three puppets: a Ballerina, a Moor, and Petrushka, a clown. He charms them to life with his flute, and they begin to perform a lively Russian dance. As their movements become

increasingly animated, they astonish the onlookers by stepping down from the stage and dancing unaided among the crowd.

Scene II takes place in Petrushka's cell, whose gloom contrasts starkly with the festive atmosphere in the square. Petrushka is in love with the Ballerina, but his comical appearance and awkward efforts at courtship repulse her. Stravinsky's original inspiration is evident in the prominent role of the piano. The scene then shifts to the Moor's cell, where the Ballerina has found a more attractive partner. Their dalliance is interrupted by Petrushka, who mocks their waltz until the furious Moor chases him out.

The final scene returns to the square. It is evening, and the Carnival festivities are at their height. People dance in groups, there is a performing bear, and masqueraders run through the crowd. Suddenly Petrushka rushes from behind the curtains of the Showman's little theater. He is pursued by the Moor, who seizes the hapless clown and cuts him down with his sword. The Showman appears and assures the horrified assembly that the lifeless body on the snow before them is only that of a wooden puppet. Finally the crowd disperses, leaving the Showman alone to carry off the corpse of the slain Petrushka. But as he does, he is terrified to hear the clown's ghost laughing, in Petrushka's signature melodic motif, from the roof of the theater.

The richness and originality of Stravinsky's music remain admirable, and at times astonishing. Original melodies, Russian folk songs, and a popular French ditty all find their way into the score. Shimmering orchestral textures seem to foretell the American minimalist school of recent decades. At times the composer superimposes melodies of radically different shape and character. The instrumentation is beyond masterful.

Igor Stravinsky *Les Noces* (*The Wedding*)

First performance: June 13, 1923, in Paris, conducted by Ernst Ansermet
STL Symphony premiere: This week **Scoring:** Four solo voices (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and baritone), chorus, four pianos, and percussion
Performance time: Approximately 25 minutes



Diaghilev, 1909
 portrait by Serov

In Context 1921-1923 W.B. Yeats writes his poem “*Leda and the Swan*”; Adolf Hitler arrested for attempted German coup; Vladimir I. Lenin proclaims the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Les Noces, Stravinsky’s evocation of a Russian peasant wedding, underwent a long creative process. The composer remembered conceiving the idea for a choral description of a rustic wedding in 1912, but more than a decade passed before the work reached its final form, in the spring of 1923.

No doubt the unusual nature of this piece accounted in large part for its protracted gestation. Part cantata, part ballet, *Les Noces* adheres closely to the traditions of neither genre. Its narrative is advanced obliquely; its various characters are not represented consistently by specific singers; its dialogue resembles, as Stravinsky described, “those scenes in [James Joyce’s] *Ulysses* in which the reader seems to be overhearing scraps of conversation without the connecting thread of discourse.”

All this might seem unpromising material for the stage, but *Les Noces* was successfully produced by the Ballets Russes, in June 1923, in Paris. Following a subsequent production in London, the novelist H. G. Wells, an author not otherwise known for music criticism, wrote: “I do not know of any other ballet so interesting, so amusing, so fresh, or nearly so exciting as *Les Noces*.” He went on to describe the piece as “a rendering in sound and vision of the peasant soul in its gravity, in its deliberate and simpleminded intricacy, in its subtly varied rhythms, in its deep undercurrents of excitement.”

The Music The first scene begins abruptly, without any prelude, and those that follow do so without the slightest pause. (Stravinsky’s deliberate avoidance of overture or interludes reflects the radical rethinking of dramatic conventions that Diaghilev urged upon his artists.) This initial section finds the bride at home, having her hair braided and lamenting the end of her childhood. The second scene takes us to the groom’s house, where similar activities are in progress: the young man’s hair is curled, his parents imagine that henceforth his wife will be tending to this task, and everyone beseeches the saints to bless the forthcoming marriage.

The brief third scene relates the bride’s departure from her house. Scene four brings us the wedding feast. There are songs, sayings, and jests, and a couple is selected to warm the bridal bed for the newlyweds. Finally,

bride and groom are led to their chamber as the groom, his part taken by various voices, sings lovingly to his bride.

Stravinsky's music is an extension of the style he had pioneered in *The Rite of Spring*. The vocal lines follow irregular rhythms reflecting those of the Russian verses for which they were conceived. They are accompanied by astringent blocks of sound, frequently in the form of repeating figures, with sharp outbursts punctuating the texture from time to time. The singing is practically continuous from the opening note until the end, where first the vocal and then the instrumental music gradually winds down. At last there remains only the periodic chiming of a bell and, in the poetic words of Stravinsky scholar Eric Walter White, "pools of silence [that] come flooding in between."

Igor Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring*

First performance: May 29, 1913, in Paris; Pierre Monteux conducted the orchestra of the Ballets Russes **STL Symphony premiere:** October 12, 1963, Eleazar De Carvalho conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** November 15, 2009, David Robertson conducting **Scoring:** Five flutes, piccolo and alto flute; five oboes and two English horns; five clarinets, plus E-flat and bass clarinets; five bassoons and two contrabassoons, eight horns and two "Wagner tubas," five trumpets and bass trumpet, three trombones, two tubas, timpani and a large battery of percussion, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 33 minutes



Stravinsky

In Context 1911-13 Swann's *Way*, the first volume of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (A la recherche du temps perdu) published; Second Balkan War involves Bulgaria, Serbia, Ottoman Empire, and Greece; Marcel Duchamp invented the "Readymade," a piece of art created "not by the hand or skill but by the mind and decision of the artist."

It seems appropriate that the inspiration for one of the most visionary compositions in the history of music should have come to its creator in a vision. In the spring of 1910 Stravinsky was finishing the score to *The Firebird* when he experienced one day a fleeting daydream of a scene out of Russian pre-history. "I saw in imagination," Stravinsky remembered, "a solemn pagan rite: wise elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring."

Stravinsky related this vision to Diaghilev, who immediately decided to base a ballet upon it. After finishing *Petrushka*, the composer set to work in the summer of 1911 and completed the score in March 1913.

The premiere of *The Rite of Spring* by the Ballets Russes on May 29, 1913, ignited a near riot in the audience. Some of the controversy was provoked by the sets and choreography, but the principal point of contention was Stravinsky's contribution. According to one eye-witness,

... a certain part of the audience was [outraged] by what it considered a blasphemous attempt to destroy music as an art, and, swept away with wrath, began very soon after the rise of the curtain to make cat-calls and to offer audible suggestions as to how the performance should proceed. The orchestra played unheard, except when a slight lull occurred. The figures on the stage danced in time to music they had to imagine they heard and beautifully out of time with the uproar in the audience.

Despite this daunting baptism, *The Rite of Spring* has emerged as one of the most highly regarded and frequently heard compositions of the 20th century. It has inspired a number of dramatic treatments, perhaps the most famous being the dinosaur sequence in Walt Disney's film *Fantasia*.

The Music Though not the first piece to express a modernist sensibility, *The Rite of Spring* nevertheless stands as a landmark in the emergence of a new musical aesthetic. Its thrilling rhythms, hypnotic phrases, audacious discords, and bold orchestral effects represented a radical break with the past when they first appeared, and they exerted an enormous influence on a succeeding generation of composers.

The composition unfolds in two parts. Both begin in an atmosphere of mystery and progress through a succession of increasingly animated episodes to shattering conclusions. From an outline of the choreographic scenario to which Stravinsky composed the music can be gleaned the headings of the various sections of the score. Still, this scenario is fairly indefinite, and *The Rite of Spring* may perhaps most profitably be heard in general rather than specific programmatic terms—that is, as a hymn to the violence and mystery of nature rather than as an aural depiction of particular scenes. In this respect, a remark Stravinsky made late in his life seems singularly apt. When asked what he most loved about Russia, the composer answered: “The violent Russian spring that seemed to begin in an hour and was like the whole earth cracking. That was the most wonderful event of every year of my childhood.”

Program notes © 2011 by Paul Schiavo

The St. Louis Symphony has invited four writers to produce program notes this season. The first, Paul Schiavo, is no stranger to fans at Powell Hall, since he has been the Symphony's program annotator for many seasons.

Next with the St. Louis Symphony

Mahler 1

Fri, September 23, at 8pm
Sat, September 24, at 8pm

David Robertson, conductor
Orli Shaham, piano

STEVEN MACKEY *Stumble to Grace* (World Premiere)
MAHLER Symphony No. 1



DILIP VISHWANATH

David Robertson

Mahler believed that “a symphony must be like the world. It must contain everything.” His youthful, exuberant first symphony incorporates countless ideas masterfully crafted into the massive work. Orli Shaham joins the STL Symphony for the world premiere of Steven Mackey’s *Stumble to Grace*, a delicate and witty work mimicking a modern-day Mozart.