

2025–2026 | 126th Season
Marian Anderson Hall

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Saturday, January 31, at 8:00

Sunday, February 1, at 2:00

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor

Seong-Jin Cho Piano

Ravel *Mother Goose Suite*

I. Pavane of Sleeping Beauty

II. Tom Thumb

III. Laideronnette, Empress of Pagodes

IV. The Conversations of Beauty and the Beast

V. The Fairy Garden

Shostakovich Piano Concerto No. 1 in C minor, Op. 35 / ●

I. Allegro moderato—Allegro vivace—Allegretto—Moderato—

II. Lento—Largo—

III. Moderato—

IV. Allegro con brio—Presto—Allegretto poco moderato—

Allegro con brio—Presto

James Vaughan, solo trumpet

Intermission

Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring* / ●

First Part: The Adoration of the Earth

Introduction—

The Auguries of Spring—Dances of the Young Girls—

Ritual of Abduction—

Spring Rounds—

Ritual of the Rival Tribes—

Procession of the Sage—

The Sage—

Dance of the Earth

Second Part: 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)

This program runs approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes.

/● designates a work that was given its world or United States premiere by The Philadelphia Orchestra, part of the Orchestra's 125th anniversary celebration.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit www.wrti.org to listen live or for more details.



The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united. Today, The Philadelphia Orchestra and Ensemble Arts brings the greatest performances and most impactful education and community programs to audiences in Philadelphia and beyond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is esteemed by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community. In addition to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers, Yannick and the Orchestra are committed to performing and recording the works of previously overlooked composers.

Your Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, throughout the community, over the airwaves, and online. The Kimmel Center has been the ensemble's home since 2001, and in 2024 Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center was officially rededicated as

Marian Anderson Hall in honor of the legendary contralto, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community programs connect, uplift, and celebrate nearly 40,000 Philadelphians and 250 schools from diverse communities annually, through inclusive arts education and vibrant engagement that reflect our city's voices and expand access to creative opportunities. Students, families, and other community members can enjoy free and discounted experiences with The Philadelphia Orchestra through programs such as the Jane H. Kesson School Concerts, Family Concerts, Open Rehearsals, PlayINs, and Our City, Your Orchestra community concerts.

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Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 15 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit www.philorch.org.

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA / 125

Yannick Nézet-Séguin
Music & Artistic Director

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Music and Artistic Director



Canadian-born conductor and pianist **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** is currently in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. An inspired leader, Yannick is both an evolutionary and a revolutionary, developing the mighty “Philadelphia Sound” in new ways. His collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm have been heralded by critics and audiences alike. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* has said that under his baton the Orchestra is “at the top of its considerable form”; the Associated Press has called it “a premier orchestra at its peak”; and the *New York Times* wrote, “the ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogenous richness, has never sounded better.”

Yannick has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling and sought-after talents of his generation. He became the third music director of New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 2018. In addition, he has been artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. In 2017 he became the third-ever honorary member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He served as music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic from 2008 to 2018 (he is now honorary conductor) and was principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic from 2008 to 2014. He has made wildly successful appearances with the world’s most revered ensembles and at many of the leading opera houses.

Yannick has shown a deep commitment to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today’s composers and by performing and recording the music of underappreciated composers of the past, including Florence Price, Clara Schumann, William Dawson, Lili Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, and William Grant Still. In 2018 he signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Under his leadership The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to recording with 15 releases on that label, including *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*, which won a GRAMMY® Award for Best Orchestral Performance in 2022.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at Montreal’s Conservatory of Music and continued his studies with renowned conductors, most notably Carlo Maria Giulini; he also studied choral conducting with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College. Among Yannick’s honors are an appointment as Companion of the Order of Canada; Companion to the Order of Arts and Letters of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Montreal; an Officier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres; *Musical America’s* 2016 Artist of the Year; ECHO KLASSIK’s 2014 Conductor of the Year; a Royal Philharmonic Society Award; Canada’s National Arts Centre Award; the Prix Denise-Pelletier; the Oskar Morawetz Award; and honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec, the Curtis Institute of Music, Westminster Choir College of Rider University, McGill University, the University of Montreal, the University of Pennsylvania, Laval University, and Drexel University.

To read Yannick’s full bio, please visit philorch.org/conductor.

Soloist

Ben Wolf



Pianist **Seong-Jin Cho** has established himself worldwide as one of the leading pianists of his generation. Celebrated across the globe for his expressive magic and illuminative insights, he was brought to the world's attention in 2015 when he won First Prize at the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw. In 2016 he signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon and two years later made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut. In 2023 he was awarded the prestigious Samsung Ho-Am Prize in the Arts in recognition of

his exceptional contributions to the world of classical music. An artist in high demand, he works with the world's most prestigious orchestras including the Berlin and Vienna philharmonics, the London and Boston symphonies, and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Conductors he regularly collaborates with include Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Myung-Whun Chung, Gustavo Dudamel, Andris Nelsons, Gianandrea Noseda, Antonio Pappano, Simon Rattle, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Lahav Shani. In the 2024–25 season he held the position of artist in residence with the Berlin Philharmonic.

During the 2025–26 season Mr. Cho is the London Symphony's Artist Portrait, working with the orchestra on multiple projects including the world premiere of a new piano concerto by Donghoon Shin, written especially for him. The position also features touring across Europe, as well as chamber music concerts and recitals. In addition to these current performances, highlights of the season include returns to the Pittsburgh Symphony under Manfred Honeck with concerts in Pittsburgh and at Carnegie Hall, to the Boston Symphony with Mr. Nelsons, and to the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Mr. Dudamel. Mr. Cho embarks on several international tours, including his notable return to the Czech Philharmonic with Semyon Bychkov in Taiwan and Japan; the Munich Philharmonic with Mr. Shani in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan; and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra with Mr. Nelsons throughout Europe.

Mr. Cho's latest recording for Deutsche Grammophon celebrates Ravel's 150th anniversary, presenting the composer's complete solo piano works and concertos with the Boston Symphony and Mr. Nelsons. The solo piano works were recognized with an Opus Klassik Award in the 2025 Instrumentalist of the Year category. Previous releases include his solo album *The Handel Project*, released in 2023, and Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 and scherzos with the London Symphony and Mr. Noseda in 2021. His first album, also recorded with the London Symphony and Mr. Noseda, features Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 and the Four Ballades. His solo album *The Wanderer* was released in 2020 and features Schubert's "Wanderer" Fantasy and piano sonatas by Berg and Liszt. In 2018 he released a Mozart album with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Mr. Nézet-Séguin. Born in 1994 in Seoul, Mr. Cho started learning the piano at age six and gave his first public recital when he was 11. In 2009 he became the youngest-ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition. In 2011 he won Third Prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 17. He is now based in Berlin.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1908

Ravel

Mother Goose

Suite

Music

Elgar

Symphony No. 1

Literature

Stein

Three Lives

Art

Chagall

Nu rouge

History

First Model "T"

produced

1913

Stravinsky

The Rite of Spring

Music

Rachmaninoff

The Bells

Literature

Mann

Death in Venice

Art

Sargent

Portrait of Henry

James

History

Balkan War

1933

Shostakovich

Piano Concerto

No. 1

Music

Strauss

Arabella

Literature

Lorca

The Blood Wedding

Art

Giacometti

The Palace at Four

a.m.

History

First

concentration

camps erected by

Nazis in Germany

Maurice Ravel is justly recognized as one of the great orchestrators of the 20th century. In 1908 he began composing a collection of four-hand piano pieces based on French fairy tales, which he called *Mother Goose Suite*. It was intended for the children of close friends, although it proved too difficult. Ravel orchestrated the five-movement set in 1911, the version we hear today, and later that year added two movements and interludes for a ballet that premiered in Paris.

In 1934 The Philadelphia Orchestra gave the United States premiere of Dmitri Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto. This Concerto is one of his wittiest pieces and proved a popular vehicle for him to shine as the piano soloist. The work prominently features the trumpet, supported by a string orchestra.

The legendary 1913 premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in Paris by the Ballets Russes proved a landmark event in the history of Western music. Historians now generally agree that the audience was more scandalized by the ballet's choreography than by the innovative music; within a year *The Rite of Spring* had emerged as an enormously successful concert piece. It took nearly a decade, until 1922, for the work to make it across the Atlantic. Leopold Stokowski conducted the American premiere with The Philadelphia Orchestra in March 1922.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

The Music

Mother Goose Suite

Maurice Ravel

Born in Ciboure, Lower Pyrenees, March 7, 1875

Died in Paris, December 28, 1937



It was not until the first decade of the 20th century that Maurice Ravel's career as a composer, which had suffered fitful starts, finally took flight. He had failed several attempts to win the coveted Prix de Rome at the Paris Conservatory, partly because his daring experiments with color and harmony did not fit easily into a conservatory mentality. Finally, he abandoned his studies altogether, becoming involved instead with "Les Apaches," the vaguely disreputable collection of

Parisian aesthetes who met to discuss art, literature, painting, music, history, and any other topic that might arise. Ravel tried out many of his new works at meetings of Les Apaches—often for groups that included such notables as Manuel de Falla.

Despite critical aspersions, his reputation grew steadily. Around 1900 the Parisian publisher Demets had started to print several of the composer's early works, such as the *Pavane for a Dead Princess*, the String Quartet, and the piano piece *Jeux d'eau*. They were received by the public with astonished enthusiasm. Buoyed by these successes, Ravel produced, in rapid succession, a string of brilliant works that secured his position as more than just Debussy's also-ran—including several of the works for which he is best known, such as the *Sonatine* (1905), the five *Miroirs* (1905), *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907), *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), *Mother Goose* (1908–11), and *Daphnis and Chloe* (1909–12).

Children's Duets Ravel composed *Mother Goose* as a set of pieces for piano duet, originally intending them for Mimie and Jean, the young children of the composer's close friends Xavier and Ida Godebski. He wrote the work mostly in 1908 at La Grangette, the Godebski's summer home near Fontainebleau, but he didn't complete the set until early 1910. Although he made the piano writing as simple and straightforward as possible, in the end it proved too difficult for the Godebski children (the youngest of whom was only eight). The piece was premiered, in this initial piano version, in Paris in April 1910, by Jeanne Leleu and Geneviève Durony—themselves just children at the time. The following year the composer transcribed the work for full orchestra, and this version is the one heard on today's concert. He also expanded it into a full-length ballet score, adding two movements and interludes and rearranging the order of the pieces; this last version received its premiere in January 1912 at the Théâtre des Arts in Paris.

A Closer Look Ravel's delightful evocation of childish pleasures takes its inspiration from three different versions of the *Mother Goose* tales, giving the version by Charles Perrault

(1628–1703) the most credence. It is the first story from Perrault’s *Contes de ma Mère l’Oye* (Mother Goose Stories, 1697), for example, that supplies the opening piece of Ravel’s Suite, **Pavane of Sleeping Beauty**—a slow-moving dance of melancholy charm. Ravel himself inscribed the second piece, **Tom Thumb**, with the following excerpt from Perrault: “Tom Thumb [who was lost in the woods] believed that he would easily be able to find the way by means of the bread that he had scattered wherever he passed—but he was surprised to discover not one single crumb. The birds had come and eaten it all!”

The brilliant, coloristic atmosphere of the third piece is a reflection of its subject, **Laideronnette, Empress of Pagodes**. Again, Ravel heads this quick march with a passage from the tale as told in Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy’s *Serpentin vert*: “She disrobed and entered her bath. At once the pagodes and pagodines began to sing and play on instruments. Some had archlutes made of walnut shells, others played on viols made from the shells of almonds, for they were obliged to proportion their instruments to their stature.” (A pagode is a fairy creature made of jewels and precious metals.)

The fourth piece is a delicate and sad waltz, a sort of dreamy depiction of **The Conversations of Beauty and the Beast**. Ravel inscribes the score with a dialogue between the couple, taken this time from a version by Marie Leprince de Beaumont:

When I think how good-hearted you are, you do not seem so ugly.
Yes, I have indeed a kind heart, but I am a monster.
There are many men more monstrous than you.
If I had wit I would invent a fine compliment to thank you, but I am only a beast.

Beauty, will you be my wife?

No, Beast.

I die content since I have had the pleasure of seeing you again.

No, my dear Beast, you shall not die; you shall live to be my husband!

The beast suddenly disappeared, and she saw at her feet a prince more beautiful than love, who thanked her for having broken his enchantment.

The clarinet tune at the beginning of this movement seems to represent Beauty, while the growling contrabassoon stands for the Beast; after a heartfelt discussion, the Beast’s theme is transformed, finally, into a “beautiful” violin melody. The fifth piece, **The Fairy Garden** (marked slowly, seriously) brings the set to a plaintive, subtly shaded close.

—Paul J. Horsley

Paul J. Horsley is performing arts editor for The Independent in Kansas City. Previously he was program annotator and musicologist for The Philadelphia Orchestra and music and dance critic for The Kansas City Star.

Ravel composed the Mother Goose Suite from 1908 to 1910 and orchestrated it in 1911.

Artur Rodzinski was on the podium for the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the piece, in January 1926. The most recent subscription performances were in February 2023, with Stéphane Denève conducting.

Ravel scored the work for two flutes (II doubling piccolo), two oboes (II doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons (II doubling contrabassoon), two horns, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone), harp, celesta, and strings.

The Suite runs approximately 16 minutes in performance.

The Music

Piano Concerto No. 1

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born in St. Petersburg, September 25, 1906

Died in Moscow, August 9, 1975



The musician we perhaps too often associate with somber portrayals of the emotional turmoil of an artist under Stalinism was also one of the wittiest musicians since Joseph Haydn. “When listeners laugh at a concert of my symphonic music, I am not in the least bit shocked,” wrote Dmitri Shostakovich in a Soviet magazine in 1934. “In fact, I am pleased.” This composer’s early scores are characterized by a sardonic and effervescent humor that is as profound as it is satirical. “I want to defend the right of laughter to appear

in what is called ‘serious’ music,” he wrote, touching on a truth known to great composers through the ages: that humor in art exists not just to elicit laughter, but to reveal truth. In Shostakovich, comedy and despair coexist as comfortably and intricately as they do in any music; humor is a means of coping with the unbearable. That there is a sharp edge to this humor should come as no surprise from one who embodied so completely the contradictions of living under the schizoid and unpredictable Soviet regime.

His early stage works (*The Nose*, *The Golden Age*, *The Bolt*) had dealt up ample servings of this sardonic wit, and the First Symphony of 1925 had its moments of youthful zest and joie de vivre as well. But it was with the First Piano Concerto that the composer brought the full force of his droll humor into the concert hall.

A Delightfully Ebullient Work Written in the summer of 1933, immediately after the completion of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (the official condemnation of which, in 1936, would change the course of his career), the Concerto is one of the composer’s most delightfully ebullient works. Its wry humor and solid craftsmanship immediately assured that it would achieve the composer’s stated goal of “filling up the gap in Soviet instrumental repertoire, which lacks major works for the concert stage.” The work has remained a favorite of concert audiences for almost a century now.

It also became a solo vehicle for its creator, who had begun his career at the Petrograd Conservatory as a dual talent, completing a degree in piano (at age 16) before earning his composition diploma. He was, of course, the soloist in the work’s premiere in Leningrad on October 15, 1933, with Fritz Stiedry conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic—and featuring the orchestra’s principal trumpet, Aleksandr Schmidt, a friend and favorite musician of the composer.

The work was initially conceived as a “concerto for piano, with the accompaniment of string orchestra and trumpet,” and the prominent role assigned to the solo trumpet gives it a distinctive quality. This biting edge, and the essential roles given to piano and trumpet, have caused some writers to connect it to *Petrushka*—and there is no doubt that Shostakovich was familiar with Stravinsky’s masterpiece. But one could also make comparisons to Prokofiev’s early works, particularly his own First Piano Concerto of 1912, which had pulled at the trouser seams of Romantic traditions. Shostakovich’s humor is drier than that of either of those composers—and funnier, too, with an edge of hysteria. Nevertheless, his First Piano Concerto was one of the last times he would give such free rein to his wit—the lively sense of fun that he still believed formed a part of his mission as an artist.

A Closer Look Shostakovich’s conservatory study had been rooted in Classical styles and traditions, and he had learned his lessons well. In addition to quotations from Haydn, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and many others, this Concerto manages to work in popular tunes and a healthy dose of the burlesque. The opening **Allegro moderato**, which introduces piano and trumpet at the outset (in an admittedly *Petrushka*-like figure), presents a staunchly classical theme in C-minor before veering off into a sort of can-can—cartwheeling away, in the words of Ian MacDonald, “into a circus-world of comic turns and raspberries ringmastered by the trumpet.”

Wittiness is brushed aside in the second movement (**Lento**), a grave meditation in the vein of the slow movement of Ravel’s G-major Concerto, and one that makes clear the composer’s wholly serious intent. The third movement (**Moderato**) is little more than a mournful recitative, a transition to the audacity of the finale. About as “over-the-top” as anything in 20th-century music, this **Allegro con brio** begins wildly and progresses to such a point of absurdity that the listener becomes aware that it is not really very funny after all—and this is precisely the idea. A solo cadenza for piano serves only to heighten the shrill atmosphere of the movement, which also includes quotations from Haydn, from Beethoven’s “Rage over a Lost Penny,” and from a ditzy tune Shostakovich had originally composed as part of an interlude for Erwin Dressel’s opera *Armer Columbus*. In the final analysis, what appears to be a self-evident bit of dash and wit is, like almost everything in Shostakovich, full of complex and surprisingly dark hidden meanings.

—Paul J. Horsley

Shostakovich’s Piano Concerto No. 1 was composed in 1933.

Eugene List won the Philadelphia Orchestra Student Competition in 1934, aged 16, and as part of his award he had the privilege of presenting the United States premiere of the Shostakovich First Piano Concerto with The Philadelphia Orchestra and Leopold Stokowski, on December 12, 1934. Most recently, pianist Martha Argerich and Charles Dutoit collaborated in subscription performances in October 2008.

The First Piano Concerto is scored for trumpet, strings, and solo piano.

The work runs approximately 20 minutes in performance.

The Music

The Rite of Spring

Igor Stravinsky

Born in Lomonosov, Russia, June 17, 1882

Died in New York City, April 6, 1971



Music connected with dance has long held a special place in French culture, at least as far back as the age of Louis XIV, and there was an explosion of major full-length scores during the 19th century in Paris. Some of the perennial favorites were written by now generally forgotten figures, such as Adolphe Adam (*Giselle* from 1841) and his pupil Léo Delibes (*Coppélia* in 1870 and *Sylvia* in 1876). These composers inspired the supreme ballet music of the late century, that written by Tchaikovsky, the great Russian. With his scores to *Swan Lake* (1875-76), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1889), and *Nutcracker* (1892), ballet found its musical master.

Back to Paris In the first decade of the 20th century, however, magnificent dance returned to Paris when the impresario Sergei Diaghilev started exporting Russian culture. He began in 1906 with the visual arts, presented symphonic music the next year, then opera, and, finally, in 1909, added ballet. The offerings of his legendary Ballets Russes proved to be especially popular despite grumbling that the productions did not seem Russian enough for some Parisians. Music historian Richard Taruskin has remarked on the paradox:

The Russian ballet, originally a French import and proud of its stylistic heritage, now had to become stylistically “Russian” so as to justify its exportation back to France. Diaghilev’s solution was to commission, expressly for presentation in France in 1910, something without precedent in Russia: a ballet on a Russian folk subject, and with music cast in a conspicuously exotic “Russian” style. He cast about for a composer willing to come up with so weird a thing.

Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes Diaghilev had some difficulty finding that composer. After being refused by several others, he engaged the 27-year-old Igor Stravinsky, who achieved great success with *The Firebird* in 1910. His second ballet, *Petrushka*, followed the next season. And then came the real shocker that made music history: *The Rite of Spring*.

The Russian artist and archeologist Nicholas Roerich, a specialist in Slavic history and folklore, devised the scenario for the *Rite* together with Stravinsky and eventually created the sets and costumes. Subtitled “Pictures of Pagan Russia,” the ballet offers ritual dances culminating in the sacrifice of the “chosen one” in order “to propitiate the god of spring.” Stravinsky composed the music between September 1911 and March 1913, after which the work went into an unusually protracted period of rehearsals. There were many for the

orchestra, many for the dancers, and then a handful with all the forces together. The final dress rehearsal on May 28, 1913, the day before the premiere, was presented before a large audience and attended by various critics. All seemed to go smoothly.

A Riotous Premiere An announcement in the newspaper *Le Figaro* on the day of the premiere promised

the strongly stylized characteristic attitudes of the Slavic race with an awareness of the beauty of the prehistoric period. The prodigious Russian dancers were the only ones capable of expressing these stammerings of a semi-savage humanity, of composing these frenetic human clusters wrenched incessantly by the most astonishing polyrhythm ever to come to the mind of a musician. There is truly a new thrill which will surely raise passionate discussions, but which will leave all true artists with an unforgettable impression.

Diaghilev undoubtedly devised the premiere to be a big event. Ticket prices at the newly built Théâtre des Champs-Élysées were doubled and the cultural elite of Paris showed up. The program opened with a beloved classic: *Les Sylphides*, orchestrations of piano pieces by Chopin. What exactly happened next that evening, however, is not entirely clear. Conflicting accounts quickly emerged, sometimes put forth by people who were not even in attendance. From the very beginning of *The Rite of Spring* there was laughter and an uproar among the audience, but whether this was principally in response to the music or to the dancing is still debated. It seems more likely that it was the latter. One critic observed that “past the Prelude the crowd simply stopped listening to the music so that they might better amuse themselves with the choreography.” That choreography was by the 23-year-old dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, who had presented a provocative staging of Claude Debussy’s *Jeux* with the company just two weeks earlier. Although Stravinsky’s music was evidently inaudible at times through the din, conductor Pierre Monteux pressed on and saw the 30-minute ballet through to the end. The evening was not yet over. After intermission came two more audience favorites: Carl Maria von Weber’s *The Specter of the Rose* and Alexander Borodin’s Polovtsian Dances from his opera *Prince Igor*.

Five more performances of *The Rite of Spring* were given over the next two weeks and then the company took the ballet on tour. Within the year the work was triumphantly presented as a concert piece, again with Monteux conducting, and ever since the concert hall has been its principal home. Yet it is well worth remembering that this extraordinary composition, which some commentators herald as the advent of modern music, was originally a theatrical piece, a collaborative effort forging the talents of Stravinsky, Roerich, Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Monteux, and a large ensemble of musicians and dancers. Leopold Stokowski conducted the American premiere of both the concert and staged versions of *The Rite of Spring* in Philadelphia.

A Closer Look *The Rite of Spring* calls for an enormous orchestra deployed to spectacular effect. The ballet is in two tableaux—“The Adoration of the Earth” and “The Sacrifice”—each of which has an introductory section, a series of dances, and a concluding ritual. The opening minutes of the piece give an idea of Stravinsky’s innovative style. A solo bassoon,

playing at an unusually high register, intones a melancholy melody. This is the first of at least nine folk melodies that the composer adapted for the piece, although he later denied doing so (except for this opening tune).

Some order eventually emerges out of chaos as the “The Auguries of Spring” roar out massive string chords punctuated by eight French horns. In the following dances unexpected and complicated metrical innovations emerge. At various points in the piece Stravinsky changes the meter every measure, a daunting challenge for the orchestra in 1913 that now seems second nature to many professional musicians. If Arnold Schoenberg had famously “liberated the dissonance” a few years earlier, Stravinsky now seems to liberate rhythm and meter.

Although the scenario changed over the course of composition, a basic “Argument” was printed in the program at the premiere, which read as follows:

FIRST ACT: “The Adoration of the Earth.” Spring. The Earth is covered with flowers. The Earth is covered with grass. A great joy reigns on the Earth. Mankind delivers itself up to the dance and seeks to know the future by following the rites. The eldest of the Sages himself takes part in the Glorification of Spring. He is led forward to unite himself with the abundant and superb Earth. Everyone stamps the Earth ecstatically.

SECOND ACT: “The Sacrifice.” After the day: After midnight. On the hills are the consecrated stones. The adolescents play the mystic games and see the Great Way. They glorify, they proclaim Her who has been designated to be delivered to the God. The ancestors are invoked, venerated witnesses. And the wise Ancestors of Mankind contemplate the sacrifice. This is the way to sacrifice Iarilo the magnificent, the flamboyant.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Christopher H. Gibbs is James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music at Bard College and has been the program annotator for The Philadelphia Orchestra since 2000. He is the author of several books on Schubert and Liszt, and the co-author, with Richard Taruskin, of The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition.

Stravinsky composed The Rite of Spring from 1911 to 1913.

The Rite of Spring is one of many essential works of the 20th century that received its United States premiere in Philadelphia. Leopold Stokowski and The Philadelphia Orchestra presented the piece on March 3, 1922. The most recent subscription performances were in March/April 2023 with Marin Alsop and Austin Chanu taking over for the indisposed Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

The Philadelphians have recorded the complete work four times: in 1929 with Stokowski for RCA, in 1955 with Eugene Ormandy for CBS, in 1978 with Riccardo Muti for EMI, and in 2013 with Nézet-Séguin for Deutsche Grammophon. An abridged version was recorded by Stokowski and the Orchestra in 1939 for RCA, the same version that appeared in the film Fantasia.

The score calls for piccolo, three flutes (III doubling piccolo II), alto flute, four oboes (IV doubling English horn II), English horn, three clarinets (III doubling bass clarinet II), E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, four bassoons (IV doubling contrabassoon II), contrabassoon, eight horns (VII and VIII doubling Wagner tubas), piccolo trumpet, four trumpets, three trombones, bass trombone, two tubas, timpani, percussion (antique cymbals, bass drum, cymbals, güiro, tam-tam, tambourine, and triangle), and strings.

The Rite of Spring runs approximately 33 minutes in performance.

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Musical Terms

Cadenza: A passage or section in a style of brilliant improvisation, usually inserted near the end of a movement or composition

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Chromatic: Relating to tones foreign to a given key (scale) or chord

Dissonance: A combination of two or more tones requiring resolution

Dynamics: The varying and contrasting degrees of loudness

Harmony: The combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions

Legato: Smooth, even, without any break between notes

Meter: The symmetrical grouping of musical rhythms

Op.: Abbreviation for opus, a term used to indicate the chronological position of a composition within a composer's output. Opus numbers are not always reliable because they are often applied in the order of publication rather than composition.

Pavane: A court dance of the early 16th century, probably of Spanish origin

Polyphony: A term used to designate music in more than one part and the style in which all or several of the musical parts move to some extent independently

Polyrhythm: The simultaneous use of two or more contrasting rhythms

Recitative: Declamatory singing, free in tempo and rhythm. Recitative has also sometimes been used to refer to parts of purely instrumental works that resemble vocal recitatives.

Scale: The series of tones which form (a) any major or minor key or (b) the chromatic scale of successive semi-tonic steps

Suite: During the Baroque period, an instrumental genre consisting of several movements in the same key, some or all of which were based on the forms and styles of dance music. Later, a group of pieces extracted from a larger work, especially an opera or ballet.

Timbre: Tone color or tone quality

Tonic: The keynote of a scale

THE SPEED OF MUSIC (Tempo)

Allegretto: A tempo between walking speed and fast

Allegro: Bright, fast

Con brio: Vigorously, with fire

Largo: Broad

Lento: Slow

Moderato: A moderate tempo, neither fast nor slow

Presto: Very fast

Vivace: Lively

TEMPO MODIFIERS

Poco: Little, a bit

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