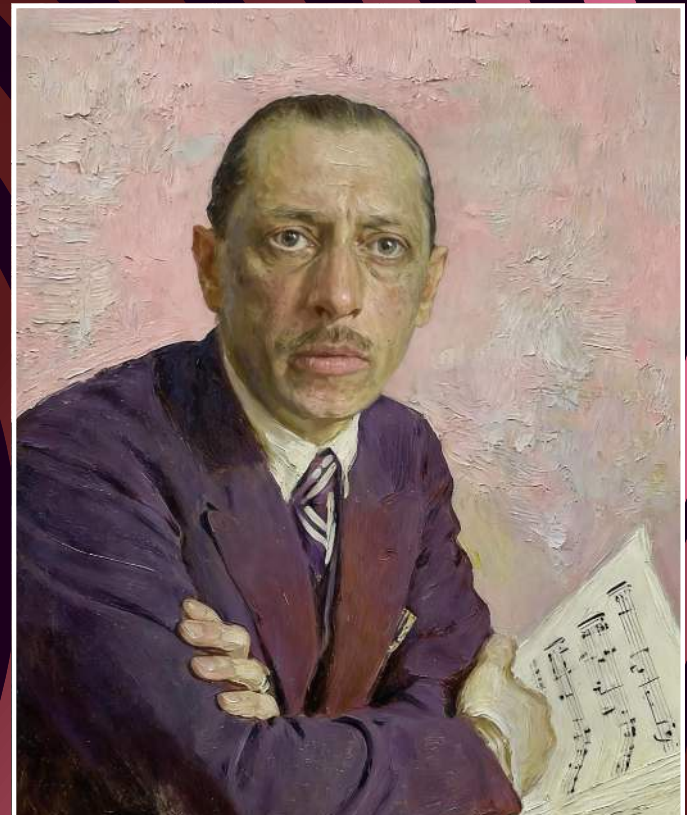


# STRAVINSKY

## The Rite of Spring

USSR Symphony Orchestra

Evgeny SVETLANOV



# Igor Stravinsky

## *The Rite of Spring*

### Part I “The Adoration of the Earth”

|   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | I. Introduction                                  | 3:29 |
| 2 | II. Augurs of Spring (Dances of the Young Girls) | 3:25 |
| 3 | III. Ritual of Abduction                         | 1:40 |
| 4 | IV. Spring Rounds                                | 3:07 |
| 5 | V. Ritual of the Rival Tribes                    | 1:44 |
| 6 | VI. Procession of the Sage                       | 1:04 |
| 7 | VII. Dance of the Earth                          | 1:16 |

### Part II “The Sacrifice”

|    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 8  | I. Introduction                        | 4:04 |
| 9  | II. Mystic Circles of the Young Girls  | 3:26 |
| 10 | III. Glorification of the Chosen One   | 1:38 |
| 11 | IV. Evocation of the Ancestors         | 0:53 |
| 12 | V. Ritual Action of the Ancestors      | 3:45 |
| 13 | VI. Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One) | 4:41 |

## USSR Symphony Orchestra

### Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra

#### Evgeni Svetlanov, *conductor*

Recorded in 1966.

Producer: **Larisa Abelyan**

Engineer: **Alexander Grosman**

Originally issued in 1966 as Melodiya Д 018017-18

### NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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The year 1913 tested Parisian taste for Russian culture to the utmost. Nijinsky’s version of Debussy’s *Jeux* did not find favour whilst the other new production, *Le sacre de printemps* (*Rite of Spring*), with music by **Igor Stravinsky** and appropriately primitive sets and costumes by Nicholas Roerich, has entered the annals of theatrical history and is regarded as the most notorious first night ever.

The ballet is set in ancient pagan Russia. Act One opens with a shamen-like 300 year old woman’s adoration of the earth. Groups of dancers then pair up in a somewhat brutal episode interrupted by the arrival of three unnaturally tall women who with stork-like movements separate the groups. Rival tribes compete in wild dance but another interruption occurs with the arrival of the sage accompanied by tribal elders. After he too has kissed the earth the stage is filled with the entire company, who dancing ever more frenziedly surround the sage.

Act Two opens with the maidens deciding who will be chosen to be sacrificed. The sacrificial victim is then glorified and then prepared for her ordeal. They are joined by the ghostly arrival of tribal ancestors in bearskins who join the maidens in forming ever-tighter circles around the Chosen One. After this ritual the maidens take their leave of the Chosen One, leaving her to her fate. As the Ancestors process around the Chosen One she can be seen jumping ever higher, dancing herself to death. As the music ends, her lifeless body is lifted aloft by the Ancestors.

The weather in Paris had been unusually muggy on 29 May 1913 and the audience had found the newly opened Théâtre des Champs-Élysées rather stuffy. Rather hot and bothered, they sat through revivals of *Prince Igor* and *Les Sylphides*. The opening notes of *Le sacre de printemps* caused a stir for in order to reproduce the sound of ancient hand-made instruments, Stravinsky contorted the sound of the traditional orchestra (just as Nijinsky contorted the body movements of the ballet dancers) making them play in unusual registers. As the curtain rose the shouting began; those such as the composer Florent Schmitt who were prepared to give the new work a fair hearing did verbal battle with those who could/would not understand what they were experiencing. Occasionally fisticuffs broke out. Stravinsky stormed out of his stalls seat and went backstage where he found Diaghilev turning on the house lights in an attempt to restore order out front; Nijinsky was standing precariously on a chair bellowing the beat to the poor dancers.

During the interval an attempt was made by the theatre manager to appeal to the audience’s better nature but to no avail; the catcalls, laughter and shouting resumed during the second half with greater ferocity. The sight of the Maidens (‘knock-kneed Lolitas’ Stravinsky later called them), their toes turned inwards, their necks crained sideways, their heads supported by cupped hands. ‘Un docteur, un dentiste!’ they

cried. Nijinsky's flat-footed jumps had shocked in Jeux; here they were hooted at.

For the performers it was a traumatic experience. Pierre Monteux trained his orchestra to the best of his ability but was constantly beset by players who queried 'misprints' in the score. The dancers likewise had never experienced the like for everything Nijinsky required of them flew in the face of classical ballet. The choreographer's sister Bronislava had been intended to play The Chosen One until she revealed the fact that she was pregnant. Her replacement Maria Piltz danced as if transformed. According to Andrey Levinson 'She seemed to dream, her knees turned inward, the heels pointing out – inert. A sudden spasm shook her body out of its corpse-like rigor. At the fierce onward thrust of the rhythm she trembled in ecstatic, irregular jerks' (taken from Stephen Walsh's indispensable *Igor Stravinsky – A Creative Spring* Jonathan Cape 2000). Astonishingly Nijinsky was onstage within minutes of the final curtain dancing *Le spectre de la rose!*

*Le sacre* only survived a handful of performances in Paris and the shenanigans from the opening night contributed to the theatre owner becoming bankrupt. It has now a classic with well over 120 different versions staged. In 1987 the ballet historians Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer reconstructed the Nijinsky/Roerich premiere for the Joffrey Ballet. Their reconstruction, staged in many cities, was included in a critically-acclaimed dramatization of the notorious opening night *Riot at the Rite*, aired by the BBC in 2006. Although over ninety years have passed since Stravinsky's score was first heard, its primitive savagery still continues to shock and polarize audiences.

## NOTES ON THE ARTIST

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Conductor **Evgeny Svetlanov** (1928–2002) was the unsurpassed authority on Russian Romantic orchestral music in the last decades of the 20th century.

From 1965 until 2000, Svetlanov conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, and recorded an extensive catalogue of Russian music, amassing the largest recorded legacy of any Russian conductor. At one point Svetlanov even claimed to have recorded "absolutely all the Russian symphonic music that has ever been written."

Svetlanov initially trained as a pianist and was also active as a composer throughout his career. From 1955, he conducted at the Bolshoi Theatre, and established a reputation for dramatic readings of Russian operas, always to high musical standards.

At the time of his appointment to the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, he had already worked with them for ten years, and the collaboration was an enduring success. Svetlanov was able to establish a leading international profile for the orchestra through extensive touring. By the 1980s, Svetlanov had also established significant connections with several Western orchestras leading to appointments with the London Symphony Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In 2000, Svetlanov was controversially sacked from his Moscow appointment by the Russian culture minister, Mikhail Shvydkoi, who cited the excessive time that the conductor was spending with foreign orchestras. However, three years after his death, the orchestra was renamed in the conductor's honour, and is known today as the State Academic Symphony Orchestra 'Evgeny Svetlanov'.

**James Murray**

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