

Leopold Stokowski was one of the greatest conductors of all time. Born in London on April 18, 1882, he started his musical career as an organist. In 1903, he took the post of principal organist at St. James' Church in London, situated in a small side off the famous Piccadilly. Although only 21 years old, he became soon well-known and after two years received an offer from St. Bartholomew's Church in New York, which he accepted enthusiastically. The congregation loved him, particularly for his uncommon musical repertoire.

In 1909, the famous pianist Olga Samaroff made it possible for him to conduct a concert with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra on May 12, in which she was the soloist. The concert was a great success and Stokowski was instantly engaged for the next season. Despite triumphal successes, however, he left Cincinnati in 1911, due to internal quarrels. Back in Europe, he married Olga. In 1912, he returned to the United States, this time to the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he conducted his first concert on October 11. The Philadelphia Orchestra was then rather a middle-class orchestra but Stokowski improved its sound within short time. The result became later known as the Philadelphia Sound and was achieved with some unusual innovations. First, he allowed the strings free bowing, which means the string players were free to move their bows up and down as they pleased, rather than in unison. This produces a very warm, silky and vivid sound, as it had never been heard before. Stokowski also made several changes to the orchestra's seating arrangement to improve the transparency and clarity of the sound. But it was not only this what made him popular. He sometimes produced his concerts like a stage-play by placing light spots on him or his always baton-less conducting hands, by speeches to the audience and even once by hiding the orchestra behind a curtain. Stokowski always made a mystery of himself. Asked about his age, he would give 1887 as his year of birth instead of 1882. Throughout his whole life he spoke with a strange pseudo-east-European accent of which nobody ever had an idea where he, as a born Londoner, could have it from.

In 1940, Stokowski made the famous film *Fantasia* together with Walt Disney, in which cartoon figures move in ballet-like sequences to classical music. The music for the film was recorded in eight-channel stereophony and surprised its spectators for both its visual and acoustical achievements. Stokowski also appeared in some other, rather slushy films, which are listed here.

His private life also brought him into the newspapers. He was married several times - once to the million heiress Gloria Vanderbilt - and had a well-publicized affair with Greta Garbo.

Musically, he provoked a still-lasting controversy over his bombastic symphonic transcriptions of Bach works, which are considered sacrilege by baroque purists. He also had no inhibitions about making changes to the scores of other great masters, such as Beethoven or Tchaikovsky, if this served the work in any way. He also made his own orchestral arrangements of other works, such as Mussorgski's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *A Night on the Bare Mountain* or Debussy's *La cathédrale engloutie*. Stokowski left Philadelphia in 1941, turning to various musical projects. He had many engagements as guest conductor all over the world and founded several orchestras, such as The All-American Youth Orchestra, The American Symphony Orchestra, The Symphony of the Air and "His" Symphony Orchestra (for recording sessions with Capitol Records).

With a legendary concert on June 14, 1972, Stokowski celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of his first appearance with the London Symphony Orchestra. Stokowski was always very interested in improving the sound quality of recording media. Therefore, it is a great luck for the record lover that he became so old. He made still excellent (perhaps even his best) stereo recordings in his higher age. The difference between his recordings and those of other conductors is simply that he is a magician. When you hear Stokowski, suddenly the music begins to develop its own life. The sound is usually richer than everywhere else and so intense that you can't believe it is produced by a hundred people and not by only one. It is said that Stokowski kept on playing the organ his whole life: through the orchestra.

At 94, he was optimistic enough to sign a five years contract with Columbia Records. Unfortunately, this could not avert his destiny. He died on September 13, 1977, at the age of 95 in his house in Nether Wallop, Hampshire, England. It was the day on which he was to record Rachmaninov's Second Symphony; a wonderful work he never recorded commercially. Stokowski was buried at Marylebone Cemetery, East Finchley, in north London. Should you wish to visit his grave, you will find it at position D 10 147.



STRAVINSKY

FIREBIRD & PETRUSHKA



STOKOWSKI

BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Stravinsky - Suite from The Firebird

Sergei Diaghilev, the great impresario of the Ballet Russe, sat forward, his eyes glowing. Could this be the composer he was searching for to write a new ballet? The orchestration was brilliant, and the handling of the orchestra remarkably mature for a man of twenty-six years. What was the piece and who was the composer? Fireworks, by Igor Stravinsky. The commission came, the first for Stravinsky, and uncertain of his ability to complete such a large project in a short time, he nevertheless accepted. After all, who would possibly refuse such an opportunity? Stravinsky immediately set to work on the Firebird, based on a Russian fairy tale.

The following is a synopsis of the story from Edwin Evans' Stravinsky. Kastchei, the green-taloned ogre, is the embodiment of evil. His soul does not dwell in his misshapen body, but is carefully preserved beyond reach of harm in a precious casket. So long as it remains intact Kastchei is immortal and retains his power for mischief, holding maidens captive and turning their male defenders to stone. Their redemption can be effected only by gaining access to the casket and destroying the ogre's soul.

One day, Prince Ivan, whilst hunting, sees a bird whose plumage shines with the brilliance of flame. He follows it, and it leads him to Kastchei's magic garden, where he succeeds in capturing it. But the Firebird pleads for its freedom, and when Ivan eventually relents, it presents him with one of its flame-colored feathers in token that it will fly to his aid in case of need. After the bird has flown away Kastchei's captive maidens repair to the garden, as is their wont, to play with the golden apples that grow there. Here Ivan comes upon them and, after some hesitation, is allowed to join in their game. But at the approach of dawn they return to the ogre's palace, warning him not to attempt to follow. Undeterred he tears open the gates whereupon, to the sound of a magic carillon, there issues from them the whole monstrous retinue of Kastchei, followed by the ogre himself. Ivan is captured and about to be turned to stone when he remembers the feather, and calls the Firebird to his aid. It answers the summons and charms the monsters into a frenzied dance until they fall exhausted. Then it lulls them to sleep, and directs Ivan to the casket. He finds it, takes out Kastchei's soul and dashed it to pieces. Immediately Kastchei, his magic garden and his monsters, vanish. The captive maidens are free, and the stones resume human form. Amid rejoicings Ivan weds the captive Princess, with whom he is to reign over the Kingdom, henceforth free from evil.

To contrast the human world from the supernatural, Stravinsky looked to a model by his orchestration teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov. The human world is portrayed with diatonic music while the supernatural is chromatic, specifically by use of the tritone. The human music also contains folk tunes, giving it a more "earthy" flavor. While this work established Stravinsky's fame, it is not a work that broke new ground the way Petroushka, and especially The Rite of Spring did. This is instead a synthesis of the music and training Stravinsky had. Written in the mold of late Tchaikovsky and Glazunov, and orchestrated with brilliance in the style of Rimsky-Korsakov, this work sought not to challenge the audience, but to excite it with the brilliance of the orchestral effects and the colors of the orchestra.

The Firebird opens with the dark, brooding chromatic music of King Kastchei. The brilliant effect of the glissando harmonics in the strings was Stravinsky's attempt to outdo Rimsky-Korsakov in orchestral effects. At the arrival of the Firebird, the tempo picks up. This is immediately followed by the Variations of the Firebird, a brilliant dance and orchestral tour-de-force. Next we see the Princesses in the Round Dance of the Golden Apples. The music is clearly diatonic, and somewhat plain, particularly in comparison to the preceding dance. The infamous Infernal Dance of King Kastchei is next. The strong rhythmic pulse of the music and the ferocious orchestral hits give this a particularly demonic quality. Next, the Berceuse features the bassoon and very delicate accompaniment in the strings and harp. Following a series of descending chords, the Finale is heralded by the horn. The orchestra joins in to build to a great climax, leading into a mixed-meter dance that concludes the suite.

Stravinsky-Petrushka

Petrushka is the second of the three great ballet scores Stravinsky wrote for Serge Diaghilev's Russian Ballet company, which established Stravinsky as a great innovator in modern music, and set the direction for much of 20th century music.

After the success of Firebird in 1910, Diaghilev was keen for another new ballet for the next season, and Stravinsky already had an idea for a ballet based on a pagan Spring sacrifice. So a few months later Diaghilev was surprised to find Stravinsky at work not on the pagan sacrifice ballet, but a sort of piano concerto. Stravinsky had realised the ballet would be a big work, and wanted to "refresh himself first. But while working on the piano concerto, he had the idea of the piano as a sort of puppet brought to life, exasperating the orchestra with its diabolical cascade of trills, and answered by menacing trumpet blasts from the orchestra - and the idea for a quite different ballet was born. Eventually he chose the name Petrushka, the Russian equivalent of Pierrot, Pulcinella, or Punch. It was finished in May 1911, and first performed a month later in Paris on 13th June, 1911. It was another stunning success.

The story is simple and tragic. Scene 1 : We are at the St.Petersburg Shrovetide fair, where all is bustle and excitement. A showman has in his booth three life-size puppets - a ballerina, a blackamoor, and Petrushka - which he magically brings to life and they dance for the crowd. Scene 2: These puppets are not just dolls, they have feelings and emotions too, especially Petrushka, who bitterly resents the cruel showman, and he seeks comfort in love for the ballerina. But the pretty girl will have none of his clumsy loving. Scene 3: The Moor is very different, all machismo and swagger, and the ballerina falls for his crude seduction. Petrushka, mad with jealousy, breaks in on them but is thrown out by the Moor. Scene 4: Back in the fair the evening wears on, with increasingly riotous dancing. Suddenly cries come from the Showman's booth, and Petrushka runs out, chased by the Moor with a big sabre, who savagely strikes him down. The miserable Petrushka dies, surrounded by the horrified crowd. The Showman comes out, and picks up the doll with its wooden head and body filled with sawdust - he was not real! Then as the uneasy crowd disperses, the figure of Petrushka appears on the roof of the booth, mocking the terrified Showman, who drops the doll and flies into the night.

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STRAVINSKY FIREBIRD & PETRUSHKA

LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI
BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

THE FIREBIRD

- 1-Introduction
- 2-Dance of the Firebird
- 3-Round-Dance of the Princesses
- 4-Infernal Dance of the Demonic
Magician Kashchei

PETRUSHKA

- 5-Russian Dance
- 6-In the Cell of Petrushka
- 7-Mardi Gras Fair
- 8-Nursemaids' Dance
- 9-Russian Peasant with Bear
- 10-Gypsies and a Rake Vendor
- 11-Dance of the Coachmen
- 12-Masqueraders

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