

A concert performance of the music typically lasts nearly 25 minutes. The composer conducted the first performance of the ballet, which took place at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City on April 27, 1937.

The first of the late orchestral works of Martinu, the Symphony No. 6, "Fantaisies symphoniques," is truly awe-inspiring. Commissioned by Charles Münch of the Boston Symphony in 1951, Martinu completed the work two years later, a remarkably long gestation period for a composer of Martinu's fluency. But the concentration of the work and the freedom of the development was both a challenge and a goal for him, and he assiduously applied himself to its realization. In the *Fantaisies symphoniques*, Martinu takes the slow-fast-slow, three-movement form of Debussy's *Three Nocturnes and La mer* and the glittering orchestral palate of Les Six and imbues them with his own elusive symphonic procedures. Each movement grows out of the same three-note motif that emerges out of the blooming, buzzing confusion of the trills of the winds and strings at the work's start, and each movement develops the motif in radically different ways. The opening movement contrasts blocks of music moving at different tempos through different textures. The central movement is a scherzo of sorts, developing the motif in airborne colors racing over the bar lines. The closing movement grows through intensities and rhythms to a final cadence that vertically expands the three-note motif as three huge and quiet chords spread over the range of the orchestra.

STRAVINSKY

JEU DE CARTES

MARTINŮ

FANTAISIES SYMPHONIQUES

(SYMPHONY NO. 6)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

CHARLES MUNCH



Mastered in DSD256

Jeu de Cartes (The Card Game) is cleverly described as a ballet in three deals. Completed in 1936 for the newly formed American Ballet, whose choreographer was the young George Balanchine, the scenario deals with the game of poker, one of Stravinsky's favorite card games. The main character is the deceitful Joker, who fashions himself unbeatable, owing to his chameleonic ability to become any card. There are also other cards -- Queens, Aces -- and several card players portrayed in the ballet.

In the first two deals, the all-confident Joker dominates the proceedings, even if he does not always win. In the final deal, however, he is vanquished by a royal flush, ending his menace. Though the music is generally light, it clearly has a satirical side and the devious Joker is viewed by some to represent evil, perhaps the devil. Because of the growing tensions in Europe and the rise of Nazism during the time of its composition, many have also seen the ballet as a sort of allegory of the developing strife.

Jeu de Cartes contains several allusions to the works of other composers, a not atypical trait in much of Stravinsky's music. The second deal contains several notable instances: the first variation is related to the opening of the second movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 8, and the fourth variation recalls Strauss' Die Fledermaus. In the Third Deal, Rossini's The Barber of Seville Overture is practically quoted. There are more than a few additional snippets from the music of other composers sprinkled throughout the score, including that of Tchaikovsky, Ravel, Delibes, and even from Stravinsky himself (the Violin Concerto, Mavra, and other

works). But the main theme of the ballet, heard at the outset of each movement, may be the most remarkable appropriation since it appears to be a reworking or slightly veiled rendition of the famous "Fate" motto from Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. Near the end of the ballet, in fact, it appears almost unaltered from its form in the Beethoven symphony.

After the opening of the First Deal, the music becomes subdued and the work's episodic nature becomes apparent as a variety of inventive sequences and thematic ideas follow. Before the end of this deal the music works into a near-frenzy, then subsides once more.

After the work's main theme is stated at the outset of the Second Deal, the music retreats to a generally calm mood, then becomes more animated as the series of variations progresses. The Third Deal features the theme at the outset, after which the music never relaxes. A Ravelian waltz and the Rossini quotation suggest fun and satire, but also perhaps the deceptions of the Joker. Near the end, the "Fate" motif appears on the horns, then the oboes. The music concludes with the main theme asserting itself, but neither triumphantly nor jovially.

It should be noted that the quotations and allusions sound very much like Stravinsky, never like a reworking of the source music as the composer did in his ballet Pulcinella, fashioned from several works of Pergolesi. Jeu de Cartes is very much in the tradition of the composer's neo-Classical style, full of wit and brilliant orchestration.

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Stravinsky Jeu de cartes (The Card Game) 22:07

1 Première donne (First Deal) 4:59

2 Deuxième donne (Second Deal) 8:51

3 Troisième donne (Third Deal) 8:17

Martinů Symphony No. 6, H. 343, "Fantaisies symphoniques" 25:23

4 I. Lento - Allegro 8:13

5 II. Poco Allegro 7:02

6 III. Lento 10:08

Stravinsky was recorded by RCA at Boston, Symphony Hall November 7, 1960

Recording Engineer - John Crawford Producer - Max Wilcox

Martinu released by RCA 1957



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