

Pierre Monteux (April 4, 1875 – July 1, 1964) was an orchestra conductor born in Paris, France.

Monteux studied violin from an early age, entering the Paris Conservatoire at the age of nine. He became a proficient violinist, good enough to jointly win the Conservatoire's violin prize in 1896 with Jacques Thibaud. However, he later took up the viola and played at the Opéra-Comique, leading the viola section in the premiere of Claude Debussy's opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902.

In 1911, with a little conducting experience in Dieppe behind him, Monteux became conductor of Sergei Diaghilev's ballet company, the Ballets Russes. In this capacity he gave the premieres of Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913) as well as Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. This established the course of his career, and for the rest of his life he was noted particularly for his interpretations of Russian and French music.

With the outbreak of World War I, Monteux was called up for military service, but was discharged in 1916, and he travelled to the United States. There he took charge of the French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City from 1917 to 1919, conducting the American premiere of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Golden Cockerel* while there.

Then he moved to the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1919–24). He had a big effect on the Boston ensemble's sound, and was able to fashion the orchestra as he pleased after a strike led to thirty of its members leaving. He also introduced a number of new works while there, particularly by French composers.

In 1924, Monteux began an association with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, working alongside Willem Mengelberg. In 1929, he founded the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris, which he conducted until 1935. In the year the orchestra was founded, he led them in the world premiere of Sergei Prokofiev's third symphony.

Monteux then returned to the United States, and worked with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra from 1935 to 1952. In 1943, he founded a conducting school in Hancock, Maine, the childhood home of his wife, Doris Hodgkins Monteux, where Monteux was now living. There he taught such future luminaries as Andre Previn and Neville Marriner. In 1946 he became a United States citizen.

Monteux made a number of records in his life, most of which are widely admired. He himself claimed to dislike them, however, saying they lacked the spontaneity of live performances. From 1961 to 1964 he was principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, before dying in Hancock, Maine in 1964.

Pierre Monteux was the father of the flautist and conductor Claude Monteux.



# STRAVINSKY



## THE RITE OF SPRING and THE FIREBIRD SUITE



*Conducted By Pierre Monteux Paris Conservatoire Orchestra*

**Rite of Spring** is one of the most powerful classical pieces available today. It is known throughout the world for its powerful lines, orchestration and melody. But when this piece premiered, it was a different story.

The ballet for the piece was choreographed by the famous dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. His lead dancer was Sergei Diaghilev, a Russian dancer of huge renown. This dancer was infamous because of his numerous affairs with other male members of the Parisian musical world and even, it is said, with the composer. The piece was split into two parts, The Adoration of the Earth and The Sacrifice. The dancers moved in blocked, step-like patterns quite different from the normal lavish movements found on a stage. The set was minimal, and contained all sorts of pagan references to sacrifice. Huge leaps and irregular motions were included in the dancing, making it incredibly hard for the dancers to perform.

Costume and design were no different for the set. The costumes were brown and draped around the dancers bulkily. The stage contained gray, black and brown hues, and the dancers moved in an open space in the center surrounded by images and shadows of rocks and primeval earth-like references. Most of the dancers are on record complaining about the costumes, calling them everything from "potato sacks" to "tatters." The dark colors and departure from the aesthetic shocked the audience, who expected a glittering, colored sequel to the Firebird Suite.

The premiere, therefore, was a landmark event, for reasons one may not expect. The work opened in Paris in 1913, at the Theatre des Champs Elysees. The Parisian audience was dotted with a number of very famous musicians and composers, as well as not a few critics. When the evening began with a former ballet of the composer, "Les Sylphides," the audience settled in for a peaceful night. Their peace was shattered with the opening of the "Rite of Spring." Drums nearly knocked them from their seats, and they responded with roars. Audience members stood on their seats to boo and yell, and the noise made it impossible for the dancers to hear. Nijinsky and Diaghilev shouted timing and numbers from the back to keep the dancers in step, while audience members left. To keep themselves heard, the orchestra played louder and louder, and finally the piece was terminated near the end. Famous composers that were there had an even split in their thinking-half thought that the work was pure genius, while half thought that the composer should be shot.

**The Firebird** the music was premiered as a ballet by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris on 25 June 1910 conducted by Gabriel Pierné. It was the first of their productions with music specially composed for them. Originally the music was to have been written by Russian composer Anatol Liadov (1855-1914); but when he was slow in starting work, Diaghilev transferred the commission to the 28-year old Stravinsky. The ballet has historic significance not only as Stravinsky's 'breakthrough piece' ("Mark him well", said Diaghilev to Tamara Karsavina, who was dancing the title role: "He is a man on the eve of celebrity..."), but also as the beginning of the collaboration between Diaghilev and Stravinsky that would also produce *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*.

The ballet was staged by George Balanchine for the New York City Ballet in 1949 with Maria Tallchief as the Firebird with Marc Chagall scenery and costumes and was performed in repertory until 1965. The ballet was restaged by George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins in 1970 for the New York City Ballet with new scenery and Karinska costumes for the 1972 Stravinsky Festival that introduced Gelsey Kirkland as the Firebird.

Stravinsky's ballet centers on the journey of its hero, Prince Ivan. Ivan enters the magical realm of Kashchei the Immortal; all of the magical objects and creatures of Kashchei are herein represented by a chromatic descending motif, usually in the strings. While wandering in the garden, he sees and chases the Firebird. The Firebird, once caught by Ivan, begs for its life and ultimately agrees to assist Ivan in exchange for eventual freedom.

Next, Prince Ivan sees thirteen princesses, with one of whom he falls in love. The next day, Ivan chooses to confront Kashchei to ask to marry one of the princesses; the two talk and eventually begin quarreling. When Kashchei sends his magical creatures after Ivan, the Firebird, true to its pledge, intervenes, bewitching the creatures and making them dance an elaborate, energetic dance (the "Infernal Dance"). The creatures and Kashchei then fall asleep; however, Kashchei awakens and is killed by the Firebird. With Kashchei gone and his magic broken, the magical creatures and the palace all disappear, and all of the "real" beings (including the princesses) awaken and, with one final fleeting appearance from the Firebird, celebrate their victory.

# Stravinsky

## The Rite of Spring and The Firebird Suite

Pierre Monteux Conducts The Paris Conservatoire Orchestra

### The Rite Of Spring

1 First Part - The Fertility Of The Earth 15:40

2 Second Part - The Sacrifice 17:15

### The Firebird Suite (Version 1919)

3 Introduction 3:20

4 Danse De L'Oiseau 1:30

5 Danses Des Princesses 3:55

6 Danse Infernale Du Roi Kastchei 4:15

7 Berceuse 4:50

8 Finale 1:57

Transferred from a RCA 2-track Tape

Recorded 1957 by Decca in Paris

Engineer: Roy Wallace Producer: John Culshaw



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