

Born: November 11, 1883 – Vevey, Switzerland

Died: February 20, 1969 – Geneva, Switzerland

The Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, came from a musical family; he successively studied the clarinet, violin and brass instruments, which he used in fanfares; later he wrote military marches for the Swiss army which he did not consider important. Besides Music, he studied Mathematics in Lausanne and graduated with a Diploma in 1903; until 1906 he taught at the Lausanne Grammar School, then he decided to continue his studies at the Sorbonne and, at the same time, to attend courses at the Paris Conservatory. After his return to Lausanne, he taught Mathematics for one more year before devoting himself entirely to music. Ernest Ansermet received the publicly advertised post of director of the Spa concerts in Montreux. Through his friend Charles Ramuz he got to know Igor Stravinsky, who was then living in Clarens. Thus, he experienced the creation of *Le Sacré du Printemps*, *Petrouchka*, *L'Histoire du Soldat*, *Bajka* and *Svadebka* at close hand. His encounter with Sergey P. Diaghilev in Geneva was decisive; in December 1915 he conducted the *Orchestre des Ballets Russes* for the first time at a gala for the Red Cross in a first performance of *Soleil de nuit*, a choreography by Leonid Massine to music by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. In 1916 he went on the first tour of America with the *Ballets Russes*. He premiered many works composed by I. Stravinsky: In 1918 he conducted the first performance of *L'Histoire du Soldat*, in 1920 *The Song of the Nightingale* and *Pulcinella*, in 1922 *Bajka* and in 1923 *Svadebka* also *Capriccio for piano* (1929) and his *Mass* (1948).

Besides the works of I. Stravinsky, Ernest Ansermet also conducted first performances of works of many other composers: *Parade* by Eric Satie (1917), *Le tricorne* by Manuel de Falla (1919), *Chout* by Sergey S. Prokofiev (1923). Living in Geneva from 1915, he conducted three orchestras at the same time, the *Ballets Russes*, the *Orchestre Romand* (O.R., founded by him in 1918) and the *Argentine National Orchestra* in Buenos Aires, which was also founded by him. For ten years, he spent the winter in Geneva and the summer in Argentina. All major orchestras issued him an invitation, but he rejected most with the aim of establishing a living musical tradition in Switzerland. In 1940, *L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande* was founded (with support from Swiss Radio), which was closely linked with his name. He conducted the orchestra until 1967.

Ernest Ansermet was a particular advocate of the Swiss composers Arthur Honegger and Frank Martin. He conducted the first performances of the following works of A. Honegger: *Horace victorieux* (1921), *Chant de joie* (1923), *Rugby* (1928) and *Pacific 231* (1923), which was dedicated to him, and of the following works of Frank Martin: *Symphonie* (1938), *In terra pax* (1945), *Der Sturm* (1956), *Le mystère de la Nativité* (1959), *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1963) and *Les Quatre Éléments*, which were dedicated to him. Also important were the first performances of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) and *Cantata misericordium* (1963).

Publications: *Le geste du chef d'orchestre* (1943); *The foundations of music in the human consciousness* (Neuchâtel 1962); Ernest Ansermet/J. Claude Piget: *Discourses on music* (Munich 1985).

STRAVINSKY

Le baiser de la fée

(The Fairy's Kiss)

Ernest Ansermet

L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

Stravinsky was a longtime enthusiast of the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen, whose story *The Nightingale* was the inspiration for the composer's opera *Le rossignol* (1908–1914). In 1928, when actress-impresario Ida Rubinstein commissioned a ballet from Stravinsky, he combined his appreciation for Andersen's work with a long-harbored notion of using melodies from the music of his compatriot Tchaikovsky as the basis for a new composition. The result was *Le baiser de la fée* (1928) or, in its full translated title, "The Fairy's Kiss, Allegorical Ballet in Four Tableaux, Inspired by the Muse of Tchaikovsky."

The ballet is based on Andersen's tale "The Ice Maiden." Stravinsky provides a compact synopsis of the story in his autobiography: "A fairy imprints her magic kiss on a child at birth and parts it from its

mother. Twenty years later, when the youth has attained the very zenith of his good fortune, she repeats the fatal kiss and carries him off to live in supreme happiness with her ever afterward."

The sonic language of this ballet might be described as a combination of Tchaikovsky's opulent melodies spiked with a bit of 1920s dissonance, a characteristically colorful orchestral palette, and a hint of the emotional coolness typical of Stravinsky's neo-Classical style. Stravinsky does employ some Tchaikovskian sounds and instrumental combinations, but the textures are consistently leaner than those in Tchaikovsky's own ballets.

In 1934, Stravinsky condensed the nearly hour-long ballet into a *Divertimento* of some 25 minutes. Around the same time, he transcribed the *Divertimento* for violin and piano for his own use during concert tours with violinist Samuel Dushkin.

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1. Scene 1 - Prologue - Lullaby in the storm
2. Scene 2 - A Village Fete
3. Scene 3 - By the Mill
4. Scene 4 - The Lullaby of the Land
beyond Time and Place

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