

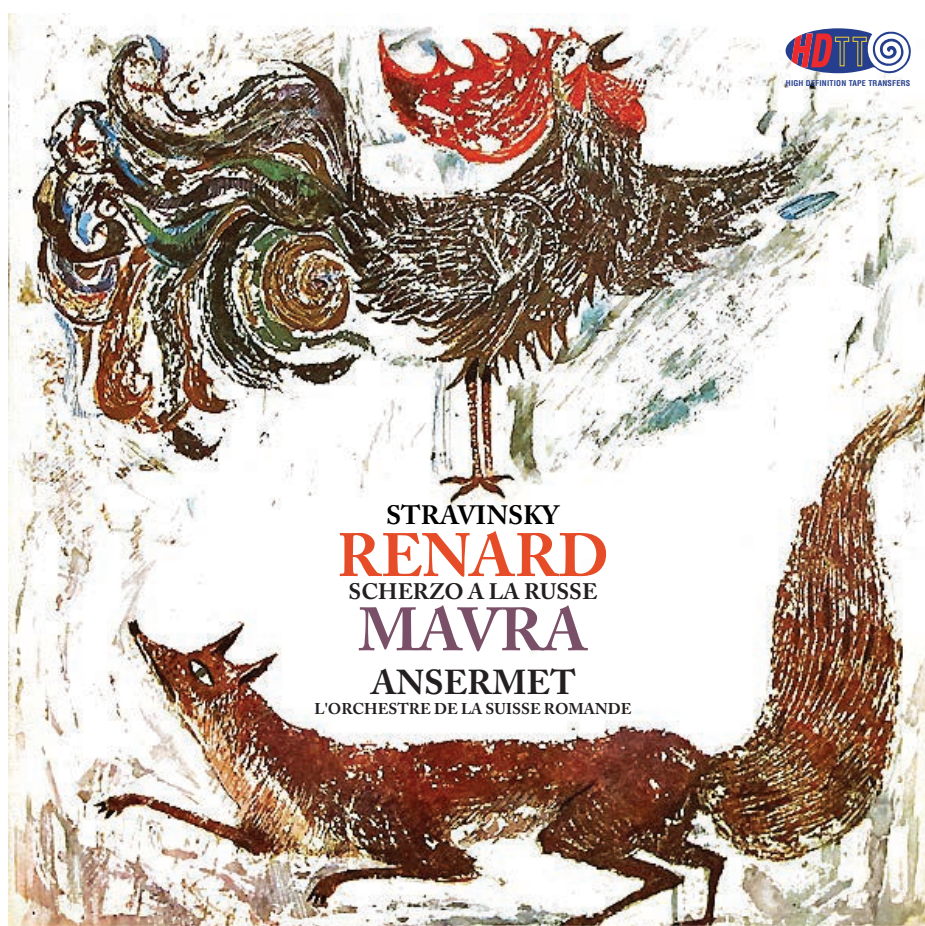
Company at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia on December 28, 1934 with Maria Kurenko as Parasha and Alexander Smallens conducting. The Santa Fe Opera mounted Mavra in 1962.

The first aria of the work has been arranged for cello and piano, and recorded with Mstislav Rostropovich under the title "Russian Song"

Stravinsky originally wrote the Scherzo à la Russe, for orchestra for jazz band on a commission from bandleader Paul Whiteman. Oddly, what the composer produced divulges little that is bona fide jazz, and perhaps that is one of the reasons for the work's failure in its initial guise. Stravinsky recast the Scherzo in this orchestral version in 1945 and found greater acceptance of it.

The work opens with a bouncy theme whose utter joy and sunny character exude a sense of Russian festivity in its lively dancing spirit. Stravinsky's orchestration is masterful here, especially in the theme's more splashy second subject, when the brass seem to overheat in their glee and threaten to turn the music sour.

In the ensuing first Trio, there is a nostalgic manner in the playful canonic theme, given by harp and piano. The melodic material here, like that in the second Trio, has been related to Russian themes in the composer's Sonata for two pianos (1943-1944). The main Scherzo section returns with few changes and after the reappearance of the flamboyant second subject, the second Trio follows. It is at first somewhat austere, but gradually turns more colorful and lively. The Scherzo returns to close out this buoyant, utterly charming masterwork. The composer also made a version of Scherzo à la Russe for two pianos in 1954, but it is the orchestral rendition of the three that is most commonly heard today.



Stravinsky's *Renard* (1915–1916) belongs to a genre perhaps best described as "ballet hybrid." In addition to the expected dance elements, *Renard* is also a burlesque, a musical story that is sung and played. The text was written by Stravinsky himself, after stories of the Fox from the famous collection of Russian folk tales by Alexander Afanasiev. *Renard* is scored for small orchestra, percussion, timpani, cimbalom, a solo string quintet, two tenor soloists, and two bass soloists.

The story is a farmyard tale in which the Cock is twice tricked and captured by the Fox, only to be rescued each time by the Cat and the Goat. After the Cock's second rescue, the Cat and the Goat strangle the Fox, and the three friends dance and sing. Stravinsky employs the singers as part of the orchestra, and though there are exactly as many singers as characters, the vocal parts are not identified with specific characters. (The composer followed this practice in subsequent works of the same type, most notably in *Les noces* of 1914–1917.)

The players remain onstage at all times, without the kind of choreography one associates with traditional ballet. Rather, as the prefatory note in the score indicates, the various characters should be played by "clowns, dancers, or acrobats" who perform in front of the curtain. Stravinsky makes prominent use of the cimbalom, a stringed instrument played with mallets, to imitate the sound of a guzla, a similar Russian folk instrument. Stravinsky knew that finding good guzla players (or even the instrument itself) would be difficult, and settled on the cimbalom after hearing it played in a nightclub in Switzerland. According to the composer, most of *Renard* was actually composed on the cimbalom rather than on the piano that was more usual for Stravinsky. The cimbalom, an instrument on which rapid repeating notes and broad arpeggios are highly idiomatic, contributes significantly to the work's linear texture. Stravinsky employs the other instruments in an almost soloistic manner, further contributing to the work's polyphonic textures. *Renard*'s melodies are wide-ranging and disjunct, while the

mixture of modes connects it to the polytonal/polymodal harmonic style of earlier works like *Petrushka* (1910–1911). *Renard*'s relative rhythmic and metric simplicity contrasts sharply with the richly complex rhythmic language of nearly contemporaneous works like *The Rite of Spring* (1911–1913).

Mavra is a one-act comic opera composed by Igor Stravinsky, and one of the earliest works of Stravinsky's neo-classical period. The libretto, by Boris Kochno, is based on Alexander Pushkin's *The Little House in Kolomna*. *Mavra* is about 25 minutes long, and features two arias, a duet, and a quartet performed by its cast of four characters. The opera has been characterised as both an homage to Russian writers, and a satire of bourgeois manners and the Romeo and Juliet subgenre of romance. Philip Truman has also described the music as satirising 19th-century comic opera. The dedication on the score is to the memory of Pushkin, Glinka and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Mavra premiered in Paris on 3 June 1922, staged under the auspices of Sergei Diaghilev, with Oda Slobdoskaya, Zoïa Rosovska and Béliina Skoupevski among the original cast, at the Théâtre national de l'Opéra, orchestra conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg. The opera was a failure at the premiere, partly because the large space of the Paris Opéra overwhelmed the small scale of the opera. One critic, Émile Vuillermoz, so enraged Stravinsky that he cut the review out and pasted it onto his manuscript copy.

Stravinsky himself thought very highly of this composition, saying once that "*Mavra* seems to me the best thing I've done". Erik Satie praised the work after its premiere. The composer reacted with hostility to people who criticized it in later years.

The opera was given its United States premiere by the Philadelphia Grand Opera

Stravinsky Renard / Scherzo A La Russe / Mavra

Ernest Ansermet L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande

1 Renard (A Burlesque) 16:35

Bass Vocals [1st] – Peter Glossop

Bass Vocals [2nd] – Joseph Rouleau

Tenor Vocals [1st] – Gerald English

Tenor Vocals [2nd] – John Mitchinson

Translated By [English Translation] – Rollo H. Myers

Bass Vocals [1st] – Peter Glossop

Bass Vocals [2nd] – Joseph Rouleau

Tenor Vocals [1st] – Gerald English

Tenor Vocals [2nd] – John Mitchinson

Translated By [English Translation] – Rollo H. Myers

Words By – Igor Stravinsky

2 Scherzo A La Russe (Symphonic Version) 4:18

3 Mavra (Sung In English) 27:30

Contralto Vocals – Helen Watts, Monica Sinclair

Libretto By – Boris Kochno

Soprano Vocals – Joan Carlyle

Tenor Vocals – Kenneth Macdonald

Producer: John Mordler Engineer: James Lock
Recorded by Decca Nov 1964 at Victoria Hall, Geneva



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