

By John Dentinger

New England Patriot

They haven't been banned in Boston yet, but the *Boston Herald's* twice-weekly columns by opinion writer Don Feder are raising the hackles of government employees and pro-state partisans throughout Massachusetts.

Feder doesn't mince words. In a typical column he writes: "No one has to teach us to detest public workers. It comes naturally, by a process of observation and experience." He cites as an example the "arrogant pickpockets of the IRS."

One of Feder's favorite targets is the Postal Service, a topic invariably eliciting outraged replies from postal workers. A sampling: "Real men tote mailbags," and "Journalists just sit on their butts"—and those are just the letters the postal service actually managed to deliver!

Every columnist comments upon the passing holidays, and Feder is no exception. Celebrating April 15, he observes, "If taxes are the price we pay for civilization, then Russia must be the most civilized nation on earth." As for July 4, he wonders why collectivists in America celebrate it and cites the anti-state attitudes of Founding Fathers such as "that venerable guerrilla leader, George Washington"—who, along with Jefferson and company, was pro-private property, and was a "gun nut" to boot.

Writing is the ideal occupation for Feder. "It all comes down to ideas. Ever since I was a student in high school I was fascinated by ideas. I did a lot of reading, joined the debate team. I came of age in the mid-'60s, a time of intellectual ferment. I was at Boston University, majoring in political science, during the '60s, at the height of the anti-war protests and New Left hysteria. I was the token free-market columnist for the *Boston University News*."

After getting his law degree from Boston University in 1972, he returned to practice law in Johnstown, the small community in upstate New York where he grew up. The practice of law in a small town provided neither excitement nor an outlet to express his political views, so in 1976 he returned to Massachusetts.

While studying for the state bar there,



Don Feder

he took what he assumed would be a temporary position—it in fact lasted three years—as executive director of the fledgling Citizens for Limited Taxation, a group formed in opposition to a ballot proposition that would have made the state income tax graduated. Feder and others spoke to civic organizations, participated in radio and TV debates, and organized mailings and the distribution of literature. The campaign was successful: the measure lost by a two-to-one margin.

Feder was then instrumental in getting the group to champion the Massachusetts equivalent of California's Proposition 13. The victory at the polls in November 1978 of "Proposition 2½" limited property taxes to two and a half percent of a property's value—a significant relief in "Taxachusetts," the state with the highest property taxes in the country.

In 1979, Feder moved to the state of Washington and became executive director of the Second Amendment Foundation, a group with about 250,000 contributors nationwide. It was the only educational (as opposed to lobbying) organization supporting freedom of gun ownership. Under Feder's leadership, the foundation published literature, put out a newsletter, and developed a lawyer referral service for gun owners who were being harassed ("denied permits on spurious grounds, arrested for technical

violations of gun laws, etc."). Feder also traveled across the country doing talk shows and newspaper interviews, making over 100 media appearances in two years.

While at the Second Amendment Foundation, he began writing a column for the *Journal-American*, a daily paper in the Seattle suburb of Bellevue, Washington. "One evening," Feder relates, "I ran into the editor at a cocktail party. I sent him copies of my *B.U. News* columns." The editor was not interested at first, but five months later he called and asked Feder to do a weekly column.

Writing the column whetted Feder's taste for journalism and allowed him to deal with a wider range of topics than just those pertaining to gun ownership. Also, he and his family missed New England. So in 1981, he returned to Massachusetts and, with writer-economist friend Mark Isaacs, spent two years publishing *On Principle*, a biweekly newsletter providing coverage of political and economic issues from an individualist, free-market perspective. One of their subscribers was a businessman who, dismayed by the perceived liberal bias of the news media, had bought WEEI, Boston's all-news radio station. Feder accepted a position as WEEI's editorial director.

The original promotion for *On Principle* offered copies of Don's *Journal-American* columns as a premium. A Heritage Foundation staffer who thus acquired them sent them to the publisher of the *Boston Herald*, who asked Feder to do occasional pieces for them. "Occasionally" led to weekly, which in turn led to twice-weekly, which is in turn leading to wider circulation: the column is also carried by *Chicago Sun-Times* and the Orange County, California, *Register* and sometimes appears in *Human Events* and *Conservative Digest*.

"The real focus of power in this country," says Feder, "is in newspapers, radio, TV, and book publishing. Not government, but the idea industry." And Don Feder is making sure that at least some of those ideas are pro-liberty.

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Stravinsky, Fabulist of Evil

By Kyle Rothweiler

Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* has rightly been considered a fit 20th-century counterpart to Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony* of the 19th century. But whereas Beethoven's work is the first, and probably the best, presentation of the heroic in musical history, Stravinsky's *Rite* is the first, and perhaps best, accurate depiction of evil in musical history.

Stravinsky describes the scenario of the work in his autobiography: "I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite; sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring." It is the ancient story of man being crushed between two forces—mysticism and the collective. It is the story of the individual being offered up to the former by the latter. It is, ultimately, the story of that abomination that has cursed the human race ever since it acquired reason—unreason.

The Rite's creator, Igor Stravinsky, is the most influential and most discussed composer of this century, with the possible exception of Arnold Schoenberg. It is therefore surprising that little attention has been given to how unmusical a mind he actually possessed.

Stravinsky's deficiencies in purely musical intelligence are illustrated not only by his ineptitude as a melodist (a startlingly large number of his works have as their raw materials the tunes of others) but by his essays in absolute form—the bleached-out and jerry-built *Symphony in C*, for example. It was only when Stravinsky combined his musical conceptions with a specific didactic intention that he was capable of composing something worthwhile. And it is here that his chief value lies—as a musical fabulist, a Krylov or Aesop of sound.

This is made clear by his preference for narrative ballets and is evident from the beginning of his career, in his two earliest ballets, *The Firebird* (1910) and *Petrushka* (1911). The latter is especially significant as a fable for our times, a story about a sentient being who is a mere puppet, controlled (literally) by ex-



Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971):
His RITE OF SPRING captured the curse of unreason.

ternal forces. This conception of self is one of the most common impressions of modernist despair, and except in totalitarian countries, it is also totally misconceived. Even if one doesn't buy the determinism of the tale, however, one can appreciate its ingenuity and effectiveness as a conveyer of its theme. But Stravinsky's best work is *The Rite of Spring*, composed in 1913.

Although *The Rite of Spring* is a story from primordial times, it is particularly relevant in an age of nostalgia when primordial times are enjoying a revival. In the 19th century there were attempts by composers to depict the savagery of irrationalism in its various forms—one thinks of Boris Godounov in Mussorgsky's opera of the same name or the Grand Inquisitor in Verdi's *Don Carlo*. But the great significance of the Stravinsky method in *The Rite* is that for once the evil of irrationality is presented naked, with no dignifying Romantic idiom. The evil of the sacrifice, the irrational hysteria of primitive superstition, is presented in a musical style that takes full cognizance of the horror involved. It is to this end that Stravinsky applied all the techniques that he had devised and that made the piece famous: the violent rhythms; the strange, exotic instrumentation; the primitive-sounding but tonal harmonies combined with wrenching dis-

sonances; and so on.

The melodic materials of the work were based on a series of folk tunes, the same sort of corny peasant melodies that had been the chief influence on serious Russian music for more than 50 years. Only now they were used in a fitting manner; not even Mussorgsky had seen so clearly the underlying connection between the brainlessly primitive and the violently savage. *The Rite of Spring* is, in effect, the *reductio ad absurdum* of musical nationalism, the ultimate artistic expression of the primitive for what it is—not benign folksiness, but tribal barbarism.

To be understood completely, *The Rite* requires knowledge of its ballet scenario and comprehension of the nature of the evils described therein. It is not enough to say that Stravinsky's work is a superb depiction of irrationalism: there are hundreds of modern works that fit this description simply because they sound like incomprehensible ravings. Stravinsky's music is intended as objective description, not as a record of his inner state; it is this that separates Stravinsky the intellectual from a profoundly musical thinker like Beethoven.

Beethoven's *Eroica* is an exercise in pure form through which Beethoven expressed the grandeur of his own soul—and, incidentally, initiated an era. Stravinsky, on the other hand, used his compositional skill to examine external matters. In this case his task was to study the nature of evil and irrationalism as they are exhibited in tribal mysticism, and he succeeded. If the *Eroica* presents a musical *utopia*, a statement of human potentialities, then *The Rite* is the musical equivalent of that 20th-century literary form the *dystopia*, a grim warning.

Although the work is set in the primeval past, it has a peculiar relevance to our time. It was written 70 years ago but continues to be the work that, in some nagging way, seems the quintessence of 20th-century music. But why? The best answer seems to be that listeners hear the work as what it is: an eloquent description, with little left to the imagination, of the modern trend toward totalitarianism and irrational mysticism. The sacrifice of one young girl to the delusions of her savage elders is the