

S/R RECORDINGS

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Opening page of the "Danse Sacrale" in the original scoring.

APROPOS "LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS"

By IGOR STRAVINSKY

Midwinter 1959-60 brings Igor Stravinsky to New York for three concerts, mostly of his own music. Included in his role of composer-conductor will be his first performance of "Le Sacre" in New York in nearly twenty years, and only the second ever in America. The revised version of the "Danse Sacrale" will be used, as noted in his article.

THE IDEA of "Le Sacre du Printemps" came to me while I was still composing "The Firebird." I had dreamed a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin dances herself to death. This vision was not accompanied by concrete musical ideas, however, and as I was soon impregnated with another and purely musical conception that began quickly to develop into, as I thought, a *Konzertstück* for piano and orchestra, the latter piece was the one I started to compose. I had already told Diaghilev about "Le Sacre" before a visit of his to me in Lausanne at the end of September 1910, but he did not know about "Petroushka"—which is what I called the *Konzertstück*, thinking the style of the piano part suggested the Russian puppet. Though Diaghilev may have been disappointed not to hear music for "pagan rites," in his delight with "Pe-

troushka," which he encouraged me to develop into a ballet before undertaking "Le Sacre du Printemps," he did not show it.

I FIRST became conscious of thematic ideas for "Le Sacre" in the summer of 1911. ("Petroushka" had been performed in June, 1911, in Oustiloug, our summer home in Volhynia.) The themes were those of "Les Augures Printanières," the first dance I was to compose. Reaching Switzerland in the fall, I rented a house in Clarens for my family and began to work. The entire "Sacre du Printemps" was written in a tiny room of this house, an eight-feet-by-eight closet, rather, whose only furniture was a small upright piano which I kept muted, a table, and two chairs. I began with the "Augures Printanières," as I said, and composed from there to the end of the first part;

the Prelude was written afterward. The dances of the second part were composed in the order in which they now appear, and composed very quickly, too, until the "Danse Sacrale," which I could play but did not, at first, know how to write. The composition of "Le Sacre" was completed by the beginning of 1912 and the instrumentation—a mechanical job, largely, since I always compose the instrumentation when I compose the music—took me four more months in the late Spring.

I HAD pushed myself to finish "Le Sacre," as I wanted Diaghilev to produce it in the 1912 season. At the end of January I went to Berlin, where the Ballet then was, to discuss the performance with him. I found him in a state of upset about Nijinsky's health. He would talk about Nijinsky by the hour, but all he ever said about "Le Sacre" was that he could not mount it in 1912. He saw my disappointment and tried to console me by inviting me to accompany the Ballet to Budapest, London, and Venice, its next stops. I did journey with him to those cities—all three were new to me then, and all three I have loved ever since—but the real reason I accepted the postponement of "Le Sacre" so easily was that I was already beginning to think about "Les Noces." Incidentally, at this Berlin meeting Diaghilev encouraged me to use a huge orchestra for "Le Sacre," promising that the size of our orchestra would be greatly increased in the following season.

I am not sure my orchestra would have been as large otherwise.

That the first performance of "Le Sacre du Printemps" was attended by a scandal must be known to everybody. I was unprepared for the explosion myself. The reactions of the musicians who came to the orchestra rehearsals betrayed no intimation of it. (Debussy, who might well have been upset by "Le Sacre," was, in fact, much more upset by the success of it a year later.) Nor did the stage spectacle seem likely to precipitate a riot. The dancers had been rehearsing for months; they knew what they were doing at least, even though what they were doing often had nothing to do with the music. "I will count to forty while you play," Nijinsky would say to me, "and we will see where we come out." He could not understand that though we might at some point "come out" together, this did not mean we had been together on the way. The dancers followed Nijinsky's count, too, rather than the musical count; he spoke Russian of course, and as Russian numbers above ten are polysyllabic—eighteen, for example, is *vosemnadsat*—in the fast tempo move-

ments neither he nor they could keep up.

At the performance mild protests against the music could be heard from the beginning. Then, when the curtain opened on a group of knock-kneed and long-braided Lolitas jumping up and down ("Dances des Adolescents"), the storm broke. Cries of "*ta geule*" came from behind me. I left the hall in a rage. (I was sitting on the right near the orchestra, and I remember slamming the door.) I have never again been that angry. The music was so familiar to me; I loved it, and I could not understand why people who had not yet heard it wanted to protest in advance. I arrived backstage in a fury. There I saw Diaghilev switching the house lights on and off in the hope that this might quiet the hall. For the rest of the performance I stood in the wings behind Nijinsky and holding the tails of his *frac*, while he stood on a chair shouting numbers to the dancers, like a coxswain.

I REMEMBER with more pleasure the first concert performance of "Le Sacre" the following year, a triumph such as few composers can have known the like of. Whether the acclaim of the young people who filled the Casino de Paris was more than a mere reversal of the verdict of bad manners a year before is not for me to say, but it seemed to me much more. (Incidentally, Saint-Saëns, a sharp little man—I had a good view of him—was present at *this* performance; I do not know who invented the story that he was present at, but soon walked out of, the première.) Monteux again conducted, and the musical realization was ideal. He had been doubtful about programming "Le Sacre," in view of the original scandal, but he had had a great success with a concert performance of "Petroushka," and was proud of his prestige with avant-garde musicians; I argued that "Le Sacre" was more symphonic, more of a concert piece, than "Petroushka." Let me say here that Monteux never cheapened "Le Sacre," or looked for his own glory in it, and he was always scrupulously faithful to the music. At the end of the "Danse Sacrale" the entire audience stood up and cheered. I came on stage and hugged Monteux, who was a river of perspiration—it was the saltiest hug of my life. A crowd swept backstage. I was hoisted to anonymous shoulders, carried out into the street this way, and up to the Place de la Trinité. A policeman pushed his way to my side, in an effort to protect me. It was this policeman Diaghilev later fixed upon in his accounts of the story: "Our little Igor now needs police escorts out of his concerts, like a prize

fighter." (Diaghilev was verdantly envious of any success of mine outside of his Ballet.)

I have seen only one stage version of "Le Sacre" since 1913, and that was Diaghilev's 1921 revival. Music and dancing were better coordinated this time than in 1913—they could hardly have been otherwise—but the choreography (by Massine) was still too gymnastic and Dalcrozian to please me. I decided then that I prefer "Le Sacre" as a concert piece.

I conducted "Le Sacre" myself for the first time in 1928, in a recording by English Columbia. My concert debut with it came the following year, in Amsterdam, with the Concertgebouw, and thereafter I conducted it frequently throughout Europe. One of the most memorable (to me) performances of these years was in the Salle Pleyel, an official occasion, with official speeches to me pronounced by the President of the Republic, M. Poincaré, and by his First Minister, M. Herriot. I have conducted "Le Sacre" only once in the United States, however, and that was twenty years ago, in April, 1940. [It is programmed for the concert of January 3, 1960, in Carnegie Hall.]

IN 1937 or 1938 I received a request from the Disney office in America for permission to use "Le Sacre" in a cartoon film. The request was accompanied by a gentle warning that if permission were withheld the music would be used anyway ("Le Sacre," being "Russian," was not copyrighted in the United States), but as the owners of the film wished to show it abroad (i.e., in Berne Copyright countries) they offered me \$5,000, a sum I was obliged to accept (though, in fact, the "percentages" of a dozen crapulous intermediaries reduced it to \$1,200). I saw the film with George Balanchine in a Hollywood studio at Christmas time, 1939. I remember someone offering me a score, and, when I said I had my own, the someone saying "But it is all changed." It was indeed. The order of the pieces had been shuffled and the most difficult of them eliminated—though this didn't help the musical performance, which was execrable. I will say nothing about the visual complement (for I do not wish to criticize an unresisting imbecility), but the musical point of view of the film involved a dangerous misunderstanding.

I have twice revised portions of "Le Sacre," first in 1921 for the Diaghilev performances, and again in 1943 (the "Danse Sacrale" only) for a performance (unrealized) by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The differences be-

(Continued on page 37)



Russia — 1908 — With his master, Rimsky-Korsakov



Lausanne—1915—Shortly after the premiere of "Le Sacre"



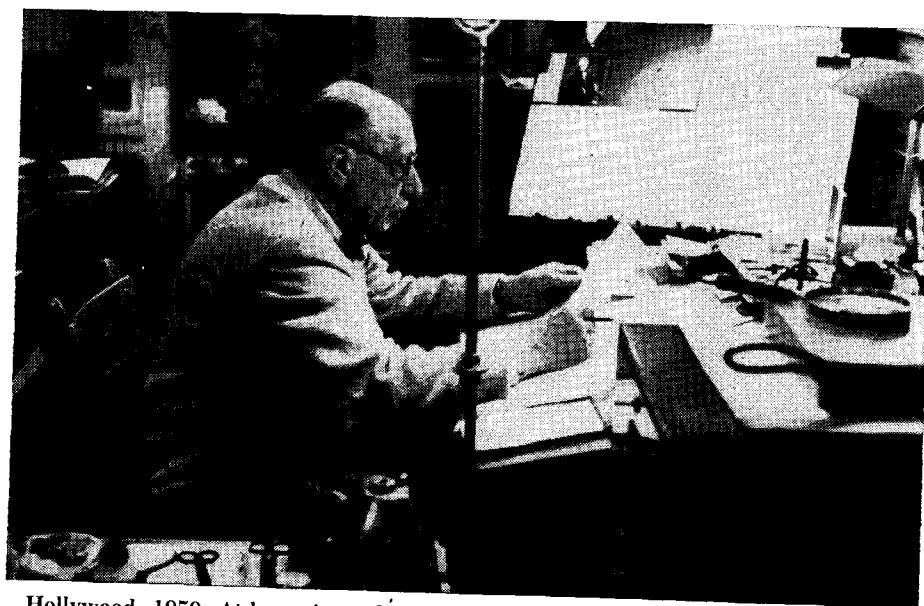
Seville—1921—With Diaghilev
—From "Conversations with Stravinsky,"
(Doubleday)

Around the World with Igor Stravinsky

Paris—1952—Applauding Monteux at the triumphant concert of the Boston Symphony at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees, May 8, 1952 at which "Le Sacre" was included in the Congress for Cultural Freedom's "Masterpieces of the 20th Century."



New York—1925—At the time of his first American visit, with Wilhelm Furtwaengler, who was guest conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra



Hollywood—1959—At home in studio: note writing materials, magnifier, steel erasers.