

## ***Fireworks, Op. 4***

IGOR STRAVINSKY

B. June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum (now Lomonosov), Russia

D. April 6, 1971, New York

*Composed in 1908, revised in 1909*

*Premiered on February 6, 1909 at a private concert in St. Petersburg, conducted by Alexander Ziloti. The revised version was premiered on January 9, 1910 in St.*

*Petersburg, also conducted by Ziloti.*

*Scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes (second doubling English horn), three clarinets (third doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, triangle, two harps, celesta, and strings. (approx. 4 minutes).*

By 1908, Igor Stravinsky had been studying with Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov for six years, and had produced several works that prominently displayed the nationalist style of his teacher. To celebrate the marriage of Rimsky-Korsakov's daughter Nadiezhda, Stravinsky composed a short orchestral fantasy, and mailed it to his teacher in the summer of 1908. Unfortunately, Rimsky-Korsakov died on June 8, just a few days before Stravinsky's package arrived. The short piece was eventually titled *Féyerverk* (Fireworks) and it is hard to overstate the impact that its premiere had on Stravinsky's career. While he had experienced modest success with his *Symphony in E-flat* (1905–07), Stravinsky was completely unknown outside of Russia. This changed quickly, because in attendance for the premiere of *Fireworks* was none other than the impresario Sergey Diaghilev – and as chance would have it, Diaghilev was looking for a composer to work on a new ballet for the Paris Opéra. Diaghilev immediately hired Stravinsky to orchestrate pieces for a short ballet, soon followed by their first full-scale collaboration, the wildly successful ballet *The Firebird* (1910). Stravinsky was instantly catapulted into international stardom, with each subsequent ballet eliciting more fame.

While still betraying the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov, particularly in its colorful orchestration, *Fireworks* also shows Stravinsky's debt to the most famous French composers of the day, Claude Debussy and Paul Dukas. The first section of the piece features three layers of music: overlapping running lines in the flutes, oboes and clarinets, creating a constantly churning machine of perpetual motion; piccolo, harps and strings playing only the off-beats, with each note preceded by a flurry of grace notes; and a fanfare-like melody, which is tossed between the brass instruments in increasingly fast succession. Just as the first section builds to a pitch, the percussion instruments make a huge racket, and everything comes to a halt. The middle section is atmospheric and perhaps even a little sinister – more than one writer has noted the similarity between this section and part of Dukas's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1897). The return of the opening section is signaled by a series of fleeting duets – flute and celesta, clarinet and cellos, and

so on. Ever inventive as an orchestrator, Stravinsky finds new combinations as the music speeds up again: piccolo, flutes, clarinets and harps play the perpetual motion lines; oboe, English horn, second violins, and violas play a winding chromatic melody. A whirlwind of motion leads to another outburst by the percussion, but instead of interrupting, this time the whole orchestra explodes into the fanfare theme, and rushes headlong to a fantastic finish.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Stravinsky's *Fireworks* on Nov. 11, 1969 with C. Valter Poole conducting.

*Program notes written by Tim Sullivan, doctoral candidate in Music Theory at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance.*