
IGOR STRAVINSKY

L'OISEAU DE FEU
THE FIREBIRD
DER FEUERVOGEL

Ballet Suite 1945
for Orchestra

PREVIEW
Low Resolution



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PREFACE

Stravinsky's early works *Fireworks* and *Scherzo fantastique* were performed for the first time on 6 February 1909 in a concert in St Petersburg conducted by Alexander Siloti. In the audience was Sergey Diaghilev, who was impressed by Stravinsky's compositions and was to play a distinctive role in the further course of Stravinsky's life. As the young composer's teacher, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, had died on 8 June 1908, Stravinsky was looking for a new patron who could present him to the public. Since 1906 Diaghilev had transferred his main activities to Paris, where he had organised five orchestral concerts in 1907 and a season of five ballets in 1909. To Diaghilev's circle belonged the dancer and choreographer Mikhail Fokine, the painter Leon Bakst, the dancer Vadlav Nijinsky and the prima ballerina Tamara Karanova. In 1907 he published his *Chroniques de ma vie* in St Petersburg. To join this group of progressive and creative artists, of which Diaghilev was the centre,

Stravinsky's first commission was the orchestral *Cherubim* (1908), which he completed in a brilliant manner. In the following year he wrote and conducted his *Three Russian dances* and *Fireworks* (both in 1909), the latter of which he translated into French in 1910. In 1910 he already began working on the libretto for *The Firebird* with the help of the librettist Igor Stravinsky was working on the libretto for *The Firebird* in Odessa. In 1910 the French press of the lack of a Russian or Russian atmosphere (i.e. of the libretto) in the Ballets Russes caused Diaghilev to choose material that would set the Russian subject more firmly in the foreground. He decided on the fairy tale of the Firebird, in which elements of various other Russian tales were integrated.

The synopsis: the Tsarevich Ivan one day sees a wonderful Firebird. He pursues it but succeeds only in seizing a golden feather from it. His pursuit leads him into the realm of the evil Kashchei, an immortal demi-god, who wishes

to catch him and turn him, like numerous other knights and princes, into stone. Kashchei's daughters and the 13 captive princesses appear and endeavour to rescue him. The Firebird

appears and lifts the spell by revealing the secret of Kashchei's immortality: the breaking of the egg, which he had laid, by the breaking of the egg, by the breaking of the egg, Kashchei loses his immortality and his magic power. His daughters return to their husbands, the princesses are freed from the golden apples, and the girl is married to the prince.

Diaghilev commissioned Bakst and Nijinsky to choreograph the ballet. Fokine's direction was supported by a "Russian ballet" style, which was originally based on the style of Diaghilev.

Diaghilev had originally been interested in the libretto by Diaghilev. In 1909 he had commissioned Nikolay Tcherepnin's *The Firebird* were unsuccessful. Diaghilev would hardly be in a position to commission the composition ready in the time allowed. Diaghilev decided on Stravinsky, who knew how to make use of this opportunity.

In the autumn of 1909, after returning to St Petersburg, he began on the composition of *The Firebird*, although he could not yet be sure of eventually obtaining the commission to compose the ballet, for which a fee of 1000 roubles was finally agreed. Not until a month after beginning on the composition did Diaghilev come to St Petersburg in December; and he was astonished that Stravinsky had already started work on it. From the beginning of November Stravinsky had withdrawn to the Rimsky-Korsakov family's dacha to the south-east of St Petersburg; in December he returned to St Petersburg, where until March he completed the composition. Stravinsky played over the new work on the piano to Diaghilev and his circle in the house on Zamiatin Pereulok, and attended the rehearsals of the Ballets Russes after Fokine had arranged the choreography for those scenes which were already written. Stravinsky completed the instrumentation of the orchestral score

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a month later. The ballet company travelled to Paris in the new year. In mid-April the score was sent to Paris, where in May, during his first stay in the city, Stravinsky corrected further details and dated the score 18 May 1910. The autograph is today preserved in the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana in Cologny (Geneva) and is owned by the Geneva Conservatoire.

The opulent scenery and some of the costumes were created by Alexander Golovin, the other costumes (Firebird, Tsarevich and Tsarevna) by Leon Bakst. The work, conducted by Gabriel Pierné had its extremely successful première on 25 June 1910 at the Paris Opéra. The principal dancers were Tamara Karsavina (Firebird), Vera Fokina (Tsarevna), Mikhaïl Fokine (Tsarevich) and Alexis Bulgakov (Kashchei). During the performances Stravinsky for the first time made the acquaintance (in Diaghilev's company) of the Parisian celebrities Proust, Giraudoux, Claudel, St John Perse, Sarah Bernhardt and the musicians Ravel and Debussy, with whom a friendly relationship lasted until his untimely death. In the course of his Paris years Diaghilev went so far as to commission Stravinsky, ever, was not more than a passing fancy. His pressiveness, which he expressed in many different ways, was angular, and he had a habit of making his own decisions. The princesses were represented by a cast of young girls who had to execute many difficult movements according to Stravinsky's later remarks, the princesses danced with insipid grace, while the male dancers portrayed the heroes of rough masculinity and ferocity; in the Kashchei scene the men dancers, sitting on the ground, stupidly thrust their feet back and forth. George Balanchine's choreography from the years 1949–50 is preferable to Fokine's, according to Stravinsky; the composer also felt that the costumes created by Chagall in 1945 and retained in performances by the New York City Ballet until 1970 were, on the whole, the

most successful. From the correspondence and private diaries of Gide, Claudel, Proust and others it is clear that it was particularly the discipline and virtuosity of the soloists and the emphasis on male dancers in the Ballets Russes, which captivated the spectators and the intellectuals.

The decisive factor in the success of the ballet, whose action can be described as schematic and idealistic, was the brilliant music, which Anna Pavlova described as 'too complicated and too difficult to hear'. The score of *The Firebird* is a masterpiece, not only as a study in evenness, but also as the most popular of Stravinsky's works. The ballets of the Ballets Russes were not the only reason for Stravinsky to remain in Paris. He had already decided to leave the Ballets Russes. The composer, however, was not satisfied with the success of his first ballet, which was published in 1911 by Schott, He had felt that the music to be too long and too uneven in quality. Stravinsky recognised the revisions of his music, and his criticism of his own composition. According to Stravinsky, the models of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky are reflected in *The Firebird*, the former in its harmony and treatment of the orchestra, the latter in a stylistic sense, e.g. in the 'Princesses with the golden apple movements (No. 7). By the abundance of novel instrumental effects (ponticello, col legno, flautando, glissando and flutter-tonguing) he nevertheless tried to outdo Rimsky-Korsakov. Stravinsky considered the music better than that of the other Russian ballets of that time, even if not very original. He was particularly proud of the instrumentation, which included a wealth of percussion and, in the stage band, Wagner tubas. The glissandos for horns, trombones and strings, which Rimsky-Korsakov had already employed before Stravinsky but were not yet known in the West, called forth the utmost astonishment from musicians and audiences. Stravinsky had taken over the means of differentiating between the human and the supernatural worlds in his music from Rimsky-

Korsakov's *Golden Cockerel*, completed in 1907 but first performed only in 1910 because of the censorship. The human world is associated with diatonic writing, the magical with Oriental sounding chromaticism or (particularly for Kashchei) pentatonicism. The constellation of the characters Kashchei, the Firebird and the prince is made clear musically also by the differentiation of the instrumentation at the appearance of the three protagonists. Stravinsky himself pointed out (in his *Memories and Commentaries*, 1960) that he had used two original Russian folk melodies: the *khovvod* theme of the 'Princesses' round dance' and the theme of the finale (both from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Hundred Russian National Songs* Op. 24 of 1876, nos. 79 and 21).

The first orchestral suite from *The Firebird* came into being in 1911 and was published by Jurgenson in 1912. For this the same plan was used as for the first edition of the complete score, and only the endings of the movements were newly printed. The score of the suite for smaller orchestra, written in 1913, was first published in Morges, and dedicated to the Société de la Suisse Romande and to the Société de la Suisse Française. The manuscript of the *Firebird* for the Orchestre National de Paris was printed in 1920. The composer's autograph score is in the collection of the Library of the University of Toronto. The score of the 1919 suite consists of 18 numbers Stravinsky arranged for the 1919 suite:

1. *Introduction. The Firebird and its dance. The Firebird's variation.* (No. 1, bars from Nos. 2 and 3, and No. 4 without the last 4½ bars of the original number)
2. *The princesses' round dance. Khovvod* (No. 10)
3. *Infernal dance of King Kashchei* (Nos. 11 and 12)
4. *Berceuse* (Nos. 17 with a new ending of four and six bars of the original number and No. 19)
5. *Finale* (No. 19)

The bulk of the *Firebird* score consists of 130 measures of music. The *Firebird* is a work of great technical and artistic value. It is a masterpiece of orchestration. In the first and second movements the music is in a key which slurs only slightly from the instrumentation as it changes.

6. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 13 and 14)
7. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 15 and 16)
8. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 17 and 18)
9. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 19 and 20)
10. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 21 and 22)
11. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 23 and 24)
12. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 25 and 26)
13. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 27 and 28)
14. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 29 and 30)
15. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 31 and 32)
16. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 33 and 34)
17. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 35 and 36)
18. *The Firebird's dance* (Nos. 37 and 38)

The *Firebird* Stravinsky, through the combination of the Ballets Russes' balletic reforms and his virtuosic treatment of the orchestra, rhythmic complexity and already recognisable new expressiveness, pointed the way to his revolutionary works *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*.

Herbert Schneider
Translation: Lionel Salter

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in der Straße Zamiatin Pereulok Diaghilew und seinem Kreis das neue Werk auf dem Klavier vor und wohnte, nachdem Fokin für jede fertige Szene bereits die Choreographie fertiggestellt hatte, auch den Proben der Ballets Russes bei. Die Orchesterpartitur und damit die Instrumentation vollendete Strawinsky einen Monat später. Das Ballettensemble reist im Frühjahr nach Paris. Mitte April wurde die Partitur nach Paris geschickt, wo Strawinsky im Mai während seines ersten Paris-Aufenthalts noch Details korrigierte und die Partitur am 18. Mai 1910 datierte. Das Autograph wird heute in der Bibliotheca Bodmeriana in Cologny (Genf) aufbewahrt und gehört dem Genfer Conservatoire.

Das opulente Bühnenbild und einen Teil der Kostüme hatte Alexander Golovin, die übrigen Kostüme (Feuervogel, Zarewitsch und Zarewina) Leon Bakst geschaffen. Unter der Leitung von Gabriel Pierné erlebte das Werk am 2. April 1910 in der Opéra in Paris seine sehr erfolgreiche Uraufführung. Tamara Karsowa (Zarewina), Vera Fokina (Zarewina), Michail Slesarew (Zarewitsch) und Alexis Bolm (Kaschchei) waren die Hauptdarsteller. Vor Strawinsky lernte Golovin in den 1880er Jahren das erste Mal die Ballettmeister Tchaikowsky, Giraudoux, Bernhardt und Ballo kennen, die er auch im Ballett kennen lernte. Strawinsky lernte die Tänzerinnen Fokina nicht in der Umsetzung des Bösewichters im Nijmeschen. Das Böse wird grotesk-eckige, hässliche und auch in seinen Bewegungen dargestellt. Die Ungenossen hatten auf allen Viere zu kriechen, zu kriechen wie Frösche oder virtuos zu springen. Die Prinzessinnen tanzten barfuß, bewegten sich grazios und geschmeidig, während nur der Feuervogel durch eine Spitzentänzerin dargestellt wurde, die viele schwierige Sprünge auszuführen hatte. Nach Strawinskys späterem Urteil tanzten die Prinzessinnen geschmacklos süßlich, während die Tänzer das „non plus

ultra“ an roher Männlichkeit und Wildheit darstellten; in der Kastchei Szene haben die Tänzer auf dem Boden sitzend ihre Füße stupide hingehalten und hergestoßen. Die Choreographie von George Balanchine aus dem Jahre 1949/50 ist nach Strawinsky der von Fokin vorzuziehen, die von Chagall 1945 geschaffen wurde und bis 1970 Aufführungen des New York City Ballets gehalten Kostüme, die der Ballettensemble gelungensten übernahm. Die Ballettmeister und den intimen Takt der Musik, die Prouts und die Ballettmeister, die die Durchführung des Balletts in der Ballettmeister und die Ballettmeister in der Ballettmeister und die Ballettmeister mit der Intellektuellen. Der Erfolg des Balletts, dessen Choreographie schematisch und kann als „non plus ultra“ angesehen, war Strawinskys Ballettmeister zu kompliziert, die Ballettmeister hatte. Die Musik Strawinsky mit einem gehört bis heute zu den besten Ballettmusiken des 20. Jahrhunderts übernahm. Das Ballettmeister blieb der Ballettmeister auch im Repertoire der Ballets Russes. Der Komponist selbst war aber nicht mit der Ballettmeister zufrieden, die 1910 bei Schott erschien. Die ganze Ballettmusik empfand er als zu lang und die einzelnen Nummern als zu ungleich in ihrer Qualität. Als seine Kritik an der eigenen Komposition fasste Strawinsky auch die Bearbeitungen von 1919 und 1945 auf.

Die Vorbilder Rimsky-Korsakow und Tschaiakowsky haben Strawinsky zufolge ihren Niederschlag im *Feuervogel* gefunden, Rimsky-Korsakow in der Harmonik und Orchesterbehandlung, Tschaiakowsky in stilistischer Hinsicht, z. B. in dem Satz „Die Prinzessinnen mit den goldenen Äpfeln“ (Nr. 7). Durch die Häufung neuer Instrumentationseffekte (ponticello, col legno, flautando, glissando und Flutterzunge) suchte er jedoch Rimsky-Korsakow zu übertreffen. Strawinsky hielt die Musik für besser als die der anderen Ballets Russes dieser Zeit, wenn auch nicht für sehr originell. Besonders