

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2016-2017 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 17, 18 and 19, 2017

YAN PASCAL TORTELIER, CONDUCTOR

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Petrushka, Ballet in Four Tableaux (1947 Version)

The Shrove-Tide Fair

Petrushka's Room

The Moor's Room

The Shrove-Tide Fair Towards Evening

Intermission

JACQUES OFFENBACH
arr. ROSENTHAL

Selections from *Gaîté Parisienne*

Overture

Allegro brillante

Polka

Ländler (Allegro)

Barcarolle

Allegro vivo

Can-Can

Allegro moderato

Allegro vivo

Vivo

MAURICE RAVEL

Boléro

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Petrushka, Ballet in Four Tableaux (1911, revised in 1947)

Igor Stravinsky was born in a suburb of St. Petersburg called Oranienbaum on June 17, 1882, and died in New York City on April 6, 1971. *Petrushka* was composed as a ballet in 1911 and premiered on June 13, 1911 at the Théâtre du Châtelet, led by Pierre Monteux with the Ballet Russe. As he similarly did with *Firebird*, Stravinsky revised the score in 1947 to use a more compact, standard instrumentation, which is the version performed here today. The Pittsburgh Symphony originally performed *Petrushka* at the Syria Mosque on March 11, 1966, with Ronald Ondrejka conducting. Most recently, the Pittsburgh Symphony performed *Petrushka* on May 13, 2012, with Music Director Manfred Honeck. The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celesta, and strings. **Performance time: approximately 34 minutes.**

Stravinsky burst meteor-like onto the musical firmament in 1910 with the brilliant triumph of his first major score for the Ballet Russe, *The Firebird*. Immediately, Serge Diaghilev, the enterprising impresario of the troupe, sought to capitalize on that success by commissioning Stravinsky to write a second score as soon as possible. Stravinsky was already prepared with an idea that had come to him even before finishing *The Firebird*. "I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite," he recalled in his *Autobiography* of 1936. "Sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring. Such was the theme of *Le Sacre du printemps*." Diaghilev was as excited about this vision as was Stravinsky, and he sent the composer off to write the score with all possible haste. Stravinsky continued the story in his *Autobiography*:

"Before tackling *The Rite of Spring*, which would be a long and difficult task, I wanted to refresh myself by composing an orchestral piece in which the piano would play the most important part — a sort of *Konzertstück*. In composing the music, I had a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life.... Having finished this piece, I struggled for hours to find a title which would express in a word the character of my music and, consequently, the personality of this creature. One day I leaped for joy, I had indeed found my title — *Petrushka*, the immortal and unhappy hero of every fair in all countries. Soon afterwards, Diaghilev came to visit me. He was much astonished when, instead of the sketches of the *Sacre*, I played him the piece I had just composed and which later became the second scene of *Petrushka*. He was so pleased with it that he would not leave it alone, and began persuading me to develop the theme of the puppet's sufferings and make it into a whole ballet."

Though his progress on the score was interrupted by a serious bout of "nicotine poisoning," Stravinsky finished the work in time for the scheduled premiere on June 13, 1911. The production was a triumph, though it appeared that at the last minute it might be scuttled by a costumer who refused to let things proceed until he was paid. The till being temporarily empty, Diaghilev went to the box of the redoubtable Misia Sert, the Polish pianist, salon hostess and arts patron, to ask for her help. She was, as always, ready with assistance, but the curtain was delayed half an hour while her driver was sent to retrieve the necessary funds. When the performance finally began, the music of Stravinsky and the dancing of Nijinsky captivated the audience. The illustrious thespian Sarah Bernhardt was so moved by the depth and subtlety of Nijinsky's portrayal of the love-sick puppet that she said, with no little envy, "I am afraid, I am afraid — because I have just seen the greatest actor in the world."

The uniformly laudatory writings about *Petrushka* agree on the daring, influential modernity of Stravinsky's musical style and his exquisite technical control. They speak of the integration of plot and music and the brilliant characterizations. They praise the stunning orchestral effect. Lawrence Gilman's summation is typical. "Stravinsky's score," he wrote, "is a masterpiece, a thing of fascinating gaiety and wit and beauty. The rhythmic and instrumental ingenuity of the work is beyond praise. And so is the slyness of its humor, the fidelity and vividness of its characterization. But there is much more than slyness and vividness in this music: there is astringent melancholy, a deep piteousness, a bitter, straining

passion. There is the sense of compassion for all unshapely and broken and frustrate things, a half-mocking tenderness for the poor creatures galvanized by the inscrutable, irresponsible Charlatan. These things are not stressed by the music — there is no hint in it of sentimental musing or rich, romantic grief; they are most subtly contained within the exuberant vivaciousness of the score. Yet they are inescapable, if one listens with more than half an ear.”

Tableau I. *St. Petersburg, the Shrove-Tide Fair*. Crowds of people stroll about, entertained by a hurdy-gurdy man and dancers. The Showman opens the curtains of his little theater to reveal three puppets — Petrushka, the Ballerina and the Blackamoor. He charms them into life with his flute, and they begin to dance among the public.

Tableau II. *Petrushka's Cell*. Petrushka suffers greatly from his awareness of his grotesque appearance. He tries to console himself by falling in love with the Ballerina. She visits him in his cell, but she is frightened by his uncouth antics, and flees.

Tableau III. *The Blackamoor's Cell*. The Blackamoor and the Ballerina meet in his tent. Their love scene is interrupted by the arrival of Petrushka, furiously jealous. The Blackamoor throws him out.

Tableau IV. *The Fair*. The festive scene of Tableau I resumes with the appearance of a group of wet-nurses, a performing bear, Gypsies, a band of coachmen and several masqueraders. At the theater, Petrushka rushes out from behind the curtain, pursued by the Blackamoor, who strikes his rival down with his sword. Petrushka dies. The Showman assures the bystanders that Petrushka is only a puppet, but he is startled to see Petrushka's jeering ghost appear on the roof of the little theater.

JACQUES OFFENBACH

Selections from *Gaîté Parisienne* (arranged in 1938)
Arranged by Manuel Rosenthal (1904-2003)

Jacques Offenbach was born in Cologne, Germany on June 20, 1819, and died on October 5, 1880 in Paris. *Gaîté Parisienne* is a set of excerpts from Offenbach's operettas, arranged by Manuel Rosenthal in 1938. Rosenthal conducted the premiere in Monte Carlo on April 5, 1938, at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed *Gaîté Parisienne* on November 18, 1947 under the baton of Vladimir Bakaleinikoff. Most recently they performed the work on September 16, 1982, at Heinz Hall with former Music Director André Previn. The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. **Performance time: approximately 20 minutes.**

In 1937, the famed Russian-American impresario Sol Hurok became associated Léonide Massine and René Blum in reorganizing the Ballet Russe of Monte Carlo, a descendent of Diaghilev's sensational Paris troupe. In planning the repertory, they decided that one number must be gay and light-hearted, with a score bubbling with melody and *joie de vivre*. After first considering the music of Johann Strauss, they settled on the operettas of Jacques Offenbach as the perfect source for their new ballet; *Gaîté Parisienne* seemed an appropriate title. Manuel Rosenthal, the noted French composer and conductor, was entrusted with supervising the music, in collaboration with Jacques Brindejonc-Offenbach. The preparations for *Gaîté Parisienne* proceeded while the Ballet Russe was on tour in America, as Hurok recounted: "Massine, Rosenthal, two pianists and a flock of copyists established themselves in a large room at the Copley Plaza in Boston, and assembled from the Boston Public Library and the Harvard Library all the extant scores of the Offenbach operettas. There the ballet was blocked out, and the basic musical material selected from the wealth of sparkling melody. Everyone adjourned to Paris. Comte Étienne de Beaumont, who was responsible for the ballet's scenario, also designed the sets and costumes, and the music was given into the hands of Rosenthal, who, with enormous taste and skill, put the score together and orchestrated it." The premiere, at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo on April 5, 1938, was a glittering success.

Hurok provided the following summary of the ballet's slight plot:

"*Gaîté Parisienne* is the romantic dream of a glamorous night in Paris of everyone who has ever dreamed of that enchanting city. The setting is a highly fashionable, but not very proper, restaurant of the Second Empire, whose customers, while not being the best of citizens, are marvelous company. Their

lives revolve around *amours*, brief but intense; their day begins at nine in the evening and ends only at dawn, when the last waltz is danced and the last champagne glass is emptied.

“As the curtain rises, we see an elegant room flooded with light from brass chandeliers. Waiters and maids are preparing for the evening. The flirtatious Flower Girl enters, followed by three young ladies in bright, candy-striped dresses escorted by young men in black jackets and berets. The couples dance a lively mazurka, but soon all are distracted by the arrival of the lovely Glove Seller, the ballet’s heroine. All the men desert their partners to admire her. At this point, the Peruvian arrives. It is his first evening in Paris. Frantic with excitement, he flirts with one girl after another. All, suspecting his pockets are full of money, respond with coquetry save the Glove Seller, who is unimpressed. The Baron enters. Attracted by his handsome bearing and his uniform, the Flower Girl approaches him, but he has eyes only for the Glove Seller. He introduces himself to her and they dance a waltz.

“The Peruvian, meanwhile, extravagantly buys champagne for everyone, but the girls desert him on the arrival of the soldiers, who enter to a martial tune. Suddenly the city’s reigning beauty, La Lionne, sweeps into the room. Immediately all eyes are centered on her and her escort, the Duke. Even the Baron abandons the Glove Seller to pay court to her. While he is thus occupied, the Peruvian again approaches the Glove Seller. The Baron is angry and jealous, the Duke is annoyed at the flirtations of La Lionne, and a fight develops, which ends with the room cleared.

“Now, in the darkened restaurant, the Baron and the Glove Seller return and dance a beautiful waltz. The guests crowd into the room again, and the *Can-Can* dancers enter with their dazzling kicks. Everyone joins in the frantic dance. The music softens, the lights dim, and the guests drift out two-by-two into the night. Last to leave are the Glove Seller and the Baron. They wave goodbye to the Peruvian, who, all alone, stands disconsolately as the curtain falls.”

The hit number of *Gaîté Parisienne* was the *Can-Can*, the lubricious dance that took Europe and America by storm in the 1860s. Upon his visit to Paris in 1867, Mark Twain left a word-picture of the *Can-Can*, which also captures the mood of the ballet: “The idea is to dance as wildly, as noisily, as furiously as you can, expose yourself as much as possible, if you are a woman, and kick as high as you can — no matter which sex you belong to. The *Can-Can* is a whirl of shouts, laughter, furious music, a bewildering chaos of darting and interminable forms, stormy jerking and snatching of gay dresses, bobbing heads, flying arms, lightning flashes of white-stockinged calves and dainty slippers in the air, and then the grand final rush, riot, terrific hubbub and wild stampede.”

MAURICE RAVEL

Boléro (1928)

Maurice Ravel was born on March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, France, and died on December 28, 1937 in Paris. *Boléro* was written as a ballet on 1928, and premiered in the same year at the Paris Opéra with the Ida Rubenstein Dance Company conducted by Walter Straram. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed *Boléro* on November 11, 1937 at the Syria Mosque under the direction of Carlos Chavez, founder of the Mexican Symphonic Orchestra. Most recently, Leonard Slatkin led a performance of *Boléro* on March 16, 2014. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, oboe d’amore (alto oboe), English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, three saxophones, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, gong, celesta, harp, and strings. **Performance time: approximately 13 minutes.**

Ravel originated what he once called his “*danse lascive*” at the suggestion of Ida Rubinstein, the famed ballerina who also inspired works from Debussy, Honegger and Stravinsky. Rubinstein’s balletic interpretation of *Boléro*, set in a rustic Spanish tavern, portrayed a voluptuous dancer whose stomps and whirls atop a table incite the men in the bar to mounting fervor. With growing intensity, they join in her dance until, in a brilliant *coup de théâtre*, knives are drawn and violence flares on stage at the moment near the end where the music modulates, breathtakingly, from the key of C to the key of E. So viscerally stirring was the combination of the powerful music and the ballerina’s suggestive dancing at the premiere that a near-riot ensued between audience and performers, and Miss Rubinstein narrowly escaped injury. The usually reserved critic Pitts Sanborn reported that the American premiere, conducted by Arturo

Toscanini at Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1929, had a similar effect on its hearers: "If it had been the custom to repeat a number at a symphonic concert, *Boléro* would surely have been encored, even at the risk of mass wreckage of the nerves."

Of the musical nature of this magnificent study in hypnotic rhythm and orchestral sonority, Ravel wrote in 1931 to the critic M.D. Calvocoressi, "I am particularly desirous that there should be no misunderstanding about this work. It constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from or anything more than it actually does achieve. Before its first performance, I issued a warning to the effect that what I had written was a piece lasting about fifteen minutes and consisting wholly of 'orchestral tissue without music' — of one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of execution. The themes are altogether impersonal ... folk tunes of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind, and (whatever may have been said to the contrary) the orchestral writing is simple and straightforward throughout, without the slightest attempt at virtuosity.... I have carried out exactly what I intended, and it is for listeners to take it or leave it." Listeners have.