THE VIRGINIA S. AND JAMES E. AISNER CONCERT
GUSTAVO DUDAMEL conducting

SCHUMANN SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN B-FLAT, OPUS 38, "SPRING"
Andante un poco maestoso—Allegro molto vivace
Larghetto
Scherzo: Molto vivace—Molto più vivace—Tempo I
Allegro animato e grazioso

{INTERMISSION}

STRAVINSKY "LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS," PICTURES FROM PAGAN RUSSIA
Part I: The Adoration of the Earth
Introduction—Auguries of spring (Dances of
the young girls)—Mock abduction—Spring
Khorovod (Round Dance)—Games of the rival
clan—Procession of the wise elder—Adoration
of the earth (The wise elder)—Dance of the earth
Part II: The Sacrifice
Introduction—Mystical circles of the young
girls—Glorification of the chosen victim—The
summoning of the ancients—Ritual of the
anceints—Sacrificial dance (The chosen victim)

SATURDAY EVENING’S PERFORMANCE OF STRAVINSKY’S “LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS” IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT FROM
THOMAS BURGER AND ANDRÉE ROBERT,

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Concertmaster Malcolm Lowe performs on a Stradivarius violin, known as the “Lafont,” generously donated to the
Boston Symphony Orchestra by the O’Block Family.
First associate concertmaster Tamara Smirnova performs on a 1754 J.B. Guadagnini violin, the “ex-Zazofsky,” and
James Cooke performs on a 1778 Nicolò Gagliano violin, both generously donated to the orchestra by Michael L.
Nieland, M.D., in loving memory of Mischa Nieland, a member of the cello section from 1943 to 1988.
Steinway & Sons Pianos, selected exclusively for Symphony Hall.
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The program books for the Friday series are given in loving memory of Mrs. Hugh Bancroft by her daughters, the
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or videos—is prohibited during concerts.

The Program in Brief...
Robert Schumann was a fine pianist in his youth, and apart from some experiments most of his early music, some of
it quite ambitious and most of it intensely personal, is for his own instrument. In the 1830s he fell in love with his
piano teacher’s daughter, Clara Wieck, herself a piano virtuoso. In 1840, overcoming her father’s objections, they
finally married; Schumann celebrated by composing more than a hundred songs. Clara’s support, as well as Schumann’s discovery of Franz Schubert’s Great C major symphony, soon fired Robert’s ambitions for what he considered the more elevated genres, orchestral and theater works. In 1841 he composed the first two of his four symphonies—No. 1 in B-flat, nicknamed Spring, and the D minor symphony now known in its later, revised form as No. 4. Schumann himself described the sunny, optimistic music of his First Symphony as “vernal.” He sketched and completed the work in under a month in January and February 1841, and the premiere was given by the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, led by Felix Mendelssohn, that March. The Rite of Spring was the third of Stravinsky’s ballets for the Paris-based Russian Ballet, led by the impresario Sergei Diaghilev. The first two, The Firebird (1910) and Petrushka (1911), were innovative and successful, but The Rite of Spring, premiered in May 1913, became one of the most influential pieces in history. The scenario centers on a prehistoric community gathering with its wise elders and its youth to witness the spectacle of a young girl dancing herself to death in a fertility ceremony. Stravinsky was able to create a hybrid of modernity and raw primitivism through a subtle use of folk music re-contextualized with innovative, even revolutionary, use of rhythm, harmony, and orchestration.

Robert Kirzinger

Paris’s Golden Era
by Jean-Pascal Vachon

Canadian-born musicologist Jean-Pascal Vachon places, in the context of Paris at the time they were composed, works by Lili Boulanger, Claude Debussy, and Igor Stravinsky being performed by the BSO this season: Boulanger’s “D’un Soir triste” and Debussy’s “Nocturnes” (both February 21-23), Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring” (April 5-9), and Stravinsky’s “Petrushka” (May 2-4). It is tempting to establish a link between the end of Baron Haussmann’s renovation of Paris in 1870 and its entry into modernity. Replacing the medieval city’s narrow and unhealthy alleyways, sometimes seedy and of ill-repute, Paris’s new boulevards, illuminated streets, and modern sanitation improved the lives of its inhabitants and drew many more into the city from across France and around the world. The city’s new beauty, liberal policies, and low cost of living made Paris a magnet for artists from all over the world; its position as a capital of the arts would remain undisputed from the end of the 19th century to the present day. Home to five world’s fairs over forty-five years (1855, 1867, 1878, 1889, and 1900), Paris defined modernity (with the Eiffel Tower as the symbol of French genius) and became a world stage where exotic and, at that time, still unknown cultures were discovered, to the great pleasure of artists who found new sources of inspiration.

In this new context, Charles Baudelaire embodied the figure of the poet as one who adapted to the new urban and social reality by bringing the theme of the city itself into poetry and sought to formalize the principles and values of the Beau moderne. For him, it was a matter of extracting “from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory” (“The Painter of Modern Life,” 1863). His Symbolist successors, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, would go even further in the search for an aesthetic that expressed modernity by proposing new forms that aspired to transcend simple realistic representation and confront the mystery of the inexpressible and the immaterial. In the field of painting, 19th-century conceptions of realism were gradually abandoned in favor of an increasingly important emphasis on purely formal elements, e.g., the expression of emotional content through color by such post-Impressionist painters as Gauguin, Seurat, and Cézanne.

It is safe to say that it was the composer CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918) who, above all, gave French music a new lease on life and brought it into modernity. With his new conceptions of scales, harmony, and tonality, Debussy “introduced a new breath of musical art” (Notes of an Apprenticeship, Pierre Boulez) with his Mallarmé-inspired first masterpiece, the Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun, which was premiered in 1894. In addition to poets (he was also strongly drawn to Baudelaire), Debussy turned to painters as a source of inspiration. Impressionism originated in Paris, causing turmoil in the visual arts around the time of Haussmann’s efforts at urban engineering, but it by no means remained exclusively French. For Debussy, it was the work of the London-based J.M.W. Turner and, even more importantly, the American James McNeill Whistler, that made the deepest impression. As Debussy later wrote about Nocturnes, composed between 1897 and 1899, the title is meant to reflect “all the various impressions and the special effects of light that the word suggests.” Debussy’s use of the term “Nocturne” itself likely originates with Whistler’s use of the term for several paintings of the 1870s, in which he softened contours and created shimmering surfaces. Its musical equivalent can be found in Debussy’s handling of tone color. Stimulated by Debussy’s music from the end of the 19th century onwards, Paris’s musical landscape became so exceptionally fertile that it would match Vienna as a musical capital until the outbreak of World War II. During this period Paris would witness dozens of first performances of significant works, from Debussy to Manuel de Falla, from Erik Satie to Maurice Ravel. It is, curiously, to a Russian that we owe the concentration of creative talents in the French capital between 1909 and 1929 that would provoke an unprecedented explosion of colors and rhythms. Neither musician nor dancer, Sergei Diaghilev nevertheless became famous in both music and dance as the impresario of one of the most important ballet companies in history, the Ballets Russes. Over its storied twenty-two-
The Firebird, Diaghilev had heard only two of the composer’s short orchestral pieces. Yet, thanks to his legendary flair, he could already proclaim, “Mark him well...he is a man on the eve of celebrity.” And how right he was! The Firebird proved to be an immediate success at its 1910 premiere. Still busy working on The Firebird, Stravinsky had a visual fantasy—“In my imagination, I glimpsed the sight of a great pagan sacred rite” (An Autobiography)—a vision that would lead him to compose The Rite of Spring between 1910 and 1913. However, prior to embarking on this project, he started work on something completely different: a concertante work for piano and orchestra. “I had the clear vision of a puppet suddenly unleashed, who, by diabolical cascades of arpeggios, exasperates the patience of the orchestra, which in turn responds to him by threatening flourishes.” Hearing a section of Stravinsky’s composition in 1910, Diaghilev immediately recognized its potential for the stage and insisted that Stravinsky make another ballet out of it. Thus Petrushka.

If Stravinsky had to follow a synopsis for The Firebird, he had carte blanche for Petrushka, which he created with designer Alexandre Benois. After the opulence of The Firebird, which drew influences from Stravinsky’s teacher Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Petrushka caused a sensation with its vivid colors, its freshness, and its use of popular songs and street music treated with extreme refinement and often biting irony. And the impact of Nijinsky’s new legendary performance in the title role cannot be overstated. However, this sensation was nothing compared to the seismic shock he caused with The Rite of Spring two years later. The riot that erupted at the Rite’s premiere in May 1913 is now part of music history and is forever associated with the work. The cause of the riot, whether Nijinsky’s choreography or Stravinsky’s music, remains a topic of debate. In any case, the musical transposition of Stravinsky’s vision of the return of spring, and the need to win the favor of the earth by the sacrifice of a young girl who dances herself to death, required a totally new musical language, far from the refinement of post-romanticism. Here, the huge orchestra-renounces subtle sound mixtures in favor of raw colors and, at times, becomes a single vast percussion instrument. It is above all its rhythmic innovations that create The Rite of Spring’s powerful impression. Static rhythms, repeated for long periods of time in the form of ostinatos, generate enormous latent energy. These are contrasted by irregular and dynamic rhythms with metric patterns that change at a mad pace, evoking a frenzied, sacred dance.

Igor Stravinsky is not the only composer to have composed masterpieces for the Ballets Russes. Other important works written for Diaghilev’s troupe include Debussy’s Jeux (1912), Erik Satie’s Parade (1917), Manuel de Falla’s El sombrero de tres picos (1919), and Maurice Ravel’s Daphnis et Chloé (1912), which Stravinsky called “not only [Ravel’s] best work, but one of the most beautiful products of all French music.” All of Ravel’s artistry is brilliantly encapsulated in this ballet. The orchestral refinement, the combination of impassioned lyricism and typically Ravelian modesty, the infinite rhythmic variety: all of these are present in Ravel’s other works—such as La Valse (also the result of a Diaghilev commission)—but nowhere are they treated with such warmth and virtuosity. In the midst of these strokes of orchestral brilliance and color, one might tend to neglect other aspects of Parisian musical life. Salons and concert societies contributed greatly to the development of chamber music and art song, while in the field of popular music, “street song” became a popular genre in cabarets and music halls. Church music also saw important advances, such as the emergence of a specifically French organ school whose composers produced works that are still part of the instrument’s repertoire.

In this musical whirlwind, LILI BOULANGER (1893-1918) appears like an isolated figure in contrast to the others. Although her immense talent was discovered very early, her chronic poor health kept her away from traditional academic training. Nevertheless, she became not only the first woman to be awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome (1913), but also one of its youngest recipients ever. That award brought her international notice as well as a steady income. Yet she was all too aware that her days were numbered, a state of mind that no doubt influenced the mood of her sometimes monumental and dark works, which often drew their inspiration from religion, mysticism, and legend. When she no longer had the strength to write, she dictated her music to her sister Nadia. The second part of a diptych with D’un Matin de printemps, her orchestral work D’un Soir triste was composed in 1918, the last year of her life. Dark, mournful, and almost violent, the work is both an expression of a young woman confronting her own mortality and a revolt against the horrors of war. Her death at the age of twenty-four in March 1918, ten days before Debussy’s, deprived French music of a strong and original voice and an extraordinary personality.

A freelance musicologist based in Vienna, Canadian-born JEAN-PASCAL VACHON writes liner notes for BIS records
Robert Schumann

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat, Opus 38, “Spring”

ROBERT SCHUMAN N was born in Zwickau, Saxony, on June 8, 1810, and died in an asylum at Endenich, near Bonn, on July 29, 1856. He sketched his “Spring” Symphony in just four days, January 23-26, 1841, and completed the score less than a month later, on February 20. Felix Mendelssohn led the first performance on March 31 that same year, in a pension fund concert of the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig. The dedication of the symphony is to Friedrich August, King of Saxony.

THE SCORE OF SCHUMANN’S SYMPHONY NO. 1 calls for two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, and strings.

Robert Schumann’s First Symphony was completed in 1841, a year of fertile and diverse activity in European music. A brief scan of this year reveals Chopin composing his F minor Ballade, Liszt his second version of theTranscendental Etudes, Mendelssohn his Scottish Symphony, and Wagner and Verdi launching their careers with Rienzi and Nabucco. All these men were born within four years of each other and constitute, along with the somewhat older Berlioz, a tremendous new gathering of forces. They form the first musical generation to identify consciously with the Romantic movement long since fully acknowledged in other arts.

Together with the influence of other arts, especially literature, these men were stimulated by the achievements of the Italian operatic melodists of the 1820s, by the works of Schubert’s last years, and by a new interest in late Baroque music. But the liberating effect of Beethoven’s music must be especially emphasized, since it has been misunderstood. We still read about the necessity to evade Beethoven, to go on in spite of him, and other negative tasks assigned to this first Romantic generation. But he was above all an energizing force, expanding and making available to a greater variety of musical talents the musical vocabulary of the early 1800s.

It is particularly Beethoven’s last piano sonatas, more than the quartets and symphonies, that reverberate in the music of the first generation of Romantics—most of whom thought through the piano. These sonatas of Beethoven suggested a new kind of narrative style, free of the necessity to define in sonata-allegro terms each moment in the form. The Schumann piano miniature, the crucial expressive vehicle of his early years, is seeded in the Beethoven piano sonatas. Even as Schumann worked himself away from his natural arena—songs and short piano pieces—toward the symphonic, choral, and sonata composition which he considered a higher calling, the piano remained an underlying sonority.

It is in this context that we must consider his controversial orchestration. Schumann’s First Symphony shares with his other symphonies an orchestral sonority that strives to retain the piano’s dense tone weight and the mystery of its pedal. All the symphonies have been considered over-scored, and there is some legitimacy to this claim; but it is worth consideration that Schumann’s orchestration—doubled, middle-register-dominated, and anti-solo—is partly the sound of this era: much of Mendelssohn and Wagner from this period is thick, and the thickness conveys intensity. Later eras have been uncomfortable with this sound, but this is partly a turn against the entire aesthetic of early Romanticism.*

Schumann intended the opening of his Spring Symphony to be heard as a call to awakening, composing it in the “vernial passion that sways men until they are very old, and which surprises them again with each year.” Unfortunately the initial bloom of this phrase was somewhat dampened when Schumann discovered at the first rehearsal that his natural horns and trumpets sounded muddy and indistinct on the lower notes of his motive. He decided to begin the phrase a third higher, on D, thus giving the first two phrases the same melody, and weakening the staged approach to the thrilling D minor chord that begins the third phrase; this chord is rich both in fervent drama and in key-area implications for the rest of the piece. (Schumann’s original intention, aided by the use of modern brass, is occasionally reinstated, a practice that hardly qualifies as a reorchestration of the kind so often practiced upon these symphonies.)

This opening motto is a setting of a line from a poem by Adolf Böttger: the line runs “Im Tale blüht der Frühling auf!” (“In the valley spring is blossoming!”), its rhythm unmistakable in Schumann’s version. This opening makes explicit a secret condition of much of Schumann’s instrumental music—hidden words behind the notes. It is with the help of such extramusical associations that Schumann achieves the unique atmospheric world inhabited by each of his symphonies. The Spring Symphony is based on two poems by Böttger; Schumann originally had titles for the movements paralleling moments in the poems—“Spring’s Awakening,” “Evening,” “Joyful Playing,” and “Full Spring” (or “Spring’s Farewell”). Like many composers, he was less interested in these verbal guideposts as he gained distance from the piece. Very often a composer will seize on poetic or narrative images to free an abstract musical thought-line already brewing in his subconscious, and in the calm that follows remains interested only in those musical urges that were primary to him.
The first motto notes of the Spring Symphony become the dominating motive in the ensuing movement. In adapting his Lied-style forms to larger spans, motivic reiteration and expansion is Schumann’s primary resource. Not a writer of free-wheeling melodies like Chopin or Berlioz, he joins motives together into melody, or creates driving development passages out of close motivic repetition. In the Spring Symphony the motivic working is a spontaneous mode of thought. (Later in his career it seems to be thought of more in formal terms, with some loss in naturalness, compensated by a touching simplicity of harmony and gesture.)

The first movement has the first of the independent, poetic codas that are special to this symphony, inspirations that close each of the first three movements with something seemingly new, but revealed as foreshadowing of what is to come. The one in the first movement is in Schumann’s warmest hymn-like manner, expressing the inward (Eusebian) side of his nature.*

Often in Schumann’s orchestral music, the spirit seems more important than the detail, but the second movement produces some memorable details as well. The lavish afterbeat wind chords behind the cellos’ statement of the main theme in B-flat, and the rich combination of octave violin descent and viola triplets at the next statement, are just a few of the many subtle settings in which the rondo theme is shown.

In the third movement Schumann uses the minor key without menace or foreboding, instead reflecting the romantic stirrings of the first D minor in the prelude. The harmonic scheme is unusual, with other keys seeming equally balanced with tonic in the opening strain.

The finale has an operatic exuberance, with even a brief outdoor cadenza, and a very attractive main subject. The development and coda become serious, especially in the gliding sequences that recall Schubert’s big C major symphony, so revered by Schumann. But the overall impression is one of Schumann’s most unified affects, Florestan and Eusebius joined in positive feelings.

One of Schumann’s special qualities is his ability to establish a one-to-one relationship with his listener, to sort that listener out from the crowd and speak only to him or her. This is an essential Romantic ambition, and Schumann’s achievement of it brings him close as a personality in a way not available to a less open temperament. Like other Romantic artists who ended in madness, he paid for his intense way of living, and his dualized nature, divided between action and withdrawal, was both substance for poetic fantasy and a dangerous problem. If a rebirth of the spirit of early Romanticism is possible (or even desirable), the artist would once again have to risk being as revealed and present to his listener as is Schumann.

John Harbison

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer JOHN HARBISON, who has written numerous works (including three of his six symphonies) on commission from the BSO, and whose 80th birthday this past December the BSO celebrated by performing several of his works earlier this season, wrote this program note on Robert Schumann’s Symphony No. 1 in 1977 for performances played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in March of that year.

* One might add that this is also a sound exacerbated and not helped by poorly balanced performances on modern instruments.—Ed.

* Florestan and Eusebius were literary personas used by Schumann in his critical writings for the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, which he co-founded with friends in Leipzig in 1834.—Ed.

THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE OF SCHUMANN’S “SPRING” SYMPHONY was given in Boston on January 15, 1853, by the orchestra of the Musical Fund Society under the direction of F. Suck.

THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE of Schumann’s Symphony No. 1 was given on March 4, 1882, with Georg Henschel conducting, during the orchestra’s first season, subsequent BSO performances being given by Wilhelm Gericke, Arthur Nikisch, Emil Paur, Karl Muck, Max Fiedler, Ernst Schmidt, Pierre Monteux, Serge Koussevitzky, and Eugene Goossens, with Gericke, Nikisch, Paur, Muck, Fiedler, Monteux, and Koussevitzky leading the work numerous times in multiple seasons between 1884 and 1945. Since then, the work has been given in BSO concerts much less frequently, under the direction of Leonard Bernstein, Charles Munch, Jean Martinon, Erich Leinsdorf, Michael Tilson Thomas, Joseph Silverstein, Hermann Michael, Kurt Masur (including the most recent Tanglewood performance on July 15, 2011), Asher Fisch, and Gustavo Gimeno (the most recent subscription performances, in October 2017).

Igor Stravinsky

“Le Sacre du printemps,” Pictures from pagan Russia

IGOR FEDOROVICH STRAVINSKY was born at Oranienbaum, Russia (now Lomonosov in the Northwest Petersburg Region of Russia) on June 18, 1882, and died in New York City on April 6, 1971. “Le Sacre du printemps”
(“The Rite of Spring”) was formally commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev on August 8, 1911, and Stravinsky began composing almost immediately. He finished Part I by early January 1912 and completed the sketch score on November 17 “with an unbearable toothache.” The work was produced in Paris by Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet with Pierre Monteux conducting on May 29, 1913. Monteux would later lead the first Boston Symphony performances, on January 25 and 26, 1924, also leading the BSO in the first New York performance that January 31 and repeating it there with the BSO that March.

THE SCORE OF “LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS” calls for two piccolos, two flutes, and alto flute in G, four oboes (one doubling second English horn), English horn, three clarinets (one doubling second bass clarinet), high clarinet in E-flat, bass clarinet, three bassoons (one doubling second contrabassoon), contrabassoon, eight horns (two doubling Wagner tubas), four trumpets, high trumpet in D, bass trumpet, three trombones, two tubas, five timpani (divided between two players), bass drum, tambourine, cymbals, antique cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, rape guero, and strings.

Almost singlehandedly responsible for revealing the riches of Russian art, music, theater, and ballet to the world at large, Sergei Diaghilev was without question the most influential impresario of the 20th century. Having first arranged a Russian art exhibit in Paris in 1906, he followed up with a series of concerts of Russian music and then Mussorgsky’s powerful opera, Boris Godunov. In a particularly bold move, in 1909 he traveled to Paris with a complete troupe of set designers, costumers, choreographers, dancers, and composers to introduce the French to Russian ballet. The artistic world would never be quite the same.

Although not a performing artist himself, Diaghilev had the uncanny ability to find and nurture artistic talent. Indeed, his ballet troupe included such luminaries as choreographers Mikhail Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky, set designers Leon Bakst and Alexandre Benois, and the twenty-seven-year-old composer Igor Stravinsky. Diaghilev had first come in contact with Stravinsky in 1909, when he attended the premiere of two of the composer’s most dazzling orchestral works, Scherzo fantastique and Fireworks. Recognizing an original voice, Diaghilev immediately invited the composer to join his company. Thus began one of the most fruitful artistic collaborations of the last century.

Stravinsky’s first ballet for Diaghilev was The Firebird (L’Oiseau de feu), based on a Russian fairy story and choreographed by Mikhail Fokine. Collaborating closely with all the other artists involved in the project, he completed the score in a mere seven months. Narrative, choreography, set design, and costumes all developed in tandem with the music, establishing a collaborative pattern that would be repeated again and again throughout Stravinsky’s career. Firebird garnered rave reviews when it was premiered in Paris in June 1910 and added Stravinsky’s name to the vocabulary of the Parisian artistic community.

The musical language of Firebird is firmly rooted in 19th-century melodic and harmonic practice, but there are moments where we catch a glimpse of procedures that Stravinsky would employ in his later scores. Particularly notable are his use of exotic scales to represent the story’s magical dimension and his subtle handling of syncopation and cross-accents. In addition, Stravinsky required what he himself called a “wastefully large” orchestra (including an independent stage band, three harps, and a huge percussion section) to create brilliant, often breathtaking effects. Little wonder that Firebird remains one of Stravinsky’s most popular scores today.

Stravinsky’s next ballet for Diaghilev, Petrushka (1911), was a collaboration with Alexandre Benois. As Stravinsky explained, “in composing the music, I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life.” Stravinsky’s sensitivity to the coordination of music and choreography, already evident in Firebird, became even more finely tuned just as the movements and emotions of the characters found perfect expression in the music. The orchestra is leaner than before, but Stravinsky compensated with unusual combinations of instruments, including the piano, a newcomer to the symphony orchestra. In the first tableau, Stravinsky depicts the bustle of a pre-Lenten Russian fair by juxtaposing colorful blocks of musical material, often abruptly shifting from one to another. Stravinsky once said that “the success of Petrushka was good for me in that it gave me the absolute conviction of my ear.” It was, however, with the next ballet, Le Sacre du printemps, that Stravinsky’s place as the foremost composer of his day was secured.

While Paris eagerly awaited his next ballet, Stravinsky took two years to prepare the work, his most daring score to date. As with Petrushka, the impetus for composition was a visual image. In 1911, Stravinsky had a fleeting vision of a young girl dancing herself to death while surrounded by village elders in a pagan Russian ritual. He then turned to his friend, Nikolai Roerich, a painter and noted scholar in ancient Russian rites, and together they worked at a depiction of the ancient ritual that had attracted Stravinsky so profoundly. Having grown up in St. Petersburg, Stravinsky remembered the cracking of the ice over the rivers when spring arrived and the din that reverberated throughout the city. For him, the coming of spring was a violent occurrence: it seemed “to begin in an hour and was like the whole earth cracking.”

Roerich and Stravinsky divided the ballet into two parts, each beginning with an introduction. The action of the ballet was meant to depict the actual ritual of sacrifice; to this end, Stravinsky included no mime in the work, only dance. Each half contained a climactic set piece, thereby providing the ballet with two dramatic high points, and allowing for innovative and daring choreography. Vaslav Nijinsky, the star dancer in the Ballets Russes, and well
known to Parisian audiences for his controversial roles (most notably the faun in Debussy’s *Prélude à l’Apr`es midi d’un faune*), was asked to choreograph the ballet. After intensive rehearsals, at which both choreographer and composer were present, the piece was ready.

The premiere on May 29, 1913, led by Pierre Monteux at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, precipitated one of the most infamous riots in the history of Western music. During the introduction, even before the curtain rose, members of the audience began to hiss and shout. The strange orchestration and unusual harmonies, with the bassoon in its highest register and unresolved chords supporting the opening melodic line, both contributed to the tension in the theater. At first there were only isolated outbursts of laughter and mild protests, but as the curtain rose revealing a completely new approach to costuming and choreography, the commotion intensified. Once the caterwauling began, it never stopped.

Opposing factions in the audience began to bicker, some calling for the ballet to cease and others for silence so it could continue. Diaghilev attempted to stop the commotion by flicking the lights off and on, managing only to create an even more charged atmosphere. Because of the deafening noise, Nijinsky was forced to scream the count to the dancers while standing on a chair behind the curtain. When violence broke out the police were called in. Stravinsky stormed out of the theater after the performance, furious that his work had not been given a thorough hearing.

The next day the riot made the front pages of the Parisian newspapers.

What caused such a ruckus and why did the new ballet make such a violent impression? Some scholars have suggested that Diaghilev actually instigated the riot through the strategic placement of paid “protestors” in hopes of receiving good press coverage. Even this, however, does not fully explain the audience’s violent reaction to the work. Perhaps the audience was subjected to too much novelty at once, for it was not just the score that displayed an unfamiliar idiom, but also the scenario, the choreography, and even the costumes. In an attempt to depict prehistoric people, Nijinsky introduced gestures as alien to classical ballet as Stravinsky’s harmonies were to traditional musical practice. The dancers often stood knock-kneed with toes turned and stomped around flat-footed, leading the outraged audience to think that the art of ballet itself was under siege.

Stravinsky’s music drew heavily on folk song, though in later years he often tried to downplay his dependence upon it. Research on the *Rite* has uncovered much of this original folk material, though it is sometimes difficult to ascertain exactly what he borrowed. In general, Stravinsky treated the preexistent folk music as raw material, excising and utilizing gestures, melodic fragments, and patterns as he saw fit and, in the process, transforming the original into something entirely new for the ballet. Stravinsky’s real interest in these tunes lay in their potential for rhythmic manipulation, a very different procedure from that in *Petrushka*.

What is particularly revolutionary in the *Rite*, then, is not Stravinsky’s borrowing of folk song, but his transformation of it. There is an unprecedented use of dissonance in the piece, even though Stravinsky himself said that the use of nine-note chords was not particularly new. The accents and displaced rhythms that he superimposed on these chords, however, made for something genuinely unique. At times, he builds unstable rhythmic cells to which others are gradually added, resulting in a shifting sense of meter. Other composers had used similar techniques, but none with the energy and violence of Stravinsky, who fires these rhythmic cells at the audience in explosive combinations.

The *Rite* was performed in London several weeks after the notorious premiere and was revived in 1920 with new choreography by Massine. Unfortunately, Nijinsky’s choreography does not survive, though in 1987 the Joffrey Ballet attempted to reconstruct the original from reminiscences of living witnesses and performers, period photographs, and notations in the score itself—an exercise that received mixed reviews.

By the 1930s, the *Rite* was often performed as a concert piece and has since remained a staple of the orchestral repertoire, maintaining its power and savage beauty despite the absence of dancers. Time has not dulled its cutting-edge quality. Indeed, the *Rite* sounds new, even to our 21st-century ears. What was originally interpreted in 1913 as an attack on art in fact represented a daring vision of what art could say and how it could say it.

Elizabeth Seitz

**ELIZABETH SEITZ** received her doctorate from Boston University in 1995 and teaches at The Boston Conservatory; her interests range widely from Schubert to Tito Puente. A frequent pre-concert speaker for the BSO, she has lectured widely on various musical topics, including MTV as a cultural force in popular music.

**THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE** of “Le Sacre du printemps” was given by Leopold Stokowski with the Philadelphia Orchestra on March 3, 1922.

**THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES** of “Le Sacre du printemps” were given by Pierre Monteux on January 25 and 26, 1924, followed by the first New York performance that January 31. Since then, the BSO has also played “Le Sacre du printemps” under the direction of Serge Koussevitzky, Leonard Bernstein, Igor Markevitch, Eleazar de Carvalho, Erich Leinsdorf, Charles Wilson, Michael Tilson Thomas, William Steinberg, Seiji Ozawa, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Leonard Slatkin, Bernard Haitink, James Conlon, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, James Levine, Charles Dutoit, Andris Nelsons (the most recent subscription performances, in November 2014), and Giancarlo Guerrero (including the most recent Tanglewood performance, on August 11, 2017).
To Read and Hear More...


Noteworthy recorded cycles of the four Schumann symphonies—listed alphabetically by conductor, and including the final version of No. 4 unless otherwise noted—include Daniel Barenboim’s with the Staatskapelle Berlin (Warner Classics); Leonard Bernstein’s with either the New York Philharmonic (Sony) or Vienna Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon); Thomas Dausgaard’s with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra (BIS, with both the original and final versions of No. 4); Rafael Kubelík’s with either the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon) or the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Sony; this has the first and second violins seated antiphonally); James Levine’s with the Philadelphia Orchestra (RCA) or Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon); Kurt Masur’s with the London Philharmonic (Teldec); Sir Simon Rattle’s live with the Berlin Philharmonic, with the original 1841 version of No. 4 (Deutsche Grammophon); Yannick Nézet-Séguin’s with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (Deutsche Grammophon); Paul Paray’s with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (Mercury Living Presence); Wolfgang Sawallisch’s with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Warner Classics); George Szell’s with the Cleveland Orchestra (Sony), and Christian Thielemann’s with the Philharmonia Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon). Three period-instrument cycles are worth seeking: John Eliot Gardiner’s with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, with both versions of the Symphony No. 4 (Deutsche Grammophon); Roy Goodman’s with the period-instrument Hanover Band, with the original version of No. 4 (originally RCA, and for a while on Nimbus); and Philippe Herreweghe’s with the Orchestre des Champs-Elysées, with the final version of No. 4 (Harmonia Mundi). Riccardo Chailly and the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig recorded the four Schumann symphonies with Mahler’s alterations to Schumann’s original instrumentation (Decca).

Stephen Walsh, who wrote the Stravinsky article in the 2001 Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, is also author of a two-volume Stravinsky biography: *Stravinsky–A Creative Spring: Russia and France, 1882-1934 and Stravinsky–The Second Exile: France and America, 1934-1971* (Norton). The 1980 Grove entry was by Eric Walter White, author of the crucial reference volume *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works* (University of California). Other useful books include *Stravinsky and his World*, a collection of essays and documents edited by Tamara Levitz (Princeton University Press); *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, edited by Jonathan Cross, which includes a variety of essays on the composer’s life and works (Cambridge University Press); Michael Oliver’s *Igor Stravinsky* in the wonderfully illustrated series “20th-Century Composers” (Phaidon paperback), and Francis Routh’s *Stravinsky* in the “Master Musicians” series (Littlefield paperback). Books devoted to *Le Sacre du printemps* include Peter Hill’s *Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring* in the Cambridge Music Handbooks series (Cambridge University Press) and Pieter C. van den Toorn’s *Stravinsky and The Rite of Spring* (University of California Press). If you can find a used copy, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* by Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft offers a fascinating overview of the composer’s life (Simon and Schuster). Craft, who worked closely with Stravinsky for many years, has also written and compiled numerous other books on the composer. Charles M. Joseph’s *Stravinsky Inside Out* challenges some of the popular myths surrounding the composer (Yale University Press). The same author’s *Stravinsky and Balanchine* studies the relationship between those two collaborators (also Yale). Noteworthy among the many specialist publications are *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, edited by Jann Pasler (California), and Richard Taruskin’s two-volume, 1700-page *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through “Mavra,”* which treats Stravinsky’s career through the early 1920s (University of California). The Boston Symphony Orchestra has made three recordings of *Le Sacre du printemps*: first in 1951 for RCA (monaural) with Pierre Monteux, conductor of the 1913 premiere; then later with Michael Tilson Thomas in 1972 (Deutsche Grammophon) and Seiji Ozawa in 1979 (Philips). Stravinsky himself recorded *Le Sacre du printemps* first with the New York Philharmonic and then in 1960 with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra (CBS/Sony). Gustavo Dudamel has recorded it with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela (Deutsche Grammophon); also in a Decca twenty-CD box entitled “Stravinsky *Le Sacre du printemps*: 100th Anniversary Collectors Edition” including thirty-five recordings of the orchestral score, and three of the two-piano version, all originally issued on
Decca/London, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, and such subsidiary labels as Mercury, all of them now absorbed under the Universal label. Other recordings of interest (listed alphabetically by conductor) include Leonard Bernstein’s with the New York Philharmonic (Sony Classical), Pierre Boulez’s with the Cleveland Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Riccardo Chailly’s with the Cleveland Orchestra (Decca), Thierry Fischer’s with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (Signum Classics), Valery Gergiev’s with the Kirov Theater Orchestra (Philips), James Levine’s with the MET Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Ludovic Morlot’s with the Seattle Symphony (on that orchestra’s own label), and Yannick Nézet-Séguin’s with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon).

Benjamin Zander’s recording with the Boston Philharmonic pairs the orchestral version of Le Sacre with the composer’s own two-piano arrangement (IMP Masters). An interesting reissue pairs the great Russian-born conductor Igor Markevitch’s two recordings of Le Sacre, both with the Philharmonia Orchestra—in monaural from 1951 and in stereo from 1959—on a single disc (Testament).

Marc Mendel

Guest Artist
Gustavo Dudamel

Driven by an unwavering belief in the power of music to heal, unite, and inspire, Gustavo Dudamel is one of the most distinguished conductors of our day. From the great concert halls to classrooms, video screens, and movie theaters, his remarkable musical achievements, and his championing of access to the arts for young people around the world, demonstrate music’s extraordinary capacity to transform lives. Mr. Dudamel’s 2018-19 season centers around the centennial celebration of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he is now in his tenth year as its music and artistic director. Under his direction, the LA Phil has become one of the world’s leading orchestras, admired for its commitment to new music, diversity, and inclusion, and the development of groundbreaking digital initiatives. Other highlights of the season include his debut at the Metropolitan Opera conducting Verdi’s Otello; tours with the Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, and Mahler Chamber Orchestra; and his first extended academic residency at Princeton University. A lifelong advocate for music education and social development through art, Mr. Dudamel himself was shaped by his childhood experience with El Sistema, the extraordinary program of immersive musical training initiated in 1975 by José Antonio Abreu. Now in his nineteenth year as music director of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Dudamel carries on the work of his late mentor with his ongoing commitment to El Sistema in his native Venezuela (he was born in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, in 1981) and by supporting numerous Sistema-inspired projects around the world. He also continues to expand the reach of his Youth Orchestra Los Angeles (YOLA) initiative. Founded in 2007, the program has provided access to quality music education to tens of thousands of children from underserved communities around Los Angeles. One of the few classical musicians who has truly reached mainstream audiences while maintaining the highest musical integrity, Mr. Dudamel has reached hundreds of millions of people around the world through his cinema, television, radio, and online broadcasts. He has been the subject of a PBS special, Dudamel: Conducting of a Life; he has been interviewed by Conan O’Brien, Stephen Colbert, and Sesame Street’s Elmo; he had a cameo role in the award-winning Amazon Studios series Mozart in the Jungle; together with members of YOLA, he became the first classical musician to participate in the Super Bowl Halftime Show; he was the youngest-ever person to lead the Vienna Philharmonic’s New Year’s Day Concert; and, at John Williams’s personal request, he guest-conducted on the soundtrack for Star Wars: The Force Awakens. His discography includes landmark recordings such as John Adams’s Gospel According to the Other Mary (commissioned and performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic); the soundtrack to the motion picture Libertador, for which Dudamel composed the score; and works by Mahler, Mendelssohn, Mussorgsky, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Wagner, and many more. Gustavo Dudamel is one of the most decorated conductors of his generation. For his advocacy for the proliferation of the arts in the Americas, he received the 2018 Paez Medal of Art and the Pablo Neruda Order of Artistic and Cultural Merit, the Americas Society Cultural Achievement Award in 2016, and the 2014 Leonard Bernstein Lifetime Achievement Award for the Elevation of Music in Society from the Longy School of Music. Among many recognitions throughout his career, he was named Musical America’s 2013 Musician of the Year, one of the highest honors in the classical music industry, and was voted into the Gramophone Hall of Fame. The Gustavo Dudamel Foundation, a registered charity inspired by his early musical and mentoring experiences, was created in 2012 with the goal of promoting access to music as a human right and a catalyst for learning, integration, and social change. More information about Mr. Dudamel is available at his official website, gustavodudamel.com. Gustavo Dudamel makes his subscription series debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra this week and will return next weekend for a second series of concerts. Until this month, his only previous BSO appearance was an August 2006 concert at Tanglewood.