

Symphony in Three Movements

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)



- I. Overture, Allegro
- II. Andante; Interlude: l'istesso tempo
- III. Con Moto

10 April, 2006
James Sproul
Orchestra Literature
Dr. Schimek

The Composer

Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky was born on June 5th 1882. He was born to Feodor Stravinsky who was a famous bass vocalist. Igor began taking piano lessons at the age of nine. He grew as a pianist remarkably quickly and was playing concertos by Clementi, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven by his early teens. Soon thereafter he began to resent his teachers narrow look at music and began to show his rebellion by his characteristic violent piano playing that would carry into his adulthood.

Despite his obvious inclination toward music his parents refused to allow him to pursue a career in music and insisted that he attend St. Petersburg University to study criminal law and legal philosophy. Igor, by his own account, was a horrible student, and said it was not likely that he even attended fifty lectures of his entire four years at the university. However, it was during this time that his interest in music began to make its direction toward composition. It began as piano improvisations and transcriptions for the piano but soon graduated into original short pieces for piano.

Soon after Igor approached Rimsky-Korsokov to take a look at his original compositions, and even though Rimsky-Korsokov directed him not to try and enter the conservatory, he did eventually take him on as a pupil to direct his compositional direction. It is from Rimsky-Korsokov that Stravinsky would take many of the techniques that would make him famous.

After some years of study with Rimsky-Korsokov, Igor met Diaghilev who would jumpstart this young artists career with a series of ballets. Igor then moved to Paris in 1910, around the time of *The Firebird*, and lived in France and Switzerland for the major part of his creative years. He became a French citizen in 1936, before moving to the US in 1939, where he eventually became a citizen in 1945 and would live the rest of his life. Igor died in 1971 in New York City.

About the Symphony

Symphony in Three Movements was composed between April of 1942 and August 7th 1945. Stravinsky conducted the premiere with the New York Philharmonic, who had commissioned the piece, on January 24th, 1946. It is a late work, beginning to work on it when he was already 60 years old. This symphony mimics many of his earlier masterpieces, such as *Petroushka*, *Rite of Spring* and others.

Stravinsky's own comments about this symphony are of little use. He describes a lengthy program inspired by a series of war-time news-films and also says that the slow movement is based on music he had written for a film "*The Song of Bernadette*" and then contradicts himself by adding "in spite of what I have said, the symphony is not programmatic." This is quite typical of Stravinsky speaking of his own works. He would often say contradictory statements about what a piece was. He even has made many contradictory statements about how, when and where his father died and was buried. The score calls for:

2 flutes and piccolo	2 Bassoons	3 Trombones	Piano
2 Oboes,	Contrabassoon	Tuba	Harp
3 Clarinets	4 Horns	Timpani	Strings
Bass Clarinet	3 Trumpets	Bass Drum	

Performance is Approximately 22 minutes.

MOVEMENT I – Overture – Allegro

“...inspired by a war film, ...of scorched earth tactics in China.” With just six notes Stravinsky catapults the audience into a propulsion. The movement opens brutally, with slashing scales and harsh octaves. This initial phrase is the only subject even though Stravinsky simulates a sonata form. The horn-call masquerades as a second subject, chattering bassoons represent a loose development section full of “Obsessive jabberings”. The “recapitulation” is marked by a huge crescendo and in the end only the jabberings remain, a cackling of bass clarinet as the music burns itself out in an ashen cord. The piano has a major part of almost concerto-like prominence, and Stravinsky uses it like a tuned percussion instrument, which mimics several of his earlier works, many of which were originally designed as piano concertos including this opening movement.

MOVEMENT II – Andante – Interlude (l’istesso tempo): The contrast of this movement is fairly obvious. Coming from the point of burning from the first movement the air has now cooled and things have settled down. There is a grounded bass line that a soaring and lilting melody floats over, but cannot decide if it is in major or minor, yet another typical Stravinsky mark, and there is a prominent harp solo. This movement is much more ethereal but soon becomes marred and the cool blue sky of the opening returns, but this time it is troubled by clouds of grey smoke. There is a short interlude that leads directly into the Con Moto.

MOVEMENT III – Con moto: “*The beginning [is] a reaction to newsreels...of goose-stepping soldiers. The square march-beat, brass-band instrumentation, [and] grotesque [tuba] crescendo... are all related to those abhorrent pictures.*” There is again only one real subject in this movement and even that subject derives from the first movements “theme”, but this time with more variation in a somewhat rondo fashion. This series of variations represents the its more graphic nature. This movement returns to the world of violence from the first movement but still with the modal ambiguity retained from the second movement, and with a major influence from the emerging jazz world of the time. There is an Nazi representative opening that is transformed and almost comically to a grinding halt, where, calmly, the trombone, piano and harp begin a fugue. The build up to the end is probably the most violent music Stravinsky had written since the Rite of Spring over thirty years earlier, while the final chord, with its jazz influenced added 6th, is not at all what the ear has been led to expect.

White, Eric Walter: *Stravinsky: A Composer and His Works*. U. of California Press. 1966, p. 389-397.

Vlad, Roman. *Stravinsky*. Oxford University Press, London. 1960. p.146-150.

Cover Portrait by Pablo Picasso.