

A VIEW FROM THE PODIUM

Thirty six years ago this week (on April 6), **Igor Stravinsky** passed away in New York City. He was laid to rest a week later in Venice, Italy, with grand pomp and circumstances appropriately suited to a man who so deeply marked his musical century.

Stravinsky belongs to my “desert island” exclusive club of composers without whom (my) life would be diminished. There is a vital “life force” to his music which I find simply irresistible. Its stunning power emanates from an unequalled (and Machiavellian I might add) use of rhythms.

I have always felt that, of the three fundamental building blocks in music (melody, harmony and rhythm,) the latter had seen the least revolutionary progress in Western music up to the early 20th century. When compared to the complex rhythmic syntax of African, Middle Eastern and particularly Indian music, our western tradition, in spite of its finest masters, remained somewhat limited and overly constricted by the confine of the bar line and binary/ternary relationships. That was about to change in no subtle ways with Stravinsky’s three astonishingly revolutionary ballets: “L’Oiseau de Feu”, “Le Sacre du Printemps” and “Petrouchka” and much of his music thereafter. The genius of Stravinsky lies in his ability to completely free his rhythmic vocabulary from any restriction while communicating these limitless ideas through manageable (albeit challenging) musical notation. With his music, rhythm experiences its first total emancipation.

I could devote pages on Stravinsky’s equally brilliant melodic ideas, both completely original and at times rooted in ebullient Russian folklore, or his unmistakable and so highly personal orchestration, his harmonic audacity, his daring exploration of genres from Neo-Classicism to 12 tone technique. My ineluctable conclusion would be that Stravinsky had no creative weakness; that the superior intelligence, integrity and courage in which he cultivated his muse remains to this day, a model that has inspired generations of composers who owe him some of the keys to complete creative freedom and daring.

“Music in Motion” is a project that is very dear to me. It represents a new direction and a sign of things to come where the classical orchestra takes on new 21st century clothes and experiments in a spirit of partnership and discovery. I am particularly grateful to Donald Byrd for sharing his cunning and inspired creativity, to the Spectrum dancers for taking on the challenge of dancing with such abandon and panache in a limited space and to the Northwest Sinfonietta musicians for, as always, giving their all to anything I have been throwing at them for the past 15 years.

It is our hope that “Music in Motion” will further enrich your orchestral experience and pave the way to a lot more of such meeting of the minds.

With warmest regards,
Christophe Chagnard