

Introduction

Marcus A. Thompson

In January 2010, our first BCMS Winter Festival and Forum Series presented jointly with the MIT Music and Theater Arts Faculty explored a segment of the chamber music repertoire through the lens of ideas about Musical Time—within the music, accompanying texts, and other artistic media.

Our 2011 BCMS Winter Special Event, also jointly presented by the MIT Music and Theater Arts Faculty, focuses on musical and visual works created to accompany ballets presented by Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois as well as on song collections by Ravel and Poulenc first seen and heard in Paris just before, during, and soon after the First World War. The concept for this program began with a search for music and visual images intended to complement each other. From there the project broadened to explore examples of collaboration and dialogue between the arts, and among artists of equal stature, where the result was a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

It is probably not an accident that we ended up with works from a place and time—in Paris at turn of the twentieth century—when strongly held views were loudly advanced through one kind of anti-establishment ‘ism’ or another. As political systems failed, war and epidemic raged, science and technology questioned certainties and the whole world seemed to be asking fundamental questions about recreating ourselves—for artists and poets it was a time to re-imagine and re-create the world.

As the longtime refuge for political and intellectual émigrés, Paris had also become the place for literary, theatrical, and musical artists to encounter modernist thought, and to form creative and protective alliances for an assault on the citadels of French tradition and taste in the interest of the new. In the minds and hands of its boldest artists the act of creation was inseparable from that of demolishing the status quo. This assault by the avant-garde took as many forms as there were talented people with ideas: as special events, public spectacles, *scandale*, factional demonstrations at openings and exhibitions, and in the withering criticism to follow.

Writers and poets, who turned the lofty language of the Symbolists into irony, burlesque or everyday conversation, pursued the exotic in Nature, natural histories and creation mythologies, or sought to capture a “walk-on-the-wild-side” through the shabbier *quartiers* of Paris, its cafés, popular theaters, and dens of iniquity. Visual artists were equally occupied with Nature and the nature of everyday reality—shattering both effete decorum and perspective, boldly juxtaposing colors, modeling the geometry of African and Oceanic forms, and embracing modern mechanical developments from industry and war.

Musicians were as active in their pursuit of the ‘new’ in Paris. They had the greatest impact through music for ballet, an art form long associated with lofty and spiritual ideals of the French aristocracy. Under the leadership of Sergei Diaghilev, in collaboration with leading writers and visual artists, and amid the successes of exotic émigrés of the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois, musicians sought a means of realizing comprehensive collaborations among artists that had historically been regarded in the theater with a mystical faith as holding the greatest promise for artistic rebirth. The popularity of Richard Wagner’s operas among French audiences in Paris during the 1890s and early 1900s made Wagner’s realization of *Gesamtkunstwerk*

(complete art work in which he created the story, poetic libretto and music) an artistic achievement to be envied, assaulted, and surpassed by the avant-garde for reasons artistic and nationalistic.

We can only imagine what the seventy-eight year old Saint-Saëns must have been thinking when he reportedly left the audience on May 29, 1913 during the premiere of Stravinsky's "great insult to habit" called *Le Sacre du printemps* (Scenes of Pagan Russia). Debussy, reacting at age 51 to its brutal and irregular rhythms, called *Le Sacre* "an extraordinary, ferocious thing... primitive music with every modern convenience." He is known to have performed the bass part of the four-hand piano version at sight with Stravinsky on the upper part without apparent difficulty.

For twenty-four year old poet Jean Cocteau, *Le Sacre* was not only a view of the primitive, filled with "savage sadness" and "noises of farm and camp" with "little melodies that arrive from the depth of the centuries." As spectacle it fulfilled the theatrical ideal of "an alliance of all the arts uniting in a common object... [as the] perfect and... only true work of art." (Wagner)

Uniquely poised between the separate worlds of the Ballets Russes, and of Post-Impressionists, Symbolists, Fauvists, Cubists, Orphists and Surrealists, Cocteau realized that were he able to corral and cajole into a common project Picasso (whom poet Guillaume Apollinaire had celebrated among the Cubists) and Satie (whose simplicity of musical texture had impressed him), he would have the answer to Diaghilev's only requirement for a new ballet: "Astound me!"

In creating the scenario for *Parade*, and successfully recruiting Picasso, Satie and Massine to the cause, Cocteau was able to extend the tradition that had drawn Toulouse-Lautrec to the popular music halls and Picasso and his friends to the Cirque Médrano. *Parade* was premiered in 1917 and created yet another *scandale*. However, success by *scandale*, even at the Ballets Russes, did not guarantee acceptance as an artist among the avant-gardists he courted. In those circles Cocteau was regarded as little more than a prodigious opportunist. History has since recognized his mastery as poet, novelist, dramatist, film-maker, portraitist, and designer of posters, pottery, tapestries, mosaics, neckties, jewelry: someone in whose real life the arts were united.

By 1918 Jean Cocteau had moved on to further collaborations, this time by naming and promoting the works of six composers known as "Les Six." Among them were Erik Satie, whom he had selected to create music for *Parade*, and Darius Milhaud, with whom he was to collaborate in his next stage work, *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, in 1920.

Cocteau's example can certainly be felt in *La Création du monde* with the coming together of poet Blaise Cendrars, painter Fernand Léger, and composer Darius Milhaud. In 1923 Cendrars, who with fellow poet Guillaume Apollinaire, had assaulted the ideals of the Symbolist poets, published his study of ancient theories regarding the creation of the world as understood among African peoples. Naturally, these theories would challenge the Judeo-Christian account of creation and inspire Cendrars to propose a wordless scenic narrative as a ballet to a rival company working in Paris, the Ballets Suédois. The success of Ballets Suédois's productions was said by Georges Auric (another one of 'Les Six') to rest on their ability to attract "no longer just the elite or the snobs, but the general Paris public." The choreography was by Jean Börlin, who three years earlier had performed one of his first and most original compositions in recital, *Sculpture nègre*. For that performance and for *La Création du monde* he had studied documentary films of black African dancers. As

a result, *La Création du monde* became the first European ballet to be derived from African dance.

In 1922 Fernand Léger published an article in which he said “modern man lives in preponderant geometrical order.” He was soon drawn into creating cutting edge Cubist costumes and sets after studying recently published catalogs of geometric African masks. Like many of the larger African masks, these costumes obscure the human identity and movement of the wearer in favor of projecting that of the animal or deity. Léger produced many studies for the sets and was never satisfied that his masks were scary enough. Darius Milhaud, who had recently returned from two years in Brazil and been exposed to music of the tropical forest, also heard jazz for the first time on trips to London and New York’s Harlem. The juxtaposition of urban jazz and tropical sounds in the musical score has remained better known than the story or the visuals.

It is very likely the high quality of the visual images by Toulouse-Lautrec (1899) and Pierre Bonnard (1904) of Jules Renard’s *Les Histoires naturelles* (1896) drew Ravel to undertake song settings of poems about local birds and farm animals. The poems, witty, unsentimental but affectionate, ascribe human characteristics and foibles to the animals. Renard, who admitted to an ignorance of music, expressed little interest in the effort and did not attend the premiere of Ravel’s *Histoires naturelles* (1906). The songs were greeted with public outrage and outcry over their choice of subject, accompanying harmonies, and a syllabification of the French language that polite society associated with cafés and music halls.

By contrast, Francis Poulenc’s song settings of six poems from Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Le Bestiaire ou cortège d’Orphée* were regarded then and since as highly sensitive, insightful and predictive of the reputation he would earn as the greatest musical interpreter of French poetry. Apollinaire’s spiritual identification with Orpheus as inspired guide, charmer of stones, and tamer of beast and men is consistent with his expressed desire to unite music, the visual arts, and poetry to give form to an inner life that would create a whole new universe. The collaboration between Apollinaire and Dufy that produced Dufy’s first published illustrations yielded one of the most celebrated illustrated books of the new century.

At age eighteen, and as the youngest of Cocteau’s “Les Six,” Poulenc was drawn into Apollinaire’s creative circle by his intuitive interpretation of poetry. If his music was to show any revolt or rejection of the status quo, it was to be against intellectual fads and ‘isms’ in favor of finding his own true lyrical voice. Poulenc’s first published songs (under the guidance of Georges Auric) were to follow. In time, Poulenc’s fruitful and somewhat Orphic collaboration with Apollinaire would yield settings of thirty-five poems following Apollinaire’s early death from influenza.

The four-hand piano versions of the ballets scores and the song collections were each heard for the first time in the intimacy of the chamber, studio, or salon. That intimacy of idea and action, mind and hand, are challenge, inspiration, and opportunity to those of us who play chamber music.

BOSTON CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY MIT MUSIC AND THEATER ARTS FACULTY

Saturday, January 22, 2011 • Kresge Auditorium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Forum **1:30-3:00 p.m.**

Introduction by Marcus Thompson (Artistic Director, Boston Chamber Music Society; Professor of Music, MIT)
Ann Allen (Adjunct Lecturer, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Member, Council for the Arts at MIT)
Jonathan McPhee (Music Director, Boston Ballet)

Concert **4:00 p.m**

Satie ***Parade (1917)***
Based on a theme by Jean Cocteau; curtain, sets and costumes by Pablo Picasso

Prelude of the Red Curtain
Entry of the First Manager
Chinese Conjuror
Entry of the Second Manager
Young American Girl
Ragtime of the Packet Steamer (“the Titanic”)
Entry of the Third Manager
Acrobats
Supreme Effort and Fall of the Managers
Continuation of the Prelude of the Red Curtain
Mihae Lee, *piano* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

Ravel ***Histoires naturelles (1906)***
Poems by Jules Renard; illustrations by Pierre Bonnard and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

The Peacock
The Cricket
The Swan
The Kingfisher
The Guinea Fowl
David Kravitz, *baritone* Mihae Lee, *piano*

Milhaud

***La Création du monde* (1923)**

***Ballet nègre in one act by Blaise Cendrars; sets and costumes
by Fernand Léger***

Overture

The Chaos before Creation

The Creation of Trees, Plants, Insects, Birds and Beasts

Man and Woman Created

The Desire of Man and Woman

The Man and Woman Kiss

Mihae Lee, *piano* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Poulenc

***Le Bestiaire ou cortège d'Orphée* (1920)**

Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire; woodcuts by Raoul Dufy

The Camel

The Tibetan Goat

The Grasshopper

The Dolphin

The Crawfish

The Carp

David Kravitz, *baritone* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

Stravinsky

***Le Sacre du printemps* (1913)**

Sets and costumes by Nicholas Roerich

FIRST PART

Adoration of the Earth

Augurs of Spring

Ritual of Abduction

Spring Rounds

Ritual of the Rival Tribes

Procession of the Sage

The Sage

Dance of the Earth

SECOND PART

The Sacrifice

Mystic Circles of the Young Girls

Glorification of the Chosen One

Evocation of the Ancestors

Ritual Action of the Ancestors

Sacrificial Dance

Mihae Lee, *piano* Randall Hodgkinson, *piano*

Erica Schiller, *image projection* Simone Ovsey, *sound effects (Satie)*

ERIK SATIE (1866-1925)

Parade

Erik Satie was a composer of miniatures, often light in character, seemingly inconsequential and with bizarre titles, yet he turned out to be a significant influence on Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc and even John Cage. His musical gifts were such that he entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of thirteen, but the records of the institution show him to have been as lazy as he was gifted, and he was expelled after three years for failing to reach the required standard.

Satie absorbed the current musical trends, being particularly influenced in his earlier works by Chabrier, and devouring books on mystical religion, Gregorian chant and Gothic art. Once he had begun to frequent Montmartre with some of his artistic friends, his shy and reserved personality evolved into a more outgoing character. He became closely acquainted with Debussy, and for a quarter of a century the two continued a stimulating and difficult friendship, one in which Debussy was happy to assert his superiority and Satie played the court jester to conceal his humiliation. A well-known instance of the way this relationship affected Satie's music occurred when Debussy admonished Satie that he should pay more attention to form in his music. Satie responded by composing *Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear*.

He knew his technique was limited, but he wrote miniatures with unusual harmonic ideas. For a number of years he had to make his living as an entertainment pianist in cafes, a fate that he considered "a great lowering," and in writing songs for the music halls, though many of these later turned up, suitably embellished, in some of his larger works. Between 1905 and 1908 he undertook further study in counterpoint, fugue, and orchestration with d'Indy and Roussel at the Schola Cantorum, though this did not prove to have any strong effect on his musical style or the facility of his output.

Satie actually began to become known outside of his personal circle when Ravel played some of his pieces at a concert of the Société Musicale Indépendante in 1911, and he suddenly became a "prophetic" composer, a forerunner of new musical trends. After World War I, Satie was discovered by Jean Cocteau, who had heard the *Three Pieces* in 1915 and promoted performances of his music in public concerts and society soirees. A group of young French composers gathered around him, not so influenced by his music per se, but eager to break away from the heavy, stifling seriousness of the post-romantic music then being promulgated by such established composers as d'Indy in France or Richard Strauss in Germany. These composers—who included Poulenc and Milhaud, and who were later somewhat arbitrarily designated as "The Six"—were delighted to introduce elements of popular music into their scores, a tendency in which Satie preceded them.

The idea for *Parade* came from Jean Cocteau after he had seen *The Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky. In 1915 he sought an introduction to Pablo Picasso, who was the leading exponent of Cubism. Cocteau invited Picasso to join him and Satie to create a new ballet that would "distill all the involuntary emotion" given off by various forms of popular entertainment. Picasso agreed to do the set and costume designs and Leonid Massine the choreography. *Parade* was premiered at the Châtelet Theater in Paris on May 18, 1917. Satie prepared the piano duo version to be performed here soon after the premiere. Two years later he added an introduction and finale to the orchestral version, but left the piano duo version as it was.

The ballet celebrates Paris street life, with a collage of music hall, ragtime, themes from the cinema, and “real life” noises such as steamboat whistles, pistol shots and typewriters. The plot is exceedingly simple, symbolizing the disconnect between modern artists and their public: A fair booth is erected on a Paris street of a Sunday afternoon, and three managers offer samples of the show to be seen inside. The bystanders, however, think that they are seeing the actual show and fail to enter the theater, leaving the managers and their performers to droop in resignation. The French manager presents a Chinese magician in a colorful costume performing sleight-of-hand tricks in a mechanistic manner. The American manager presents a little American girl in a schoolgirl’s sailor jacket who dances in a series of movement styles—western hoedown, Charlie Chaplin’s shuffle, miming a typewriter and shooting a gun (with appropriate sounds coming from the pit). The final “manager” is two dancers in a horse costume followed by a pair of acrobats. The episodes are presented as mirror forms, so that the entire structure seems to reflect itself, even as it suggests other music, including a possible reference to Irving Berlin’s 1911 song *That Mysterious Rag*.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Histoires naturelles

These songs, among the most original that Ravel ever composed, were the cause of scandal, for that most French of reasons: the pronunciation of the language! For centuries composers setting French poetic texts had planned the melodic line to allow for the singing of syllables at the ends of words that are mute when the word is spoken. The reason for this is usually that the poet counts the mute syllable in the prosody of the line, as part of the poetic effect. But Jules Renard’s texts are in prose, and when read aloud, the mute *e* (or other mute ending) remains mute.

Ravel had the nerve to set these texts to music like the prose they are. They sing like a wonderful casual comment by some *boulevardier*. The melodic line, too, is essentially prosy, not sustained lyrical melody. It is the union of voice and accompaniment that makes these songs so delicious offers up observations, almost scientifically precise, of the behavior of the animals that Renard describes.

Le Paon

Il va sûrement se marier aujourd’hui.
 Ce devait être pour hier.
 En habit de gala, il était prêt.
 Il n’attendait que sa fiancée.
 Elle n’est pas venue.
 Elle ne peut tarder.
 Glorieux, il se promène avec une allure de prince
 indien et porte sur lui les riches présents
 d’usage.

L’amour avive l’éclat de ses couleurs et son aigrette
 tremble comme un lyre.

La fiancée n’arrive pas.
 Il monte au haut du toit et regarde du côté du soleil.
 Il jette son cri diabolique: Léon! Léon!
 C’est ainsi qu’il appelle sa fiancée.

The Peacock

He will certainly be married today.
 It should have been yesterday.
 In his gala attire he was ready.
 He was only waiting for his fiancée.
 She has not come.
 She cannot be long.
 Magnificent, he walks with the demeanor of an
 Indian prince bearing about him the customary
 rich gifts.

Love enhances the brilliance of his colors and his
 crest trembles like a lyre.

The fiancée does not come.
 He mounts to the roof top and looks towards the sun.
 He utters his fiendish cry: Léon! Léon!
 It is thus that he calls his fiancée.

Il ne voit rien venir et personne ne répond.
Les volailles habituées ne lèvent même point la tête.
Elles sont lasses de l'admirer.
Il redescend dans la cour, si sûr d'être beau qu'il est
incapable de rancune.
Son mariage sera pour demain.
Et, ne sachant que faire du reste de la journée, il se
dirige vers le perron.
Il gravit les marches, comme des marches de temple,
d'un pas officiel.
Il relève sa robe à queue toute lourde des yeux qui
n'ont pu se détacher d'elle.
Il répète encore une fois la cérémonie.

Le Grillon

C'est l'heure où, las d'errer, l'insecte nègre revient de
promenade et répare avec soin le désordre de
son domaine.
D'abord il ratisse ses étroites allées de sable.
Il fait du bran de scie qu'il écarte au seuil de sa
retraite.
Il lime la racine de cette grande herbe propre à le
harceler.
Il se repose.
Puis il remonte sa minuscule montre.
A-t-il fini? Est-elle cassée?
Il se repose encore un peu.
Il rentre chez lui et ferme sa porte.
Longtemps il tourne sa clef dans la serrure délicate.

Et il écoute:
Point d'alarme dehors.
Mais il ne se trouve pas en sûreté.
Et comme par une chaînette dont la poulie grince, il
descend jusqu'au fond de la terre.
On n'entend plus rien.
Dans la campagne muette, les peupliers se dressent
comme des doigts en l'air et désignent la lune.

Le Cygne

Il glisse sur le bassin, comme un traîneau blanc, de
nuage en nuage.
Car il n'a faim que des nuages floconneux qu'il voit
naître, bouger, et se perdre dans l'eau.
C'est l'un d'eux qu'il désire.
Il le vise du bec, et il plonge tout à coup son col vêtu
de neige.
Puis, tel un bras de femme sort d'une manche, il le

He sees nothing coming and no one replies.
The fowls who are used to him never even raise
their heads. They are tired of admiring him.
He descends again to the courtyard, so sure of his
beauty that he is incapable of resentment.
His marriage will take place tomorrow.
And not knowing what to do for the rest of the day,
he turns towards the flight of steps.
He ascends as though they were the steps of a
temple, with an official tread.
He spreads open his tail, heavy with all the eyes
that could not leave it.
Once more he repeats the ceremony.

The Cricket

This is the hour when, tired of wandering, the brown
insect returns from his outing and carefully
tidies the disorder of his home.
First he rakes his narrow sandy paths.
He makes some sawdust which he spreads on the
threshold of his retreat.
He files the root of this tall grass likely to annoy him.
He rests.
Then he rewinds his tiny watch.
Has he stopped? Is it broken?
He rests again for a moment.
He goes inside and shuts the door.
For a long time he turns the key in the delicate lock.

And he listens:
Not a sound outside.
But he does not feel safe.
And as though by a little chain with a creaking
pulley, he descends to the bowels of the earth.
Nothing more is to be heard.
In the silent countryside, the poplars rise like fingers
in the air pointing at the moon.

The Swan

He glides on the lake, like a white sleigh, from one
cloud to another.
For the only hunger he feels is for the fleecy clouds
that he sees appearing, moving, and vanishing
in the water.
It is one of these that he wants.
He takes aim with his beak, and suddenly plunges
his snowy neck into the water.
Then, like a woman's arm emerging from a sleeve,

retire.

Il n'a rien.

Il regarde: les nuages effarouchés ont disparu.

Il ne reste qu'un instant désabusé, car les nuages tardent peu à revenir, et là-bas, où meurent les ondulations de l'eau, en voici un qui se reforme.

Doucement, sur son léger coussin de plumes, le cygne rame et s'approche.

Il s'épuise à pêcher de vains reflets, et peut-être qu'il mourra victime de cette illusion, avant d'attraper un seul morceau de nuage.

Mais qu'est-ce que je dis?

Chaque fois qu'il plonge, il fouille du bec la vase nourrissante et ramène un ver.

Il engraisse comme une oie.

Le Martin-pêcheur

Ça n'a pas mordu ce soir,
mais je rapporte une rare émotion.

Comme je tenais ma perche de ligne tendue, un martin-pêcheur est venu s'y poser.

Nous n'avons pas d'oiseau plus éclatant.

Il semblait une grosse fleur bleue
au bout d'une longue tige.

La perche pliait sous le poids.

Je ne respirais plus, tout fier d'être pris pour un arbre par un martin-pêcheur.

Et je suis sûr qu'il ne s'est pas envolé de peur, mais qu'il a cru qu'il ne faisait que passer d'une branche à une autre.

La Pintade

C'est la bossue de ma cour.

Elle ne rêve que plaies à cause de sa bosse.

Les poules ne lui disent rien:

Brusquement, elle se précipite et les harcèle.

Puis elle baisse la tête, penche le corps,
et de toute la vitesse de ses pattes maigres,
elle court frapper de son bec dur,
juste au centre de la roue d'une dinde.

Cette poseuse l'agaçait.

Ainsi, la tête bleuie, ses barbillons à vif, cocardière,
elle rage du matin au soir.

Elle se bat sans motif,
peut-être parce qu'elle s' imagine
toujours qu'on se moque de sa taille,
de son crâne chauve et de sa queue basse.

he draws it back.

He has caught nothing.

He looks: the startled clouds have disappeared.

He is disillusioned only for a moment, for the clouds are not slow to return, and yonder, where the undulations of the water are dying away, there is one which is reforming.

Softly, upon a light cushion of feathers, the swan paddles and draws near.

He is exhausted by fishing for empty reflections and perhaps he will die a victim of this illusion, without having caught a single piece of cloud.

But what am I saying?

Each time he plunges in, he burrows in the nourishing mud and brings out a worm.

He is growing as fat as a goose.

The Kingfisher

Not a bite this evening,
but I had a thrilling experience.

As I was holding out my fishing rod,
a kingfisher came and perched on it.

We have no bird more brilliant.

He seemed like a big blue flower
on the end of a long stalk.

The rod bent under the weight.

I held my breath, quite proud to be taken for a tree by a kingfisher.

And I am sure that he did not fly away out of fear,
but believed that he was only passing from one branch to another.

The Guinea Fowl

She is the hunchback of my courtyard.

She thinks of nothing but fighting due to her hump.

The fowls say nothing to her:

suddenly she sets on them and harasses them.

Then she lowers her head, leans forward,
and with all the speed of her skinny feet,
she runs and smites with her hard beak
the exact center of a turkey's tail.

This poseur provoked her.

Thus, with her head bluish, her wattles lively, fiercely aggressive, she rages from morning to night.

She fights for no reason,
perhaps because she is always imagining that they are laughing at her figure,
at her bald head, and her mean low tail.

Et elle ne cesse de jeter un cri discordant qui perce
l'air comme une pointe.

Parfois elle quitte la cour et disparaît.

Elle laisse aux volailles pacifiques un moment de
répit.

Mais elle revient plus turbulente et plus criarde.

Et, frénetique, elle se vautre par terre.

Qu'a-t-elle donc?

La sournoise fait une farce.

Elle est allée pondre son oeuf à la campagne.

Je peux le chercher si ça m'amuse.

Et elle se roule dans la poussière comme une bossue.

And incessantly she utters her discordant cry
which pierces the air like a needle point.

At times she leaves the courtyard and disappears.

She gives the peace-loving fowls a moment of
respite.

But she returns more boisterous and more peevish.

And in a frenzy, she wallows in the earth.

Whatever is the matter with her?

The crafty creature has played a prank.

She went to lay her egg in the open country.

I may look for it if I like.

And she rolls in the dust like a hunchback.

DARIUS MILHAUD (1892–1974)

***La Création du monde* (The Creation of the World)**

Among the most prolific of 20th century composers, with a catalogue running well past 400 works, many of them quite large, Darius Milhaud absorbed music wherever he went and transmuted the received impressions into his own work. Having done so, he would move on to new territory. The mere fact that a work in one style might prove to be very popular was not enough to induce him to continue writing in that style; he also needed to find musical problems worth solving. Among his most successful works were those inspired by his encounters with various popular musical traditions during and immediately after the First World War. Two years in South America left an indelible impression on him, followed closely by the influence of American jazz, which began making its way to Europe via recordings long before musicians traveled there in person. Already in 1919 Milhaud composed the flip, cheeky, jazzy ballet *Le Boeuf sur le toit* as a musical depiction of an American speak-easy, though at that time he had never seen one. Most “serious” musicians of the 1920s in the United States considered jazz a form of musical primitivism that was beneath contempt, a view that had as much to do with racism as with musical values. Any bibliography of writing about jazz in that period is filled with articles posing such trenchant questions as whether listening to jazz might not bring about the destruction of western civilization and all that was good and moral and wholesome, and whether jazz should be considered to have a place under the rubric of “music” at all. Milhaud’s own memoirs, *Notes Without Music*, recall an incident during his first American visit. He had given a lecture at Harvard, which was followed by a party given by Archibald T. Davison, a friend of the composer’s on the Harvard faculty:

Dr. Davison had chosen Hotel Brunswick for the party, because it had an excellent jazz orchestra, and he knew I would like to hear it. When I arrived in New York, I had told the newspapermen interviewing me that European music was considerably influenced by American music. “But whose music?” they asked me; “Maccowell’s or Carpenter’s?” “Neither the one nor the other,” I answered, “I mean jazz.” They were filled with consternation, for at that time most American musicians had not realized the importance of jazz as an art form and relegated it to the dance hall. The headlines given to my interviews proved the astonishment caused by my statements: “Milhaud admires jazz” or “Jazz dictates the future of European music.”

Later he had a chance to hear real New Orleans jazz at a Harlem nightspot:

The music I heard was absolutely different from anything I had ever heard before and was a revelation to me. Against the beat of the drums the melodic lines crisscrossed in a breathless pattern of broken and twisted rhythms.

For the rest of his American stay, he frequented places where jazz could be heard, soaking up as much music as he could find. He took records, purchased in a Harlem shop, back to Europe with him, and resolved to use the new style in a chamber work. He had been scheduled to work with Fernand Léger and Blaise Cendrars on a ballet. The scenario by Cendrars drew from African folklore to tell a version of the creation. Léger's designs drew inspiration from animal costumes worn by African dancers during religious rites.

At last, in *La Création du monde*, I had the opportunity I had been waiting for to use these elements of jazz to which I had devoted much study. I adopted the same orchestra as used in Harlem, seventeen solo instruments, and I made wholesale use of the jazz style to convey a purely classical feeling.

La Création du monde was composed in 1923 and given its first performance by Ballet Suédois in Paris. No one is likely to confuse Milhaud's work with actual New Orleans jazz. The legato waves of melody at the opening come from a different musical world, but when the tempo speeds up into a rhythmic and bluesy fugue the source of inspiration is beyond question. The ensuing sections return to the opening material and call up sultry lamenting melodies before breaking out in a still faster tempo with a four-bar rhythmic lick as an ostinato accompaniment, which builds to a kind of melodic free-for-all characteristic of New Orleans jazz. Earlier ideas summarize the discourse in concluding this score, which remains one of the most successful examples of a rapprochement between symphony and jazz band ever written.

FRANCIS POULENC (1899-1963)

***La Bestiaire ou Cortège d'Orphée* (The Bestiary or Cortege of Orpheus)**

Though he eventually became one of the most significant French composers of song in the 20th century, Poulenc was a slow starter, seeming at first to be only playing games with music—he was from a wealthy family and did not need to earn a living—and he was simply himself, without pretension of being anything more. In the cultural ferment of the 1920s, he began to establish himself, first with lively musical numbers filled with the jaunty swagger of a *boulevardier*, and later opening up also a vein of deep, often religious, sobriety.

La Bestiare (1919) is Poulenc's earliest significant piece. He chose six quatrains by Apollinaire, having heard the poet read the work shortly before his death at a bookstore in Paris. These animal pieces are tiny, but astonishingly varied between the witty and the serious. Poulenc's lack of technique is most apparent in the constant linking together of two-bar phrases, with no attempt at a broader or more thorough development of his ideas. Yet their direct charm has appealed to both singers and audiences from the beginning.

Le Dromadaire

Avec ses quatre dromadaires
Don Pedro d'Alfaroubeira
courut le monde et l'admira.
Il fit ce que je voudrais faire
si j'avais quatre dromadaires.

La Chèvre du Thibet

Les poils de cette chèvre et même
ceux d'or pour qui prit tant de peine Jason,
ne valent rien au prix
des cheveux dont je suis épris.

La Sauterelle

Voici la fine sauterelle
la nourriture de Saint Jean
puissent mes vers être comme elle
le régal des meilleures gens.

Le Dauphin

Dauphins, vous jouez dans la mer
mais le flot est toujours amer.
Parfois ma joie éclate-t-elle
mais la vie est encore cruelle.

L'Écrevisse

Incertitude, O mes delices!
Vous et moi nous nous en allons
comme s'en vont les écrevisses,
à reculons, à reculons.

La Carpe

Dans vos viviers, dans vos étangs,
carpes que vous vivez longtemps!
Est-ce que la mort vous oublie,
poissons de la mélancolie?

The Camel

With his four camels
Don Pedro d'Alfaroubeira
traveled the world over and admired it.
He did what I would do
if I had four camels.

The Tibetan Goat

The hide of this goat and even that golden one
for which Jason took so many pains
is worth nothing compared to
the hair which holds me in thrall.

The Grasshopper

Here is the delicate grasshopper,
the food of Saint John.
May my verses similarly be
a banquet for the best people.

The Dolphin

Dolphins, you play in the sea,
but the waters are always bitter.
Sometimes my joy bursts forth,
but life is still cruel.

The Crawfish

Uncertainty, O my delights!
You and I progress
just like the crawfish,
backwards, backwards.

The Carp

In your fish tanks, in your ponds
how long you live, carp!
Is it that death has forgotten you,
O fish of melancholy?

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

***Le Sacre du printemps* (The Rite of Spring)**

The first image for the single most influential composition of the 20th century came to Stravinsky while he was composing *The Firebird* for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, which was enjoying a great success in Paris. Stravinsky had a visual idea, a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death. Naturally such an image invites the creation of a ballet to bring the dance to life. Diaghilev loved the idea and told Stravinsky to go ahead. Stravinsky invented this ritual. There was no ancient tradition in which a young maiden would be chosen to dance to her death, but the idea certainly makes for a lively stage picture. It was the first step to *The Rite of Spring*, which, when it premiered in 1913, changed *everything*.

At the time, most listeners—whether they were shocked or enthralled by the

piece—would probably have said that it was notorious for its new and dissonant harmonies. Indeed, Stravinsky dared to offer complicated combinations of pitches never heard before. Today, we are more likely to feel that the real revolution in *The Rite of Spring* was the rhythm. Harmonies have turned harsher or sweeter at various times over the years, but few composers have remained unchanged after hearing Stravinsky's rhythms—varied, flexible, and often completely unpredictable. Even when they seem to be “straight,” you just know there is a surprise lurking around the next measure.

When he started composing, Stravinsky worked at the piano and played the music as it came to him, working it out in his head and his fingers. But it was so unusual, so irregular in its rhythms that at first he could not even figure out how to write it down! It was so different from his earlier work that he told a friend, “It was as if twenty and not two years had passed since *The Firebird* was composed.”

The dancers and the orchestra both had to learn how to perform this daring, incomprehensible new work. And the first paying audience evidently hated it, for the premiere was one of the greatest scandals in the history of music. At the dress rehearsal, attended by a large crowd of invited musicians (including Debussy and Ravel) and critics, everything had gone smoothly. However, at the performance, the noise in the audience began almost as soon as the music started—a few catcalls, then more and more. Stravinsky left the hall early in a rage. “I have never again been that angry. The music was so familiar to me; I loved it, and I could not understand why people who had not heard it wanted to protest in advance.”

After the performance, Stravinsky related, they were “excited, angry, disgusted, and...happy.” Years later Stravinsky suspected Diaghilev of having foreseen the possibility of such a scandal—and perhaps even have helped it along. A riot like that was worth more than any paid advertising!

Probably no single work written in the 20th century so profoundly affected the art of music as *The Rite of Spring*. In one blow, Stravinsky destroyed the “tyranny of the bar line” that had locked so much romantic music into a rhythmic straitjacket. From 1913 on, new rhythmic possibilities were developed by composers of all types, and the results are apparent in a large part of the music of the last ninety-five years.

Some of the big moments in *The Rite of Spring* are built up from simultaneous ostinato patterns, overlapping in different lengths, piled up one on top of the other. These contrasting but simultaneous rhythms were choreographed, in the original production, by different groups of dancers, bringing a correspondence between aural and visual elements. The “Procession of the Sage” is such an example—an overwhelming maelstrom of sound coming to a sudden stop at the soft, subdued chords accompanying the “Adoration of the earth.” The musical “primitivism” cultivated by many composers ranging from Prokofiev to the congenial simplicities of Carl Orff would be unthinkable without *The Rite of Spring*.

Stravinsky insisted that this work was created with no system, no analytic framework. “I had only my ear to help me. I heard and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed.” For rehearsal purposes, Stravinsky produced the duo piano version of the score, which emphasizes the work's rhythmic character in the percussive rhythms of the pianoforte.

Today, nearly a century later, *The Rite of Spring* remains one of the most exciting and vivid musical creations of all time. It no longer scandalizes us, but few listeners can avoid being carried away in its glorious sonic whirlwind.

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Panelists



ANN ALLEN is a member of the Council for the Arts at MIT and an Adjunct Lecturer at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where she has taught art study classes for twenty years. Before receiving her Masters Degree in Art History from Boston University, she studied art and photo history at Wellesley College, where she served as a Docent at the Jewett Art Center and the Davis Museum for many years. Before joining the MFA, Mrs. Allen was the Associate Curator for the MIT Museum Exhibitions, “Image and Imagination: 150 Years of Photography,” and “The Development of Photography: The Process and the Product,” in collaboration with the Polaroid Corporate Archives. More recently, she has created “The Sound of Color: Debussy and the Visual Arts”—a historical dialogue with piano—which she presented as a Lowell Lecture for the MFA and Monadnock Music.



JONATHAN MCPHEE is equally at home as a conductor for the symphony, ballet, and opera. As Music Director for Boston Ballet, he has received critical acclaim for his work with the company and orchestra. Mr. McPhee is also Music Director for the Nashua Symphony & Chorus in New Hampshire, the Lexington Symphony and the Longwood Symphony Orchestra. He was invited to conduct the Nashville Symphony as one of the conductors featured in the 2009 Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview by the League of American Orchestras.

Other orchestras he has conducted include the Hamburg Philharmonic, the BBC Scottish Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, the Louisiana Philharmonic, The Hague Philharmonic, Rochester Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Orchestre Colonne in Paris and the Bergen Philharmonic in Norway. Some of the world’s most distinguished dance companies for which he has served as conductor include the New York City Ballet, The Royal Ballet (England), Martha Graham Dance Company, National Ballet of Canada, The Australian Ballet, Den Norske Ballett in Norway and The Royal Danish Ballet in Denmark. In addition to a broad repertoire in the field of dance, Mr. McPhee has conducted pops concerts, musical theatre and operetta. He has also conducted grand opera with Opera Boston, the American Opera Center in New York and Boston University Opera Institute. Mr. McPhee’s best selling recording of *The Nutcracker* with the Boston Ballet Orchestra has sold over 70,000 copies. He has also recorded Tchaikovsky’s *Sleeping Beauty* and Prokofiev’s *Romeo & Juliet* with that orchestra available on iTunes, and Michael Gandolfi’s *Caution to the Wind* on the CRI CD label. Mr. McPhee conducted the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra for the films of Martha Graham’s works telecast by DANCE IN AMERICA, and conducted the score for the feature film *Ballets Russes* (2005). His collaboration with WCRB’s “Kids Classical Hour” earned a Gabriel Award in 1998. Born in Philadelphia, Mr. McPhee received his L.R.A.M. from the Royal Academy of Music, and a B.M. and M.M. from The Juilliard School. While at Juilliard, he was the recipient of a Naumburg Scholarship in Conducting and English Horn. He has studied with Leonard Brain, David Diamond, Thomas Stacy, Rudolf Kempe and Sixten Ehrling.