

Pétrouchka

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Written: 1911, revised in 1947

Movements: Ballet in four scenes

Style: Contemporary

Duration: 34 minutes

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a young Russian émigré named Igor Stravinsky landed in Paris, certain to take the city by storm. He needed more than talent to make his impression on Paris; he needed inspiration and, most importantly, an audience. Stravinsky found both in his association with the impresario Sergei Diaghilev and in the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev was part of a group of poets, philosophers, musicians and artists whose objective was the integration of folk traditions into all aspects of art and literature. The Ballets Russes was the “radical chique” of the day.

After completing *The Firebird*, his first great ballet for Diaghilev, Stravinsky was supposed to start on a second, called *The Rite of Spring*. Instead he got sidetracked working on “an orchestral piece in which the piano would play the most important part.” Diaghilev arrived one day expecting to hear sketches of the *Rite of Spring*. Instead, he heard a good deal of the newly titled *Pétrouchka*. Immediately taken with the music, Diaghilev convinced Stravinsky to use it as the basis for another ballet.

The ballet begins with a chaotic street scene at the Shrovetide Fair in St. Petersburg. Drummers interrupt, announcing the beginning of a puppet show. A mysterious showman exhibits three puppets—Pétrouchka, the Moor, and the Ballerina—who he magically brings to life. Pétrouchka is sensitive, but awkward and ugly. The Moor taunts him. The second scene shows Pétrouchka in his room. Two clarinets play a dissonant melody that represents his despair at having been rejected by the Ballerina. The third scene finds the Moor lying in his

room. The Ballerina enters and dances for him until Pétrouchka bursts in, only to be chased off by the Moor. In the final scene, we are back at the fair, with dancing bears, coachmen, grooms and nursemaids. Pétrouchka rushes into the crowd, pursued by the Moor who attacks him and strikes him dead with his scimitar. The showman reassures the horror-stricken crowd that Pétrouchka is only a puppet, but when the spectators leave, the puppet's apparition startles him. Pétrouchka jeers at the terrified puppeteer from the roof of his booth.

Stravinsky revised Pétrouchka in 1947 for concert performance, reducing the orchestration and adding a "concert ending"—and placing it in American copyright!

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