



Biography of Igor Stravinsky

*Born June 17, 1882 in Oranienbaum, Russia;
Died April 6, 1971 in New York City, U.S.A*

Stravinsky was, in his time, considered one of the world's most avant-garde and controversial composers. People tend to love or hate his music!

When Stravinsky was growing up, formal musical training was an important part of schooling for upper class children. Though Stravinsky learned to play the piano from an early age, he never pursued music studies formally at a conservatory. Instead, he took private lessons with Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov whose influence was especially great on Act I of *The Nightingale*.

During World War I, Stravinsky and his family lived in Switzerland, returning to France only in 1920. After composing the jazz-influenced works of this period such as *Ragtime* (1918) and *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918), Stravinsky turned to a more pared-down, neo-Classical style* that produced pieces as diverse as the ballet *Pulcinella* (1920), the opera *Oedipus Rex* (1927), the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930) and, decades later, the opera *The Rake's Progress* (1951).

Stravinsky's fame reached far across the Atlantic and after World War II he moved to the United States where he continued to compose but also began conducting full time. In 1962 Stravinsky visited Toronto and was the subject of a CBC documentary. He died of heart failure at the age of 88 on April 6, 1971 in New York City.

Opera was in his DNA: Igor Stravinsky was born the son of one of the Mariinsky Theatre's principal basses. A "bass" is a male singer with the lowest voice type.

His early orchestral works *Scherzo Fantastique* and *Fireworks* impressed ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev, the director of the Ballet Russes in Paris. Diaghilev commissioned Stravinsky to write his first ballet, the famous *The Firebird* (1910). This prompted Stravinsky's move to Paris in 1911 where he composed two more ballet scores for Diaghilev's company: *Petrouchka*, and *Le Sacre du printemps* (1913). The music in *Le Sacre* was such a radical departure from classical ballet traditions that the audience rioted after its premiere!

*Neo-Classical style:

A style of music composition between 1920 – 1940 which favoured the balanced forms and emotional restraint of the music written in the Classical era (i.e. Mozart, Haydn, etc.). This style of writing music was a reaction against the emotionally charged compositions in the Romantic era (i.e. Beethoven). However, this is not to say that neo-classical music sounded *exactly* like Mozart's! Don't forget that in the 250 or so years between the Classical and the Neo-Classical eras many new instruments were created giving the composers in the 20th century a variety of new sounds for their compositions.