



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ENSEMBLES
Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.
Streaming at [youtube.com/usmarineband](https://www.youtube.com/usmarineband)
Colonel Jason K. Fettig, conducting

Stravinsky in Miniature

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Concerto in E-flat, *Dumbarton Oaks*

Tempo giusto
Allegretto
Con moto

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Suite No. 1

Andante
Napolitana
Espanola
Balalaika

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Eight Instrumental Miniatures (1962)

Andantino
Vivace
Lento
Allegretto
Moderato
Tempo di Marcia
Larghetto
Tempo di Tango

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Pastorale

GySgt Sara Sheffield, mezzo-soprano

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)
lyrics by W. H. Auden

Elegy for J.F.K. (1964)

GySgt Sara Sheffield, mezzo-soprano

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Octet (1923, revised 1952)

Sinfonia
Tema con variazioni
Finale

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)
edited by Robert Craft

Symphonies of Wind Instruments (1947 revised version)

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Scherzo à la Russe (1945)

PROGRAM NOTES

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Russian born composer Igor Stravinsky died fifty years ago this year. Not only was he among the most influential composers of the twentieth century, Stravinsky was also a notable musical chameleon. He attained an unparalleled level of sustained success during his lifetime, and this was due in no small part to his incredible skill and savvy as a working composer. His ability to adapt and develop his compositional style based on the ever-changing climate of the world served him, and his audiences, well. He was a pupil of famed composer Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov and began his career writing larger works in the romantic Russian tradition. Prior to the First World War, Stravinsky's most successful music was for the ballet, anchored by his masterworks *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*. In the wake of the war, however, he turned his attention to writing for smaller forces, partly in response to the shortage of funding for larger ensembles. It was a fortuitous change in format because Stravinsky's musical language was also evolving; his music became simpler in scope, less sentimental than his previous works, and it began to more clearly allude to structural forms and musical ideals of eras past. These unique "musical miniatures," both in the size of the ensembles and the nature of Stravinsky's musical language, continued to flow from his pen to the end of his life.

Concerto in E-flat, *Dumbarton Oaks*

The Concerto in E-flat, *Dumbarton Oaks*, ranks among Stravinsky's neoclassical masterpieces. Composed for a small orchestra in 1937, this was the final work Stravinsky composed in Europe. The piece brilliantly meshes the influences of music past, most notably the concertos of Johann Sebastian Bach, with Stravinsky's innovative new approach. The work was commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss to celebrate their thirtieth wedding anniversary and it takes its subtitle from the couple's stunning Washington, D.C. estate. Dumbarton Oaks was especially renowned for its beautiful gardens and today is a national landmark owned by Harvard University and open to the public.

The fact that Stravinsky was visiting the couple at Dumbarton Oaks while he was planning the Concerto in E-flat has led to the speculation that the structure of the work was inspired by the design and layout of the gardens, which greatly interested the composer. In addition to commissioning the composition, the Blisses sponsored its first performance. The première took place at the estate, and the couple purchased the manuscript to be included in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum. Stravinsky's dear friend and the legendary pianist, conductor, and teacher Nadia Boulanger led the private première in May 1938 in the composer's stead, as he fell ill and was unable to leave Paris in time for the performance.

Suite No. 1

After the debut of his seminal ballet *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky relocated to Switzerland due to the First World War. The war had ceased the Paris operations of the Ballets Russes, which had been the composer's primary source of income. In addition to his forced shift into creating smaller arrangements in this new environment, Stravinsky also took the opportunity to explore the musical language and folk heritage of his homeland.

During this period from 1915 to 1917, Stravinsky composed two sets of piano duets designed to be teaching pieces for young musicians. Three Easy Pieces was completed in 1915, and the companion collection of Five Easy Pieces were written two years later for the piano studies of Stravinsky's two older children. The second set was designed with simple melodies for the student paired with more difficult accompaniments for the teacher; presumably in this case, the composer. While these little pieces with the nondescript title give the impression of nothing more than a pedagogical exercise, closer inspection reveals exactly the musical direction upon which the composer was about to embark. These charming and entertaining movements contain the seeds of the Stravinsky's impending neoclassical period. The composer completed orchestrations of many of the movements from these easy pieces for small orchestra in 1921 and 1925. The first suite takes its four movements from a reordering of four of the Five Easy Pieces: Andante, Napolitana, Espanola, and Balalaika. Each of the movements takes its inspiration from traditional international dance forms and transforms them through Stravinsky's distinct voice.

Eight Instrumental Miniatures (1962)

Stravinsky moved from Switzerland to France in June of 1920, and fully immersed himself in his new musical language of neoclassicism. While in the autumn of that year, he worked on a revision of the monumental score to *The Rite of Spring* for Diaghilev's revival of the ballet in December, he also continued to compose much leaner music for smaller forces. In the following year, he wrote another set of easy piano pieces for children entitled *Les cinq doigts* (*The Five Fingers*). This set was even more sparse than his previous sets of easy pieces for piano, relegating the right hand generally to only five notes. Like so many of his early works from this period, Stravinsky revisited this music much later in life. In 1962, he rescored *Les cinq doigts* for an unusual combination of fifteen instruments and retitled the work Eight Instrumental Miniatures. While the scoring was completely reimagined from the original piano pieces, Stravinsky remained musically faithful to the source. The resulting work is a beautiful and diverse collection of instrumental colors that also radiate with child-like simplicity. The première of Eight Instrumental Miniatures was conducted by the composer on April 29, 1962, in Toronto, Canada.

Pastorale

Stravinsky composed this short song without words as a young man in 1907, but returned to it time and again later in his life. Pastorale was composed at Stravinsky's family estate in Ustilug, Ukraine, while he was still under the mentorship of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and the song was dedicated to Rimsky-Korsakov's daughter, Nadia.

The piece was originally scored for soprano and piano, but Stravinsky transcribed it several times over for various ensembles, including this version for soprano and a woodwind quartet of an oboe, English horn, clarinet, and bassoon. Famed conductor Leopold Stokowski also later arranged the piece for five soloists (violin, oboe, English horn, clarinet, and bassoon) and strings and made a well-known recording of his rendition with the musicians of his Philadelphia Orchestra in 1934.

Elegy for J.F.K. (1964)

Stravinsky's neoclassical period began to morph into a different approach in the 1950s. After more than thirty years composing in this signature style, Stravinsky began to experiment in twelve-tone serial techniques, and employed this theory in many of his works for the remaining two decades of his life.

Written in response to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, *Elegy for J.F.K.* is the most recently composed work in this set of miniatures. It is scored for a mezzo-soprano or baritone soloist accompanied by three clarinets (one soprano and two altos).

Stravinsky had been an acquaintance of President Kennedy and was shocked by the news of the assassination. He later told the *New York Times*: "The idea [for the *Elegy*] came to me in mid-January 1964. I felt that the events of November were being too quickly forgotten, and I wished to protest." Stravinsky asked W. H. Auden to write a text, and by March, the distinguished poet delivered to Stravinsky a set of four haiku-like verses. Stravinsky immediately set to work composing the vocal line first, using a technique that matched the seventeen syllables of each poetic stanza with twelve musical notes of a serial tone-row: G#, D, C, A#, E, F, B, A, G, F#, D#, and C#.

Auden's stark text delivered a simple, yet poignant message that contributed to the composer's wish to "protest" humankind's tendency to forget too quickly:

When a just man dies,
Lamentation and praise,
Sorrow and joy, are one.

Why then, why there,
Why thus, we cry, did he die?
The heavens are silent.

What he was, he was:
What he is fated to become
Depends on us

Remembering his death,
How we choose to live
Will decide its meaning.

Stravinsky chose to repeat the opening stanza at the end of his work, and the piece's ternary form can clearly be felt, just like in the poem; the musical material is repeated in the first

and the last nine measures. The striking use of an incessant tritone also underscores the unsettling emotions of the subject. Although crafted in a different musical language and texture than much of Stravinsky's earlier music, the *Elegy for J.F.K.* stands as an original and deeply moving commemoration of the tragedy.

Gunnery Sergeant Sara Sheffield, mezzo-soprano

Mezzo-soprano vocalist and concert moderator Gunnery Sergeant Sara Sheffield joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in May 2005, becoming the first featured female vocal soloist in Marine Band history. Gunnery Sgt. Sheffield began her musical instruction on piano at age nine and voice at age sixteen. After graduating from Jacksonville (Texas) High School in 1997, she attended the University of North Texas in Denton and earned a bachelor's degree in vocal performance in 2001. In 2016 she earned an executive master's degree in business administration from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

Octet (1923, revised 1952)

Stravinsky's transition to his neoclassical style could be argued to have formally solidified in 1923 with the Paris première of his *Octet for Wind Instruments*, which was given during a concert series presided over by legendary conductor Serge Koussevitzky. Stravinsky had firmly established his reputation as a composer of bold and dramatic music for ballet, and thus many of his contemporaries were puzzled by his departure from the large scale, Russian-flavored symphonic works that had brought him so much acclaim. Aaron Copland recalled the reaction to Stravinsky's rather sudden metamorphosis in his book *The New Music—1900–1960*:

Few listeners in the early 20s...were prepared for the final phases of [Stravinsky's] conscious adoption of the musical ideals of the early 18th century.... The French musical establishment first became aware of this tendency—referred to in the beginning as the "Back to Bach" movement—with the first performance of the Stravinsky Octet on October 18, 1923, at a Koussevitzky concert in Paris. I can attest to the general feeling of mystification that followed the initial hearing. Here was Stravinsky, who had created a neo-primitive style all his own, based on native Russian sources...now suddenly . . . presenting a piece to the public that bore no conceivable resemblance to the individual style with which he had hitherto been identified. Everyone was asking why Stravinsky should have exchanged his Russian heritage for what looked very much like a mess of 18th-century mannerisms. [It] seemed like a bad joke that left an unpleasant after-effect and gained [him] the unanimous disapproval of the press. No one could have foreseen, first, that Stravinsky was to persist in this new manner of his, or second, that the Octet was destined to influence composers all over the world by bringing the latest objectivity of modern music to full consciousness by frankly adopting the ideals, forms, and textures of the pre-Romantic era. Thus was neo-classicism born.

Stravinsky himself detested the term neoclassicism, calling it "a much abused expression meaning absolutely nothing." However, it was an apt label for contextualizing his new voice. Gone were the lush, earthy, romantic utterances characteristic of his large-scale stage works and

in their place stood an angular, contrapuntal chamber work for an odd collection of wind instruments made up of flute, clarinet, and pairs of bassoons, trumpets, and trombones. Yet in spite of the unconventional instrumentation and plentiful mixed meters, the Octet is teeming with the kind of clear lines and ordered themes that defined the Classical period. Its three movements also mirror the well-worn structural stencils from bygone eras of sonata allegro form, theme and variation, and two-part invention. Eschewing the emotive narrative indicative to much of the music of the Romantic era, Stravinsky further described the Octet as “a musical object. This object has a form and that form is influenced by the musical matter of which it is composed....Form, in my music, derives from counterpoint as the only means through which the attention of the composer is concentrated on purely musical questions. This sort of music has no other aim than to be sufficient in itself. In general, I consider that music is only able to solve musical problems, and nothing else, neither the literary nor the picturesque, can be of any interest in music.”

The score was begun in Biarritz, France, late in 1922 and was finished in Paris on May 20, 1923. The première took place at the Paris Opera House and the many musical luminaries of the time in attendance that fateful evening witnessed an additional notable debut from the composer. Stravinsky led the première performance of the Octet himself, also marking his first public appearance as a conductor.

Symphonies of Wind Instruments (1947 revised version)

edited by Robert Craft

Stravinsky completed *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in the summer of 1920, dedicating the work to the memory of Claude Debussy. The term symphonies does not reflect the traditional definition, but suggests the idea of a “sounding together” of different instruments, with the plural form signaling several such groupings in the work. Stravinsky’s decision to omit string instruments from the score is indicative of his diminishing interest at the time in the expressive qualities of the strings.

The musical form of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is essentially a montage of musical images, consisting of episodes and motives that are stated in three different but closely related speeds. Throughout the work Stravinsky alternates short litanies (expressed in the form of Russian popular-sounding material), pastoral melodies, and solemn chorale-like passages. The closing Chorale, a procession of solemn, irregularly spaced chords, forms a serene and eloquent coda to the work.

This piece was the culmination of a shift in Stravinsky’s musical thinking that had been germinating during the years that preceded it, but given the stark departure from many of the composer’s previous successful works, *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* was not an immediate success. Only gradually has it achieved its present status as a twentieth century classic and especially one of the most important works in the band repertoire. Stravinsky began a revision of the work in 1945, which was published in 1947, primarily for the purpose of entering it into copyright and for correcting performance-related problems that plagued the original, and this is the version most often performed today.

Scherzo à la Russe (1945)

Stravinsky's neoclassical period produced dozens and dozens of wonderful miniatures for many combinations of instruments, and led the composer to explore numerous traditional and emerging musical styles, which he incorporated into his original compositions. These influences included folk dances and songs from around the world, as well as the emergence of Ragtime and Jazz in parts of Europe and especially in the United States. Stravinsky first performed in America in 1937 and immigrated to the country in 1940. He settled in southern California and became a naturalized citizen in 1945.

Stravinsky's collection of works from between the World Wars reveal an insatiable search for new and interesting sounds, and his definition of the "orchestra" was reworked time and time again. During this fruitful period, he added dance band and jazz orchestra to his list of ensembles and produced a handful of unique and highly original pieces exploring their unusual timbres. The original version of Scherzo à la Russe (Russian Scherzo) for jazz orchestra is one of several pieces written for abandoned film projects. Although he later reworked the Scherzo for conventional symphony orchestra, the present version, which includes the complete family of saxophones playing the part of a wailing accordion, achieves the brilliant colors suggested by its title. It remains the most popular vignette in a collection of wartime pieces that mix in equal parts the influences of Stravinsky's residency in America with a renewed identification with his Russian heritage.