

## PARIS REPORT II

### The "Sacre du Printemps" Celebrations

Paris, May 29, 2013

1. The Hotel de Ville, evening May 29
2. The Comedie du Theatre des Champs Elysees, morning May 30

#### 1.

May 29th, 2013 was the 100th Anniversary of the world premiere of the ballet "Le Sacre du Printemps" (Rite of Spring): Music by Igor Stravinsky Choreography Vaslav Nijinsky, decor Nicolas Roerich, producer Sergei Diaghilev, company Les Ballets Russes.) The 3 performances took place at the *Theatre des Champ Elysees*, 15 Avenue Montaigne, near the right bank of the Seine, a short distance across the river from the Eiffel Tower.

The riots at every performance made it impossible to hear the music. The production was shot down after 3 days.

From the Oxford Dictionary website:

*"The Rite of Spring.... depicted pagan ceremonies for the coming of spring, culminating in the sacrifice of a young woman who dances herself to death. Faced with Stravinsky's dissonant modernist score and Nijinsky's experimental choreography expressing exotic subject matter, the audience rioted ... Fights broke out between audience members, as those who were hissing and booing were violently rebuked by those who saw genius in the ballet..."*

The *Theatre des Champs Elysees* was the brain-child of Gabriel Astruc, the most prominent promoter of music and theatre in France at the beginning of the century.

From Wikipedia:

*"From 1905 through 1912 Astruc brought a long list of musical giants to Paris under the banner "Great Season of Paris", including an Italian season with Enrico Caruso and Australian soprano Nellie Melba in 1905, the creation of Salome under the baton of Richard Strauss in 1907, the Ballets Russes of Diaghilev in 1909, the Metropolitan Opera conducted by Arturo Toscanini in 1910, and the Le martyre de Saint Sébastien of Debussy, text, by Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1911.*

*In 1913 Astruc [... commissioned] the innovative Theatre des Champs-Elysees building in the Avenue Montaigne from Auguste Perret. After a brilliant and scandalous first season, climaxed by the famous riot at the premiere of The Rite of Spring, Astruc found himself financially ruined within six months."*

From the home page of the Theatre des Champs-Elysees:

*"The artistic adventure of the Theatre des Champs-Elysées has been illuminated by the presence, for a century, of some of the most famous artists in the history of music, opera and dance."*

Many of the musical masterpieces of the early 20th century were first performed at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. These include works by Satie (a personal friend of Astruc) Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Darius Milhaud, Jean Cocteau, Paul Claudel, Igor Stravinsky and others.

One often reads the assertion that the riot threw open the doors of

the 20th century to all the experimental, abstract and avant-garde art for which critics and scholars have invented the term, "modernism".

Neither true nor false, this claim must be put into perspective:

(1) Nobody could hear the music in the performances of May 29, 30 and 31, 1913. It was completely drowned out by the cacophony that began the moment that the dancers of the Ballet Russes began Nijinsky's violent, "pagan" ritual dances against the perfervid accents of the Stravinsky score. One might say that the (metaphorical) dinosaurs of reactionary art (precursors of the dinosaurs in Walt Disney's "Rite of Spring" in Fantasia!) came into conflict with the "Communards mounting the barricades of the avant-garde"!

(2) The riot in other words was really about the dancing. As a matter of historical record, the concert score of the Rite of Spring has been a staple of the classical music repertoire ever since Pierre Monteaux conducted it, (without ballet), in 1914 at the same theatre.

Nijinsky's choreography, however, was withdrawn after the 8 performances in Paris and London. Diaghilev then commissioned a new choreography from Leonide Massine. This was successfully

performed in London in 1924.

It was not until 1987 that the original choreography of Nijinsky was reconstructed by Millicent Hudson and Kenneth Archer following 17 years of historical research filling 7 volumes of documentation. The first performances of their reconstruction were by the Joffrey Ballet. A brilliant DVD (2009) of performances of the Marinsky Ballet, conductor Valery Gergiev, contains both the Firebird, and the Archer/Hodson reconstruction of the Rite.

(3) "Modernism" in any case is a obnoxious academic cliché, invented by people who, were they to actually be productive in the arts, would not dream of using it.

(4) There were many "revolutions" in all the arts in the first decades of the 20th century. In music one need only cite the opera Salomé, (Richard Strauss 1907), Pierrot Lunaire, (Arnold Schoenberg 1912), Bluebeard's Castle, (Bela Bartok 1911). Debussy had been producing "revolutionary music" since the 1890's. (Following the tradition whereby composers tend to say nasty things about the works of their contemporaries, Debussy (who had performed the Rite of

Spring in a two piano version with Stravinsky himself) described it as a "19th century work using 20th century instruments"!)

Over 200 known choreographies have since been composed and performed of Stravinsky's score of the *Sacre du Printemps*. On the occasion of the centenary of the first performance, Paris was host to the productions of the Mariinsky Theatre of St Petersburg (The Hudson/ Archer production), the 1975 version of the Wuppertal Tanztheatre of Pina Bausch; the Massine choreography of 1924; the "Sasha Waltz and Guests" Company (located in Berlin) production, and no doubt several others that I don't know of.

As the tickets to all of these spectacles began at \$120, attendance at them was unfortunately beyond my means (which is to say, though I might have done without half a dozen books, events, trips, to cover the costs, against my conscience.)

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## 2.

Notices on the Internet, and in newspapers such as *Le Monde*, announced that there would be a free live transmission, starting at 8

PM May 29<sup>th</sup> , on the giant film screen in front of the Hotel de Ville (city hall of Paris), an OnLine screening of the performance by the Mariinsky company at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. The transmission was to be broadcast courtesy of the commercial TV Channel ARTE-TV.

At 6:45 that evening I set out from the Institut Poincaré to walk to the Hotel de Ville. This took me along the Boulevard St Michel, down the hill all the way to Shakespeare and Company, then across to the cathedral of Notre Dame, over the Seine to the grand square of the Hotel de Ville obstructing my path like an atom waiting to gobble up its quantum.

This year's springtime in Paris was cold and wet. A common quip was "*Bien sur, c'est un sacré printemps!*" (Bloody awful spring!) Billowing clouds were gleaming and glooming even as I left the Institut Poincare and the neighborhood of Paris's enclave "Science City" , bounded by the rue d'Ulm, rue l'Homond and rue Pierre et Marie Curie.

From there I centimetered ("inched" in the metric of the local

Bureau of Standards) along the treacherous defile of the rue St.

Jacques. This narrow street straddles the flat plateau that culminates a long rise up the hill from the Seine, in back of the buildings of the Sorbonne. In this district the rue St. Jacques calls up a resemblance to Middletown, Connecticut, in that it contains a large number of small exotic restaurants, Turkish, Algerian, Indian, Chinese, Tibetan. One also finds a butcher shop, fruit stalls managed by North Africans dressed in indigenous clothing, liquor stores, a cheese shop, and even a French restaurant boasting of its "good old home cooking" from the provinces!

Turning left on St. Jacques I made the descent down the small twisting rue Royer-Collard (where I lived in 1968-69), then turned right on the rue Gay-Lussac, heading to the corner of the Boulevard St Michel and the rue Soufflot. This is the grand promenade leading up to the Pantheon, temple for the veneration of the "great men of France" (with a few spots for the anomalous Marie Curie and Joan of Arc.)

On the north-east and south -east corners of this intersection respectively, stand the "Quick Quality Burger" and the

"McDonald's" fast-food-fresseries. We have traded the colorful cuisine of the rue St Jacques for the tourist junk-food of the downtown!

Along the east side of the Boulevard St Michel a series of chic clothing stores (to call anything Parisian "chic" is, of course, to be redundant) descending all the way to the river. There are also some luggage shops, discount stores, tabacs and cafes. A sad commentary on universal trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: no bookstores, even on passing the 17th century frontispiece of the Sorbonne.

On this evening the plaza in front of the Sorbonne was deserted. There appears to be little political activity there today. One still may encounter Iranian students handing out literature denouncing the Iranian regime. Otherwise its principal exploiters seem to be massage therapists, qualified and otherwise, their open-air stools suitably arranged around the square.

Continuing down the Boulevard St Michel one passes bank buildings, a Monoprix, and, at the base of the hill, the *Musee de Cluny*, the demolished remnants of a Benedictine residence of the 13th century.



Cross the Boulevard St Germain; a turn to the right brings us to the rue de la Harpe, one of several tentacles surging out of the rue de la Huchette and, like all of them, packed with restaurants of every nationality, price range and quality – although all the officially “French” restaurants tend to carry the same cuisine, with seemingly reasonable prices for the appetizers and dishes, but outrageous prices for beverages (glass of Coke \$7.00) that you are expected to buy.

Close by the Blvd St. Germain lies the *rue de la Parcheminerie*. Here the Canadian bookseller Brian Spence has maintained a valiant competition against the internationally famous Shakespeare & Co. 4 blocks away for more than a decade.

A brief stop at Shakespeare & Co. itself, to let the young managers of the store know that the Rite of Spring ballet performance at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees was being broadcast at the Hotel de Ville in less than 45 minutes.

Gliding past the façade of Notre Dame cathedral I saw bleachers set up on the plaza facing the building. On them were seated the audience awaiting the arrival of Quasimodo to ring the bells at 8.

Continuing on the Ile de la Cité one encounters a few streets filled with shops selling the tourist trinkets one sees all over Paris, and are probably manufactured in Taiwan (See my novel "Eiffel Tower Gang" at [www.fermentmagazine.org/Novel/eiffel.pdf](http://www.fermentmagazine.org/Novel/eiffel.pdf).) Crossing the river on the other side of the island brought me at last to the square of the Hotel de Ville.

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The first thing that struck me was the presence of about 30 police vans on all the streets surrounding the square. Were the authorities fearful of a replay of the Sacre du Printemps riot of 1913?

The darkening complexion of the skies had shifted from grey, to ominous, to menacing. Rain was a certainty, and my only concern was that it might begin during the display of the Mariinsky Ballet performance on the grand TV screen. In fact it began raining buckets at the beginning of the evening's scheduled entertainment, supplemented by the minor detail that we were not going to witness any broadcast of the concert. Read further.

The giant TV screen on the plaza of the Hotel de Ville has a field of 65 square meters, or about 715 square feet. When the screen is empty it becomes a vault, densely black over the bright chalk orange of a tennis court on the ground. Normally the screen is used in the transmission of the tennis games at Roland-Garros. The court is oriented north-south, with the Hotel de Ville to the east, the river to the south, and the large BHV department stores across the rue de Rivoli to the north.

The tennis court is surrounded by a series of chest high metal fences, each about 30 feet long. By 7:30 there were no more than a dozen people at the barriers on the west side of the court, waiting for the screening to begin. Personnel, with the "SECURITÉ" firmly enstitched on the backs of their jackets, were strolling about inside the court. We were told that we would have to wait before being allowed inside the court, but that there would indeed be a transmission by ARTE TV of the Rite of Spring on the TV screen, starting at 8 PM.

The barrier fence on the east side of the tennis court sits adjacent to that grand, grandiose and grotesque Hotel de Ville that squats as a

monument to civic order. I decided to stand by this fence; yet first I walked to the northern edge of the plaza to rest up after my 4 mile walk through the Quartier Latin. Passing rows of colorful tents and trucks filled with TV equipment led me to the granite borders of a grass plot. After resting up for 15 minutes I returned on the side adjacent to the Hotel de Ville, and took up a station on the west side of the court, the great screen high above my head to my left.

The rains had already begun; fortunately I was wearing a raincoat. The event did not actually begin until 8:30, by which time everyone in this little universe was drenched to the bones. The unpleasantness of this 50 minute wait was turned , courtesy of ARTE TV, into an excruciating ordeal through the bombardment by noises emanating from the grand screen.

For precise interludes of 3 minutes the screen fell silent. Upon it was displayed a single message (translated):

*100th Anniversary Celebration  
Le Sacre du Printemps  
Igor Stravinsky  
Theatre des Champs-Elysses*

Along the edges of the black rectangle stood the logos of the City of

Paris, the radio station France-Musique, and ARTE TV.

These 3 minute breaks were interrupted periodically by 3 unrelieved minutes of horrible electronic cacophony: *advertising for ARTE TV!* The repetitions of this plug never varied: blasts of music in many styles were snorted at peak volume, enswaddled by reams of static and combined with rapidly juxtaposed images of orchestras, singers, pianists, and lots of drummers. Across this insane medley the message ARTE TV pulsed like the beating of deranged eyeballs.

Then the screen fell dead and the message about the centenary of the Rite of Spring returned.

At 7:45 a short woman with flaming red hair strode across the court and disappeared into a warren of trucks and makeshift storage sheds located in back of the giant screen, outside the court . She soon returned with rolls of plastic masking tape. These she applied to the court, laying out a number of large squares below the screen. It was the first intimation that the evening would have nothing at all to do with any transmission of the concert at the Theatre des Champs Elysses.

My suspicions were confirmed soon afterwards, when about 30 dance students, some men but mostly young women, all dressed in black leotards, bounded onto the court. They brought with them some more rolls of masking tape which they used to mark out smaller rectangular shapes inside the big boxes.

Following this, the northernmost barriers to the tennis court were removed and the public, some armed with umbrellas or hooded raincoats, others defenseless against the rain, entered the lower of the tennis court that had been set aside for them . I chose to remain on the sidelines , leaning against the west barriers, where another crowd eventually collected.

While the dancers were applying the finishing touches to the forward section of the tennis court, the shrill ARTE TV publicity announcements continued unabated. For a moment I speculated that the dancers might just be there to dance the advertising! However, shortly after 8:30 they were regimented into blocks standing in readiness for the performance. The screen emptied out its images and the loudspeakers fell silent.

*So, this what it was going to be! No transmission from the Theatre des Champs Elysees; rather a scholastic, clumsy "imaginative reconstruction" by students from the dance conservatories of Paris , of what it might have been like to have been in the auditorium of the Theatre des Champs Elysses during the famous riot of May 29, 1913!!*

**Fists waving, arms shaking, bodies strutting, random animated gestures, mindless shouting (One girl walking about, crying out (in English) " I hate this dance!"), pointless clapping as a way of getting the spectators to clap: "embarrassing" was the kindest thing one could say about it. Was it for this that I had walked 4 miles across Paris for over an hour, only to be thoroughly soaked by the drenching rains for another hour, to be driven to the edge of madness by no less than 10 repetitions of the shattering ARTE TV advertising?**

**Then images and sounds returned to the screen: a electronic "tape loop" of sounds mixed from recordings of the Rite of Spring was played; at the same time a giant pink egg covered with white specks resembling pollen was flashed onto the screen. *Fertility? Egg and sperm? The sun? The adoration of the earth? Some kind of human***

*sacrifice to the gods of ARTE advertising?*

I didn't hang out long enough to test all of the possible interpretations. Soon after the young woman with cascading golden hair cried "I hate this dance!", I fled to the nearest Metro entrance.

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It may come as a surprise to learn that I actually enjoyed the experience. *It was so thoroughly Parisian!* :

(1) The brisk walk through the crowds down the Blvd St. Michel, a brief hello at Shakespeare and Company, past Notre Dame cathedral , then onwards to the Plaza of the Hotel de la Ville;

(2) The many dark shades of sinister blue, black and grey cast by the looming and swelling cloud formations;

(3) The dependable misinformation communicated by Le Monde and other journals about the nature of the event.

(4) The hideous ARTE TV publicity, with its piercing sounds designed to blunt the ears to any kind of music.

(5) The silly "interpretation" of the riot of May 29<sup>th</sup> by troupes of student dancers from the Paris conservatories.



(6) The soaking rain , that, beginning as a downpour, had, by the time I reached my apartment in the Latin Quarter, become a veritable monsoon!

The experience, taken as a whole, was "vintage Paris!!" and thus, in its own way, something of a treat.

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## 2.

*Conference at the Comedie du Theatre des Champs Elysses,*

The two days of conferences dedicated to the centenary of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" were packed solid with the famous and the knowledgeable: composer Pierre Boulez, historian-choreographers Millicent Hodson and her husband Kenneth Archer; choreographer Sasha Waltz; Lutz Forrester, principal male dancer of the Pina Bausch Wuppertal Tanztheatre; musicologist Richard Taruskin; museum curator Eric Naslund from Sweden; and other journalists, musicologists and archivists.

I attended everything, but was only able to take notes for the morning session of May 30<sup>th</sup>.

*orning, May 30*

*Pierre Boulez, Interview*

*Richard Tarushkin , UC Berkeley: "Resisting Le Sacre"*

*Robert Pienkowski (musicologist, Fondation Paul Sacher) "Les irradiations du Sacre"*

*Heidy Zimmerman, musicologist, Fondation Paul Sacher : The autographed scores of the "Sacre du Printemps"*

The Theatre des Champs Elysees is at the far end of the long Avenue Montaigne connecting the Champs-Elysees with the Seine. Coming out of the metro at the station Franklin Roosevelt I quickly became thoroughly lost. A blue-suited businessman tried to help me find the Avenue Montaigne. He pecked at his Blackberry to no avail: down with modern technology. I therefore started walking, in the wrong direction. Only the looming presence of the Arch of Triumph indicated that I needed to cross the street and reverse directions. After two more inquiries from persons who turned out to be tourists, a well-dressed elderly man informed me that the Avenue Montaigne

was less than a block away. A long walk down the avenue, past ritzy hotels and the Canadian embassy, took me to the Theatre des Champs Elysees .As I discovered, the metro station Alma-Iena station sits at the end of the same block.

The Theatre des Champs-Elysees, and its associated “Comedie” comprise together a beautiful building in the Art Deco style. It was a major center for Europe’s performing arts in the decades before World War I.

Inside the buildings the pattern is much the same in both theatres: a winding staircase of half a dozen turns leads to the auditoriums on the second floor. There are narrow Art Deco doors, stiff as Wagnerian Norns, for entering them. The décor of the external corridors is enamel white and brown ochre, and holds red velvet benches and carpeting.

The space of the auditorium is cramped, its concave rows of seats formed from blocks of wood cemented in tight units . The interior is quite dark even when the lights are on; many theaters in France appear to be like that. The proscenium arch is quite high, but

the actual stage area appeared rather small; this may be because of the general darkness obscuring the room. The auditorium filled up; I would not say that it was packed. The tall curtains were of an inky blackness; perhaps the 17<sup>th</sup> century Jansenites had rendered the French nation ashamed of being seen at the theatre!

At the front of the stage stood a table over which was draped a purple-pink cloth. In the center stood a single lamp with unprotected bulb emitting a very harsh light. At the far left sat the moderators, followed by Pierre Boulez and his interviewer Robert Piencowski.. Robert Tarushkin, an obese man with massive features, white hair, mustache and beard, sat stiffly at attention like a Zen novice awaiting the whack of the paddle.

Pierre Boulez seemed old and tired: grey skin, a weary face set in a grimace combining impish humor with bitterness. Yet he spoke very well, in a faint and somewhat forced voice . A jolly Pienkowski, round faced, his facial hair mid-way between a beard or a neglected shave, cracked jokes in several languages; for the most part these flew over the heads of the audience. Later when I spoke with him I learned that

he is fluent in 4 languages, Polish, French, English, German. As it turns out he'd grown up in New Jersey.

Pienkowski asked Boulez about the Theatre des Champs Elysees under the occupation. (*My notes convey the general sense of the interview, without necessarily being strictly accurate*) To paraphrase:

“This theatre (the Theatre and the Comedie combined ) had become taboo. It was used by the Germans for propaganda purposes and for their Beethoven and Richard Strauss festivals.

The playing of works by Stravinsky was attempted soon after the Occupation. There was a great deal of disorganization; musicians played "anything at all in any kind of way"

“This changed in 1945. On March 15, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* was performed. A piece called *4 Norwegian Moods* was also on the program. Boulez (characteristically!) didn't think much of it.

“When the *Danses Concertantes* of Stravinsky were performed shortly afterwards it was hailed as a major new work. This was because it was a new piece by Stravinsky after 4 years of war, and had no relation to its real value. Stravinsky wasn't there”(Quote Boulez:

**"All to the good!")**

**"Real concerts at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in competent performances began in 1947. Notable among them was a concert entitled *Works of the 20th Century* .*"Alban Berg"* ,so Boulez claimed, "was held hostage on this program, with his violin concerto and 3 fragments from Wozzeck.**

**Boulez, not surprisingly, characterized the Violin Concerto as "inferior". (Pierre Boulez has a long history of endorsing, then repudiating, then effecting a "reconciliation" with all modern composers and several classical ones: Wagner, Stravinsky, Berg Schoenberg, Messiaen, Cage, etc.)**

**The generation of composers after 1945 rejected lots of past music. In 1948 there was a concert of works by Cluytens, Boulez and Messiaen; they were hailed as the "new rebels", though Messiaen was already 38. People came to the 1948 concert "with their hostility and their non-hostility".**

**Boulez, who studied under Messiaen on more than one occasion, claimed to have never understood him: "Messiaen's musical**

language is a strange mix of sentimentality with Catholicism". His real value for the history of music lay in his "research on the nature of time, unequalled by anything before or since." This led him to a few ambiguous words on John Cage, who, refreshingly, was "neither Hollywood nor religion".

Boulez and Messiaen were "reconciled" in 1952, the year that Stravinsky returned to Europe. In 1952 the "Anglo-Saxon Universities" configured Boulez's techniques of total serialism into an absurd dogma. (*My personal experience agrees: Certainly American universities did that sort of thing. My record for praising universities of course, is about equal to Boulez's record for praising rival composers.* )

The first real meeting of Boulez and Stravinsky after the war also occurred in 1952, at a performance of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Wind Instruments* . On this occasion Pierre Boulez and others were able to persuade Stravinsky to experiment with 12-tone music techniques and with the forms of "serialism" developed by Boulez and his followers.

Stravinsky toyed with serial techniques throughout the rest of his life, though his way of applying them was idiosyncratic. In Stravinsky's hands, the music goes back and forth within the series, within being restricted to a linear progression from beginning to end.

It was in that same visit that Stravinsky found himself booed at the Paris Conservatory because he had rejected his own musical revolution of the years before WWI for the neoclassical style that grew up between the wars. This may have influenced his decision to experiment with modern techniques.

Stravinsky and Boulez had actually met somewhat earlier, at some event in New York in 1947. They they had little chance to talk to one another: as Boulez put it they were "put in a box"!

Boulez recounted the story of a very strange radio concert broadcast in this period from the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. It included works by Boulez, Stravinsky, Pierre Henri and, to conclude Tschaikowky's Pathetique . Pierre Henri tried to give the transmission a "modernist twist", by jacking up the volume to unsupportable levels for key passages! This created an outcry across the nation.



Boulez and Stravinsky met again in Los Angeles in 1956. The *Marteau sans Maitre* (Boulez's signature work) was performed; Stravinsky joined with Boulez in turning the pages of the score.

On June 18, 1959 there was a concert at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees, in which both *the Sacre du Printemps* and the *Marteau Sans Maitre* were on the same program.

In 1953 Messaien's annotated score of the *Sacre* was published. Boulez stated that this commentary is "very important. Stravinsky's music "tends to moan" (*begayer*) and Messiaen sought to correct this.

Commenting on his recording of the *Sacre* in 1963 in the Comedie auditorium, Boulez stated flat-out that the acoustics of this hall are lousy. It was designed as a theatre, not as a concert hall.

During the intermission I exited into the lobby. At the upper end was a table on which CD's of Boulez's recordings were for sale. One of them was this 1963 recording. The salesclerk, a young man, encouraged me to buy it, explaining that the recording had been made in this same auditorium. I did buy it; then I told him that Boulez had stated that the acoustics for this recording were lousy. "When did he

say this", he asked. "About 10 minutes ago!"

Boulez recalled the years around 1966 when the arts were dominated by doctrinaire Communists, J.P. Sartre among them. Their strong protests against "bourgeois music" were, as Boulez quite rightly claimed, "very stupid". Among the composers that they "denounced" were Pierre Henri, Dutilleux, Jolivet and Boulez himself. He recalled the night on which Armand Gatti jumped over the rows of seats in the Comedie, crying "Shut Up!" (*One has to know who he is to catch the full flavor of this absurdity. A doctrinaire poet popular in the Communist world, he combines a rigid Marxist-Leninist leftism with the manner of a buffoon and, on occasion, writes moving poetry.*) The French CP, Boulez said, lacked the flexibility of the Italian.

Boulez presented his theory of the influence of other Russian composers on Stravinsky. Stravinsky rejected all connection with Scriabin, but it is there all the same. The influence of "The Five" (Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Balaikirov) came out during WWI in his Swiss period.

Pienckowki argued that Parisian audiences were ready to accept

the work of the Ballet Russes before it came to France. The war of 1870 had produced a strong "anti-German reaction". "German music" exemplified by Wagner, was rejected in favor of a certain "exoticism" which was associated with Russian music.

Then Boulez propounded a theory that sounded rather odd. He argued that before Stravinsky, Russian music with the exception of Tschaikowsky was relatively primitive, barely competent compared to German music. This is why the Russian composers tended to use repetitive patterns. Stravinsky turned this handicap into a virtue by his employment of long ostinatos and other repetitive devices.

Boulez continued this line of reasoning with another theory to explain the dearth of recordings of the *Sacre du Printemps* between 1913 and 1955:

"The best conductors were Germans; they've been trained in the school going back to Bach in which metres are regular. They were unable to deal with a score that changes the metre, rhythm and tempo in virtually every bar. This was, effectively due to a very profound difference in musical culture."

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*Afternoon, May 30th*

Comedie du Theatre des Champs-Elysees

Professor Richard Tarushkin,

*Resisting the Sacre*

Robert Craft , the "Boswell" of Igor Stravinsky, biographer, conductor of many recordings of his work, author of numerous collections of interviews with Stravinsky, had been invited to the colloquium but was unable to attend due to illness (He is 90) . His place was filled by Richard Tarushkin.

With his outcroppings of white hair, drooping mustache and peppered beard dropping from his chin and stiff as a blackboard eraser, his appearance may correctly be characterized as "shaggy". Combined with his massive bulk, big head and long face, one would not be blamed if, encountering him for the first time on the Siberian tundra, one might mistake him for a Russian bear (though just barely).

The musicologist Richard Tarushkin is the author of several books on Russian music and on Stravinsky in particular: "*Stravinsky and the*

*Russian Tradition*"; *"Russian Folk Melodies in the Rite of Spring"*

*"Opera and Drama in Russia"*; *"Defining Russia Musically"*, etc. He is

also an editor of the 3 volume "Oxford History of Western Music".

Following the uproar in Paris and London, which caused the Nijinsky choreography to be withdrawn and not performed for over 70 years (*one can watch a very silly BBC film, "Riot at the Rite" on YouTube*), Igor Stravinsky concluded that he'd failed. Performances of the orchestral score, which took place almost immediately afterwards, proved him wrong, yet he began distancing himself from the ballet as early as 1914.

Stravinsky spent World War I in exile in Switzerland. After the war, the stranglehold of Zhdanov's Socialist Realism on the arts prevented him from returning to Russia. This was followed by quarrels with Diaghilev and Nijinsky, Nijinsky's descent into insanity, and other catastrophes. Out of this came Stravinsky's devotion to a new fashion in music known as "neoclassical", a kind of "mannerism" in music, not unlike what has come to be known as "post-modernism" in architecture.

As a consequence, Stravinsky continued to reject, or "repudiate" his earlier work , starting with the *Sacre*. He both rejected the ballet, then made the patently absurd claim that the score to the *Sacre du Printemps* is pure, abstract music, like Bach's *Art of the Fugue* or the chamber music of Webern!

Combining the evidence advanced by Taruskin, and that of Millicent Hudson and Kenneth Archer the next day, left no doubt in my mind that the *Sacre de Printemps* is one of the greatest works of "tone painting" ever composed. These evidences came from (1)The score (2) The costumes (3) The huge backdrops painted by Nicolas Roerich based on his research as an archeologist (4) Nijinsky's ballet, reconstructed over 17 years, which one can see on a DVD.

Yet Stravinsky continued to maintain that there was no connection between the score, the ballet, and the plot. Unfortunately, his authority was overreaching, so that his dogma of the "pure and universal abstract music of the *Sacre du Printemps*" found its advocates in the US among such distinguished persons in the music world as the critic, composer and musicologist Olin Downes and the

conductor Leopold Stokowski. Paradoxically, it is Stokowski who conducts the *Sacre* in Disney's "Fantasia", which could not be more plesiosauric in its literal story-telling!

Only in recent decades have there been attempts to re-unite the score with the ballet in a way that does justice to both.

The 3 schools of thought, namely that the riots were due to the music, or the ballet, or the story are about equally divided.

Taruskin disagrees with the claim that the riot of May 29, 1913, should be treated as a landmark in the history of music. There was so much noise in the auditorium that no-one could hear the music anyway. For him the protests were about the dance. His views were more in accord with the conclusion that the productions of Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, including the *Sacre*, should be treated as the origin of modern dance.

Concert versions of the *Sacre* were conducted in 1914 by Serge Koussevitsky in Russia and on April 1914 by Pierre Monteux in Paris. These were very received. Once again, according to Taruskin, the *Sacre du Printemps* prompted no revolutions in the basic diatonic

language of European music, in contrast to the work of Arnold Schoenberg and his school. The score is neither subtle nor complex; dissonances are used as timbral color; the texture evolves from unresolved dissonances over a fairly ordinary diatonic background.

What *was* new, and decidedly shocking, about the *Sacre* were the huge orchestra (120 musicians), the completely novel sound effects generated by combinations of instruments, and the wildly shifting metrics and tempo. In other words, the "grammar" of the *Sacre* may have been conventional, but the sound was entirely new, which is what a revolution in music is supposed to be about! Stravinsky himself said that the *Sacre* was "written with an ax".

All the same the myth of the "scandal of the riot" took on a life of its own. This, of course, helped to promote the career of the orchestra score, though it led to censorship of the Nijinsky choreography for 75 years. Taruskin said that he has evidence that Diaghilev had sent out advanced notices of a possible scandal, and was very happy when it happened.

Diaghilev brought the Ballet Russes to London in 1922, with a



new choreography by Leonide Massine. He "took out insurance" by arranging to have performances of the orchestral version conducted by Eugene Goossens beforehand . Both ballet and concert version were successes. After the barbarities of World War I, those of the *Sacre* were tame in comparison.

Taruskin gave us a number of telling examples of the strange contradictory labels of "barbarity ", and "classical purity" that have been attached to the *Sacre du Printemps* over the century. Because of the revolutionary impact of both works, comparisons are often made between the *Rite of Spring* and Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Pablo Casals, for example, conceded that Stravinsky might written some interesting music, but described this comparison as "blasphemy!"

Taruskin questioned whether any work of music should be considered "sacred", or "blasphemous". With a signal to the projectionist, a YouTube morsel was projected on the screen to his right. It is taken from a film made in Germany in the 40's showing the ending of the 9th Symphony, conducted by Furtwangler for an assembly of the officialdom of the Third Reich. The camera scoots

back and forth between the orchestra, the conductor, Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, etc.

The granulation of the old film adds to its horror: grotesque, painful to look at or listen to. It is unlikely that the Third Reich would have commanded a performance of the *Sacre du Printemps*.

To show that the "sanitized" versions of the orchestral version are still very much with us, we were shown the final "human sacrifice" section of the *Sacre* on the DVD produced by Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Orchestra. This performance is something of a romp of virtuosos proudly demonstrating that they can "do their thing". As it races to the finish it freezing on a final frame of Thomas' face expanding into a broad grin, as if to say : "We did it!"

Yessir, we killed that dancer, all right! Now perhaps the gods will leave us alone until next year!

Finally, Taruskin read us an excerpt from the writings of Stravinsky, replete with criticisms of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup>, several of which are not without merit.

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