

PROGRAM NOTES

Igor Stravinsky – Ode

Igor Stravinsky

Born June 18, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia.

Died April 6, 1971, New York City.

Ode

In 1942, with the death of Natalie, whose family money had long nurtured her husband's passion for conducting and supporting composers, Serge established a foundation to commission new works written in her memory. The first work, premiered that November—less than six months after the foundation's first board meeting—was Symphony no. 1 by Bohuslav Martinů. The following year, grants were given to Béla Bartók, William Schuman, and Stravinsky.

At the time Stravinsky received his commission, he had already written an eclogue for a film of *Jane Eyre* that was never made, and he decided to use that music as the interlude between the first and last movements of his new piece in memory of Natalie Koussevitzky. "As I was charmed by that book," Stravinsky recalled of the *Jane Eyre* project, "and fascinated by the Brontës in general, I composed this piece for one of the hunting scenes." Now one of the fruits of Stravinsky's commercial undertakings during his American years—works that include a *Circus Polka* for Barnum & Bailey and the *Ebony Concerto* for Woody Herman—became part of this tribute to a friendship that dated back to the very beginnings of his career.

The Eclogue connects two new movements, a contrapuntal Eulogy and a solemn Epitaph, to form one of Stravinsky's loveliest memorial compositions (other subjects over the years included Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, Dylan Thomas, John F. Kennedy, Aldous Huxley, and T.S. Eliot). Koussevitzky himself conducted the premiere in October 1943, a performance Stravinsky called "catastrophic," because the trumpet player read the part in C instead of B-flat, and, near the end, a copyist's error joined together two separate staves into one, to unexpectedly cacophonous results.

Serge Koussevitzky died on June 4, 1951. Already in its first nine years, the foundation had commissioned more than fifty works in Natalie's memory, including Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, Copland's Third Symphony, Messiaen's *Turangalila* Symphony, and Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

© by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. All rights reserved. Program notes may not be reproduced; brief excerpts may be quoted if due acknowledgment is given to the author and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

These notes appear in galley files and may contain typographical or other errors. Programs and artists subject to change without notice.