**PROGRAM NOTES**

by Phillip Huscher

**Igor Stravinsky**  
Born June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia.  
Died April 6, 1971, New York City.

**Fireworks, Op. 4**

Stravinsky composed this work in 1908. The first performance was given on February 6, 1909, in Saint Petersburg. The score calls for three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, triangle, celesta, two harps, timpani, and strings. Performance time is approximately four minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first subscription concert performances of Stravinsky's *Fireworks* were given at Orchestra Hall on January 22 and 23, 1915, with Frederick Stock conducting. Our most recent subscription concert performances were given on April 4, 5, and 6, 2002, with Zubin Mehta conducting. The Orchestra first performed this work at the Ravinia Festival on June 26, 1951, with William Steinberg conducting, and most recently on July 7, 1968, with Seiji Ozawa conducting. Stravinsky himself led the Orchestra in performances of this work on November 7 and 12, 1940 (Orchestra Hall), and July 21, 1962 (Ravinia Festival).

This is the first music by Stravinsky the Chicago Symphony ever played. Frederick Stock included it on the second half of his program on January 22, 1915, sandwiched between music by Eric DeLamarter and the Queen Mab Scherzo from Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet*. The program book mentions (in passing and without comment) a recent ballet by Stravinsky called *The Rite of Spring*; the importance of that score, one of the few truly revolutionary works of the twentieth century, wasn’t yet appreciated, even though it had caused a riot at its premiere in Paris little more than a year before.

*Fireworks* is a small piece of great historical importance. Stravinsky began it in the spring of 1908, at a time when he often went to see his beloved teacher, mentor, and recently appointed father-figure, Rimsky-Korsakov. "He seemed to like my visits," Stravinsky later wrote. "He had my deep affection, and I was genuinely attached to him. It seems that these sentiments were reciprocated, but it was only later that I learned so from his family. His characteristic reserve had never allowed him to make any sort of display of his feelings."

One day, Stravinsky mentioned to Rimsky-Korsakov that he was writing a new orchestral fantasy:

> He seemed interested and told me to send it to him as soon as it was ready. I finished it in six weeks and sent it off to the country place where he was spending the summer. A few days later a telegram informed me of his death and shortly afterwards my registered package was returned to me: "Not delivered on account of death of addressee."

Stravinsky dedicated *Fireworks* to Rimsky’s daughter Nadia, in honor of her marriage to Maximilian Steinberg. Apparently the Steinbergs didn’t appreciate the gesture, then or later. In fact, Stravinsky's relations with Rimsky-Korsakov’s family deteriorated almost literally from the day of the funeral, when he and Rimsky’s widow had exchanged heated words. In 1962, when Stravinsky returned to Russia for the first time in nearly a half century and invited Nadia Steinberg to a concert of music which included *Fireworks*, she declined.

But *Fireworks* found a most receptive audience at the first performance in Saint Petersburg in 1909, for that night the crowd included the impresario Sergei Diaghilev. He was so impressed with Stravinsky’s music (the Scherzo fantastique also was performed) that he invited him to orchestrate music by Chopin.
and Grieg for the upcoming ballet season in Paris and commissioned him to compose the score for a new ballet he was planning on the Russian legend of the Firebird. The rest, of course, is history, but the fresh force of a singular new voice in music is felt throughout these four explosive, astonishing minutes of orchestral fireworks.

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