

Minnesota Orchestra Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra

Roberto Abbado, conductor

Abigail Nims, mezzo

Joseph Kaiser, tenor

Jason Grant, bass

Thursday, January 21, 2010, 7:30 pm | Orchestra Hall

Igor Stravinsky	<i>Pulcinella</i> , complete ballet <i>Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra</i> <i>Abigail Nims, mezzo; Joseph Kaiser, tenor;</i> <i>Jason Grant, bass</i>	ca. 40'
------------------------	---	---------

I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
-------------------------	---------

Igor Stravinsky	<i>The Firebird</i> , complete ballet (original 1910 version) <i>Minnesota Orchestra</i>	ca. 44'
------------------------	---	---------

The *Pulcinella* text is provided in a program insert.

music up|close

Pulcinella and *Firebird*
with Minnesota Orchestra
Assistant Conductor
Courtney Lewis
1/21 at 6:30 pm
Orchestra Hall Auditorium

one-minute notes

Stravinsky: *Pulcinella*

Stravinsky re-imagined “some delightful 18th-century music” suggested by the impresario Serge Diaghilev to create a one-act ballet with song, based on the romantic manipulations of the *commedia dell’arte* figure Pulcinella. The work is heard here in its original form, with singers positioned within the orchestra, singing of love’s pleasures and pains as a counterpoint to the story of the ballet itself.

Stravinsky: *The Firebird*

The heroic Prince Ivan and a magical Firebird are revealed with brilliant orchestral colors. The gentle dance of captive princesses, the prince’s effort to free them, and the evil sorcerer’s defeat by the Firebird—all is painted in the most vivid musical imagery.



Roberto Abbado, conductor

Roberto Abbado, now in his second term as an Artistic Partner of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, is esteemed internationally as a conductor of major orchestras and opera companies. He has led the Boston Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra and maintains regular relationships with the primary orchestras of San Francisco, St. Louis, Atlanta and Houston, as well as the Orchestra of St. Luke’s in New York. He is known as a passionate interpreter of modern and contemporary music.

Currently: He began this season leading the Teatro Maggio Musicale of Florence at Bucharest’s Enescu Festival and conducting a Swiss tour with the Orchestra Sinfonica of Milan. He also leads additional orchestras across his native Italy, Israel and the U.S. and conducts a new production of Rossini’s *La Donna del Lago* at the Paris Opéra.

Of interest: Abbado, whose dynastic musical family includes his uncle, the famed conductor Claudio Abbado, was recently honored with the Franco Abbiati award of the National Association of Italian Music Critics.

More: thespco.org, opus3artists.com.



Abigail Nims, mezzo

Rising young mezzo Abigail Nims has garnered acclaim for her opera, concert and recital performances.

Opera: Current and recent engagements include singing Lazuli in *L’Étoile* with New York City Opera, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Hermia in Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. She also created the role of Veruca Salt in the workshop premiere of Peter Ash’s *The Golden Ticket*.

In concert: Nims has been a soloist in Crumb’s *Night of the Four Moons* with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Mahler’s Second Symphony at Teatro Municipal de Santiago (Chile) and *Messiah* with several ensembles.

More: herbertbarrett.com.



Joseph Kaiser, tenor

Joseph Kaiser, who enjoys success in opera, oratorio and concert roles throughout North America and Europe, starred as Tamino in the Kenneth Branagh film adaptation of *The Magic Flute*.

Opera: This season Kaiser makes several role debuts, two as the title character: in *Faust* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Sir Andrew Davis conducting, and in Messenger’s *Fortunio* at Paris’ Opéra Comique under the baton of Louis Langrée. He has sung with the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper and Santa Fe Opera, among other companies.

at the same time...

In 1910, when Stravinsky’s *Firebird* is first staged:

- Newspaper owner W.D. Boyce founds the Boy Scouts of America
- Nineteen-year-old entrepreneur Joyce C. Hall founds the greeting-card company later known as Hallmark

Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* debuts in 1920, the year:

- F. Scott Fitzgerald wins acclaim for *This Side of Paradise*, his first novel
- In the U.S., the Nineteenth Amendment grants women the vote

In concert: He has often been featured in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the Berlioz Requiem.

More: imgartists.com.



Jason Grant, bass

Los Angeles native Jason Grant is heard on concert stages across the country this year, singing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Brahms' *German Requiem*, Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, the Mozart Requiem and Zemlinsky's *Frühlingsbegräbnis*, with such conductors as JoAnn Falletta, Louis Langrée and Jahja Ling.

Opera: He recently joined Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony for Stravinsky's *Le rossignol*, with Carnegie Hall among the performance venues. He has sung Angelotti in *Tosca*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Zuniga in *Carmen*, Bartolo in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Monterone in *Rigoletto* and many other roles.

More: colbertartists.com.

Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra

The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, now in its 51st season, is the nation's only full-time chamber orchestra and is widely regarded as one of the finest in the world. In collaboration with its four artistic partners—Roberto Abbado, Douglas Boyd, Dawn Upshaw and Christian Zacharias—the 35 SPCO members present more than 150 concerts and additional programs each year, among which are its award-winning CONNECT education program.

Broadcasts, recordings, tours: The ensemble's concerts are regularly heard on *Performance Today* and *SymphonyCast*. It tours nationally as well as to premier venues in Europe, Asia and South America, and has released 67 recordings.

Honors: The SPCO has received 14 ASCAP awards.

More: thespcoco.org.

STRAVINSKY, COMPLETE

This concert offers performances of two of Stravinsky's most popular scores, *Pulcinella* and *The Firebird*. But with a difference. Though *Pulcinella* was premiered as a "ballet with song" and originally scored for three vocal soloists, dancers, and orchestra, most audiences today know only the 20-minute orchestral suite that Stravinsky drew from the stage production in 1920. *The Firebird* has become Stravinsky's most popular work in the concert hall, but it began life as a ballet score. First danced by the Ballets Russes in Paris in 1910, it made the young composer's reputation. Stravinsky was fully aware of that success, and over the next 35 years he drew three orchestral suites from his ballet score.

Tonight we hear *Pulcinella* and *The Firebird* in their original, complete form. They tell a much fuller story than the familiar suites, for which Stravinsky had to cut a great deal of music. Not only do the original works include rarely heard (and very good) music: they also illuminate for us the original stage works, fleshing out scenes, establishing a sequence of events and helping us understand Stravinsky's initial conception of both works.



Igor Stravinsky

Born: June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum

Died: April 6, 1971, New York City

Pulcinella, complete ballet

In the years immediately after World War I, Stravinsky found himself trapped between several forces. The Russian Revolution had made it impossible for him to return to his native land, and now, suddenly homeless, he had to make a new home for himself in Western Europe.

an impasse, broken by Diaghilev

He was at an artistic impasse as well.

Unwilling to return to the grand manner of the great "Russian" ballets that had made him famous, he was repelled by the music of the serial composers, dadaism and other new directions in music. A fresh direction came from an unexpected source. In 1919, the impresario Serge Diaghilev approached Stravinsky with what seemed a strange suggestion: "I have an idea that I think will amuse you...I want you to look at some delightful 18th-century music with the idea of orchestrating it for a ballet." Diaghilev had in mind a collection of pieces by the Italian composer Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-1736).

Stravinsky thought Diaghilev insane—he actively disliked the few pieces that he knew—but he agreed to have a look. Prepared to sneer, he instead fell in love. Diaghilev and Stravinsky evolved a ballet with song in one act based on this music and centered on the old *commedia dell'arte* figure of Pulcinella. The ballet tells of two young men, Florindo and Caviello, whose sweethearts Rosetta and Prudenza are in love with Pulcinella. The men evolve an elaborate plan involving disguises, but Pulcinella outfoxes them all. At the end Pulcinella marries the beautiful Pimpinella, and the young men are wed to their sweethearts.

Stravinsky was fortunate in his collaborators on *Pulcinella*: Diaghilev oversaw the project, Picasso designed the sets, Leonid Massine created the choreography and danced the title role, Tamara Karsavina danced the part of Pimpinella; and Ernest Ansermet conducted. First produced in Paris on May 15, 1920, *Pulcinella* was an instant success, and the orchestral suite Stravinsky drew from it has remained one of his most popular scores.

the music

In *Pulcinella*, Stravinsky took the melodic and bass lines of Pergolesi's themes and re-harmonized and extended that material in his own way. It makes for a pleasing amalgam of the old and the new: Pergolesi's charming melodies now sit up and sing with an unexpected pungency and rhythmic vitality. Stravinsky writes for what seems at first an orchestra of Baroque proportions (it calls for 33 players), and he preserves the small band of string soloists, the *concertino*, within the larger orchestra. Yet he modifies the 18th-century orchestra, including parts for more recent instruments such as the trombone and valved French horns.

The saucy *Overture* that opens *Pulcinella* is followed by a sequence of dance movements and songs. The role of the songs—for mezzo, tenor, and bass, who are positioned within the orchestra—is unusual, for they are not part of the action unfolding onstage. Stravinsky's biographer Eric Walter White has described the singers as instruments in that orchestra, and their eight vocal numbers (sung individually or in various combinations) effectively comprise a tale-within-a-tale. These songs are about love, its pleasures and pains, and the question of faithfulness, and they form a sort of counterpoint to the story being danced onstage. *Pulcinella* concludes with a *Minuet* (during which all the weddings are celebrated) and the general rejoicing of the *Finale*.

Pulcinella is a pivotal work in Stravinsky's career. Not only did it break a creative impasse, but it opened up new possibilities for the composer and inaugurated his neo-classical period. Stravinsky himself was frank about the importance of this score: "*Pulcinella* was my discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of my late works became possible. It was a backward look, of course—the first of my love affairs in that direction—but it was a look in the mirror, too."

Instrumentation:

solo mezzo, tenor and bass, with orchestra comprising
2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns,
trumpet, trombone and strings

The Firebird, complete ballet (original 1910 version)

In 1909, following a successful visit of the Ballets Russes to Paris, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev and his choreographer Mikhail Fokine made plans for a new ballet to be presented in Paris the following season, based on the old Russian legend of the Firebird. They at first asked Anatoly Lyadov to compose the music, but when it became clear that the notoriously lazy Lyadov would never get around to it, they decided to take a chance on a young composer who had orchestrated some pieces for the Ballets Russes the year before. His name was Igor Stravinsky, and he was virtually unknown.

meeting the challenge

Recognizing that this was his big chance (and terrified that he would not be up to the challenge), Stravinsky set to work in November 1909 at a dacha owned by the Rimsky-Korsakov family (to which he had gone, as he said, "for a vacation in birch forests and snow-fresh air"). He finished the piano score in St. Petersburg in March, and the orchestration was complete a month later. The first performance took place in Paris on June 25, 1910, eight days after the composer's 28th birthday, and it was a huge success. Stravinsky would go on to write quite different music over the course of his long career, but the music from *The Firebird*—now a century old—remains his most popular creation.

the tale

The Firebird tells of a young prince, Ivan Tsarevich, who unknowingly pursues the magic Firebird—part woman, part bird—into the garden of the green-taloned Kastchei, most horrible of all ogres: Kastchei captures and imprisons maidens within the castle and turns all knights who come

to rescue them to stone. Ivan captures the Firebird, but she begs to be released, and when he agrees she gives him a magic feather and vanishes. The prince sees a group of 13 princesses playing with golden apples, and when dawn breaks and they have to return to Kastchei's castle, he follows them. Instantly he is confronted by the hideous fiends who inhabit the castle and is about to be turned to stone himself when he remembers the feather. He waves it, and the Firebird returns, putting Kastchei and all the other ogres to sleep, and showing him where a magic egg is hidden in a casket. When Ivan smashes the egg, Kastchei and his fiends disappear, the petrified knights return to life, the maidens are freed, Kastchei's castle is transformed into a cathedral, and Ivan marries the most beautiful of the princesses.

These concerts present the score of *The Firebird* as it was performed at the premiere of the ballet in Paris in June 1910.

the music

The ominous *Introduction*, in the unusual key of A-flat minor, hints at the music that will be associated with the monsters; near the end of this section comes one of Stravinsky's most striking orchestral effects, a series of rippling string glissandos played entirely in harmonics. *The Enchanted Garden of Kastchei* leads to music that Stravinsky omitted from the suites, the *Appearance of the Firebird, Pursued by Prince Ivan*, full of trills and tremolos from the strings. The music proceeds without pause into the shimmering, whirling *Dance of the Firebird* and *The Firebird's Variation*, which contained Stravinsky's own favorite music from this score. But between these comes the unfamiliar *Capture of the Firebird by Prince Ivan*, full of quick-paced staccato writing that concludes with ringing horn attacks.

Appearance of the Thirteen Enchanted Princesses is marked by shimmering string chords, followed by a series of woodwind and violin solos and culminating in a flute cadenza. As Prince Ivan watches, the princesses engage in their *Game with the Golden Apples*, which bustles along energetically on its steady rhythmic pulse. Stravinsky was later critical of this movement, calling it too "Mendelssohnian-Tchaikovskyan," but it is brilliant music, and it makes an effective scene in the ballet. The *Sudden Appearance of Prince Ivan*, with its striking horn solos, accompanies Ivan Tsarevich's entry into the garden.

The music now proceeds into the familiar *Khorovod*, or *Round Dance*. One of the intentions of Diaghilev and

Fokine had been to make *The Firebird* as "Russian" as possible, and in *The Princesses' Khorovod* Stravinsky uses the old Russian folk-tune "In the Garden." Announced by solo oboe as the 13 captive princesses dance in the castle garden, the melody is taken over by the violins and extended in the ballet's most lyric section.

The *Khorovod* comes to a peaceful close, and it is here that listeners will find a long sequence of unfamiliar music. In the familiar suites, the *Khorovod* gives way to the *Infernal Dance of All Kastchei's Subjects*, but in the complete ballet a number of scenes separate these two movements. *Daybreak*, with its fierce trumpet calls, leads to the *Magic Carillon*: bells ring wildly as Kastchei's monsters appear—to violent music—and take Prince Ivan captive. Kastchei the Immortal then enters on a series of brass fanfares and threatens Ivan. The princesses intercede to little avail before the Firebird herself enters and gradually puts Kastchei's minions to sleep. Only now does the great *Infernal Dance of All Kastchei's Subjects* explode to life in one of the most violent orchestral attacks ever written. Sharply syncopated rhythms and barbaric snorts from the low brass depict the fiends' efforts to resist the Firebird's spell; without the slightest relaxation or slowing of tempo this dance powers its way to a dazzling (and ear-splitting) close on a great rip of sound. In its aftermath, solo bassoon sings the gentle, almost lugubrious *Berceuse*, the music with which the Firebird lulls Kastchei and his followers to sleep.

In the familiar suites, the *Berceuse* leads without pause into the *Finale*. In the ballet, however, Kastchei does not remain conveniently asleep but comes back to life to the sound of contrabassoons, then bassoons, then the entire wind and brass sections. The Firebird lulls him not to sleep but to death (deep string chords), and this leads through a magical passage for tremolo strings into the *Finale*. Here solo French horn sings the main theme, based on another Russian folksong, "By the Gate." Beginning quietly, this noble tune simply repeats, growing in strength as it recurs, and the ballet drives to its magnificent conclusion.

Instrumentation:

3 flutes, piccolo (3rd flute doubling 2nd piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling E-flat clarinet), bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon (3rd bassoon doubling 2nd contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bells, cymbals, glockenspiel, tambourine, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone, 3 harps, piano, celesta and strings; offstage: trumpet, 3 tenor Wagner tuben, 3 bass Wagner tuben

— Program notes by Eric Bromberger.

