

# Minnesota Orchestra Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra

**Osmo Vänskä**, conductor

Friday, January 22, 2010, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

<b>John Stafford Smith/ arr. Igor Stravinsky</b>	<i>The Star-Spangled Banner</i> <i>Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra</i>	ca. 2'
<b>Igor Stravinsky</b>	<i>Jeu de cartes</i> (A Game of Cards), Ballet in Three Deals <i>Minnesota Orchestra</i>	ca. 21'
<b>Igor Stravinsky</b>	<i>Danses concertantes</i> for Chamber Orchestra Marche Pas d'action Thème varié Pas de deux Marche <i>Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra</i>	ca. 18'
	<b>I N T E R M I S S I O N</b>	ca. 20'
<b>Igor Stravinsky</b>	<i>The Rite of Spring</i> Part I: The Adoration of the Earth Part II: The Sacrifice <i>Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra</i>	ca. 32'

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music  
up close

**Musical Collaborations**  
with Minnesota Orchestra  
Principal Horn Michael Gast and  
Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra  
Principal Horn Bernhard Scully  
1/22 at 7 pm  
Orchestra Hall Auditorium



**Osmo Vänskä**, conductor

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**Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra**

Profile appears on page 34.

one-minute notes

**Smith/Stravinsky: *The Star-Spangled Banner***

The pungent harmonies in Stravinsky's arrangement of the famous anthem nearly got the composer arrested for tampering with national property.

**Stravinsky: *Jeu de cartes* (A Game of Cards)**

This musical poker game consists of three witty movements, or "deals," each of which begins with a bright fanfare. A saucy Joker figure makes frequent appearances, as do playful quotations of other great composers' works.

**Stravinsky: *Dances concertantes***

Stravinsky's witty set of five dances for chamber orchestra is at turns lyrical, forceful and mischievous. Brisk marches open and close the work; at the core is a set of variations full of bright sonorities and biting harmonies.

**Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring***

Of this work—which drew jeers at its 1913 premiere—Stravinsky wrote: it "represents pagan Russia and is unified by a single idea: the mystery and great surge of the creative power of Spring." Vibrant sounds of nature set the scene for the story, an imagined pagan ritual in which a sacrificial virgin dances herself to death.

at the same time...

**In 1942, when *Dances concertantes* is first performed:**

- Anne Frank's family goes into hiding in an attic above her father's office in Amsterdam
- President Roosevelt orders the internment of Japanese American citizens
- Daylight saving time is introduced in the U.S.

***The Rite of Spring* premieres in 1913, the year:**

- Henry Ford pioneers new assembly line techniques in his automobile factories
- The first crossword puzzle is published in the *New York World*
- Death Valley, California records a temperature of 134° F, the highest in U.S. history



**Igor Stravinsky**

**Born:** June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum  
**Died:** April 6, 1971, New York City

***The Star-Spangled Banner*, arr. Stravinsky**

In 1941, shortly after immigrating to the U.S., Stravinsky arranged *The Star-Spangled Banner*, which had become the national anthem just ten years earlier. The lyrics date back to an 1814 Francis Scott Key poem, and the tune existed even earlier; a young composer named John Stafford Smith (1750-1836) wrote it in the 1770s as the theme song for a British gentlemen's club.

Stravinsky kept the melody intact, but inserted strikingly

pungent and original harmonies, baffling some people and outraging others. The tender, legato treatment of the central section—underscoring “And the rockets’ red glare, the bombs bursting in air”—is a delightful juxtaposition that many arrangers have repeated. Stravinsky certainly meant no offense with his music, and its mixed reception indicates just how wide the gap was between the century’s most famous composer and his new compatriots.

Stravinsky provided the following statement to accompany the first publication of the score: “Searching about for a vehicle through which I might best express my gratitude at the prospect of becoming an American citizen, I chose to harmonize and orchestrate as a national chorale the beautiful sacred anthem *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

It is a desire to do my bit in these grievous times toward fostering and preserving the spirit of patriotism in this country that inspires me to tender this, my humble work, to the American people.”

*Excerpted from a program note by Aaron Grad ©2010.*

### ***Jeu de cartes (A Game of Cards), Ballet in Three Deals***

Stravinsky was fond of games. He liked having a game of Chinese checkers after dinner every evening, and he was an inveterate card-player. When Lincoln Kirstein and Edward Warburg commissioned a ballet from him in 1936, Stravinsky recalled that “poker was then one of my favorite recreations,” and he decided to base the ballet on a scenario about a game of poker; his first idea was a vision of ballet dancers dressed as playing cards and dancing on a green surface.

#### **casino rhythms and a saucy joker**

He composed *Jeu de cartes* (A Game of Cards) across the summer and fall of 1936 in France and came to New York City the next spring to observe Balanchine’s rehearsals. Stravinsky disliked the early costume design, based on Tarot cards, feeling that it turned his ballet into a costume drama, and Balanchine accepted that criticism. New costumes based on playing cards were prepared for the premiere, which Stravinsky conducted at the Metropolitan Opera on April 27, 1937.

As he began to work on the ballet, Stravinsky reached back to some of his earliest memories, when his family

spent their vacations at German resorts. In particular, he remembered how the master of ceremonies at a German casino would herald each new card game by announcing in grand tones: “EIN NEUES SPIEL. EIN NEUES GLÜCK” (A new game. A new fortune). The rhythm of that call became the rhythm of the fanfare for each of the ballet’s three acts, or “deals,” as Stravinsky called them.

The composer has described the action of the ballet: “In the first deal, one of three players is beaten while the other two remain with even ‘straights.’ In the second deal the Joker is victorious because of four aces who defeat four queens. In the third deal, the Joker is finally beaten by three flushes.”

One need not know the details of each of the deals to enjoy the music, particularly when it is performed as a concert work, as it usually is today, though it may help to know that the saucy figure of the Joker intrudes early in the ballet and will return in different forms throughout. *Jeu de cartes* lasts about 21 minutes, and its three deals are played without pause. Listeners will be able to follow the brass fanfare that marks the start of each deal, and that fanfare returns at the very end: Stravinsky said that he wanted to suggest that all games are ongoing.

The score calls for a large orchestra (woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, plus bass drum and timpani), and Stravinsky specified that he wanted a substantial string section: 12 first violins, ten seconds, eight violas, six cellos and six basses. The music itself is built on the bright sonorities, clean textures and rhythmic energy of Stravinsky’s neo-classical style.

Special mention should be made of the many quotations that appear in this score. The most prominent of these are the main theme from Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* Overture, which appears in the third deal, and the theme from the *Allegretto scherzando* of Beethoven’s Eighth Symphony, which appears in the second. Both are playful and tautly rhythmic in their original form, and Stravinsky incorporates that spirit of play as he adapts these themes for his own uses. Others have made out themes from *Die Fledermaus*, *La Valse* and many more, including quotations from Stravinsky himself—they are all part of a score that is intended to be fun.

#### **Instrumentation:**

2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum and strings

### Dances concertantes for Chamber Orchestra

during the World War II era, Stravinsky wrote three works in a neoclassical vein, all scored for a chamber orchestra-sized ensemble—*Dumbarton Oaks* Concerto (1938), *Dances concertantes* (1942) and the Concerto in D for Strings (1946)—each offering bright chamber orchestra sonorities, formal clarity, a pungent harmonic language and boundless energy.

*Dances concertantes* was one of the first works Stravinsky composed after moving to America in 1939. On his arrival in the United States, Stravinsky had lived briefly in New York, but in May 1940 he moved to Hollywood, where he would live for the next 29 years. The Werner Janssen Symphony of Los Angeles quickly commissioned a work from the newly-arrived composer, and Stravinsky wrote *Dances concertantes* in Hollywood during the latter half of 1941. He led the premiere with the Werner Janssen Symphony on February 8, 1942, dedicating the score to the orchestra as well.

#### tension and transparency

A certain tension resides within the title *Dances concertantes*. This is indeed an orchestral work conceived for performance in the concert hall (hence, concertante), but it is also a dance score. Stravinsky wrote this music without a specific story or scenario in mind, but its dance-like rhythms and movement titles such as *Pas d'action* and *Pas de deux* suggest that dance was never far from his mind. In fact, the work has been choreographed by George Balanchine, Kenneth MacMillan and others.

Stravinsky was precise about the orchestra he was writing for—he wanted an ensemble of 24 players: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, two horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, six violins, four violas, three cellos and two double basses. The scoring throughout is transparent, and Stravinsky gives important passages to individual players, much as Baroque composers did in the concerto grosso. Themes are sometimes kaleidoscopic, with bits tossed between instrumental sections.

*Dances concertantes* is in five brief movements, with the first and fifth movements, a brisk march based on the same music, acting as a frame for the 18-minute score. The *Pas d'action*, at a somewhat faster tempo than the opening march, features solo woodwinds and constantly shifting meters. Longest of the movements, the *Thème*

*varié* is, as the title suggests, in variation form. After a brief introduction for woodwinds, solo French horn sounds the theme, and Stravinsky—by reputation the enemy of “expression” in music—significantly marks this *dolce, cantabile*. Four variations follow, the first three quickly-paced, the last at a slower tempo. The *Pas de deux* is built on long melodic lines, and along the way alert listeners will detect fragmentary quotations from Schubert’s *Marche militaire*. The opening march, now somewhat abridged, returns to propel *Dances concertantes* to its energetic (and abrupt) conclusion.

#### Instrumentation:

flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani and strings

### The Rite of Spring

In the spring of 1910, while completing the orchestration of *The Firebird*, Igor Stravinsky had the most famous dream in the history of music: “I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: wise elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dancing herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring.”

This idea became *The Rite of Spring*, which Stravinsky began composing in the summer of 1911, immediately after the premiere of *Petrushka*. For help in creating a scenario that would evoke the spirit of pagan Russia, Stravinsky turned to the painter-archeologist-geologist Nicholas Roerich, who summarized the action:

“The first set should transport us to the foot of a sacred hill, in a lush plain, where Slavonic tribes are gathered together to celebrate the spring rites. In this scene there is an old witch who predicts the future, a marriage by capture, round dances. Then comes the most solemn moment. The wise elder is brought from the village to imprint his sacred kiss on the new-flowering earth. During this rite the crowd is seized with a mystic terror.

“After this uprush of terrestrial joy, the second scene sets a celestial mystery before us. Young virgins dance on the sacred hill amid enchanted rocks; they choose the victim they intend to honor. In a moment she will dance her last dance before the ancients clad in bearskins to show that the bear was man’s ancestor. Then the greybeards dedicate the victim to the god Yárido.”



This story of violence and nature-worship in pagan Russia—inspired in part by Stravinsky's boyhood memories of the thunderous break-up of the ice on the Neva River in St. Petersburg each spring—became a ballet in two parts, *The Adoration of the Earth* and *The Sacrifice*.

### ancient and modern

In the music, Stravinsky drew on the distant past and fused it with the modern. His themes (many adapted from ancient Lithuanian wedding tunes) are brief, of narrow compass, and based on the constantly changing meters of Russian folk music, yet his harmonic language can be fiercely dissonant and “modern,” particularly in the famous repeating chord in *Dance of the Adolescents*, where he superimposes an E-flat major chord (with added seventh) on top of an F-flat major chord. Even more striking is the rhythmic imagination that animates this score: Stravinsky himself confessed that parts were so complicated that while he could play them, he could not write them down.

And beyond all these, *The Rite of Spring* is founded on an incredible orchestral sense: from the eerie sound of the high solo bassoon at the beginning through its use of a massive percussion section and such unusual instruments as alto flute and piccolo trumpet (not to mention the eight horns, two tubas and quadruple woodwinds), this score rings with sounds never heard before. The premiere may have provoked a noisy riot, but at a more civilized level it had an even greater impact: no music written after May 29, 1913, would ever be the same.

### the adoration of the earth

The *Introduction* is scored almost exclusively for woodwinds: from the famous opening bassoon solo through its intricately twisting woodwind figures, the music suggests the wriggling of insects as they unfold and come to life in the spring thaw. This is suddenly interrupted by *Dance of the Adolescents*, driven along by stamping, dissonant chords and off-the-beat accents.

The *Mock Abduction*, full of horn calls and furious rhythmic energy, rides a quiet trill into *Rounds of Spring*, where together the E-flat and bass clarinets outline the haunting principal melody, another theme Stravinsky derived from ancient folk music. Deep string chords (which in the ballet accompany the male dancers' lifting the girls onto their backs) soon build to a cataclysmic climax full of the sound of tam-tam and trombone glissandos. The return of the wistful opening melody rounds this section off quietly, but that calm is annihilated

by the timpani salvos and snarling low brass of *Games of the Rival Cities*. The eight horns ring out splendidly here, and the music rushes ahead to the brief *Procession of the Wise Elder* and then to one of the eeriest moments in the score, *Adoration of the Earth*. Only four measures long, this concludes with an unsettling chord for eleven solo strings, all playing harmonics, as the Wise Elder bends to kiss the earth. The music explodes, and *Dance of the Earth* races to the conclusion of the ballet's first half.

### the sacrifice

The second part of the work might be thought of as a gradual crescendo of excitement. It moves from a misty beginning (an inspiration to generations of film composers) to the exultant fury of the concluding *Sacrificial Dance*. Along the way come such distinctive moments as the solo for alto flute in *Mysterious Circles of Young Girls*, where the sacrificial maiden will be chosen; the violently pounding 11/4 measure that thrusts the music into *Glorification of the Chosen One*; the nodding, bobbing bassoons that herald *Evocation of the Ancestors* (another folk-derived theme of constricted range yet of great metric variety); and the shrieking horns of *Ritual of the Ancestors*.

A solitary bass clarinet plunges us into the *Sacrificial Dance*, whose rhythmic complexity has become legendary: this was the section that Stravinsky could play but at first not write down, and in 1943 (30 years after composing this music) he went back and rebarred it in the effort to make it easier for performers. This music is dauntingly “black” on the page, with its furious energy, its quite short (and constantly changing) bar lengths, and its gathering excitement. It dances its way to a delicate violin trill, and *The Rite of Spring* concludes with the brutal chord that marks the climactic moment of sacrifice.

#### Instrumentation:

3 flutes, alto flute, piccolo (3rd flute doubling 2nd piccolo),  
4 oboes, English horn (4th oboe doubling 2nd English horn),  
3 clarinets, bass clarinet (3rd clarinet doubling 2nd bass clarinet),  
E-flat clarinet, 4 bassoons, contrabassoon (4th bassoon doubling  
2nd contrabassoon), 8 horns (two doubling tenor Wagner tuben),  
4 trumpets, (4th trumpet doubling bass trumpet), piccolo trumpet,  
3 trombones, 2 tubas, antique cymbals in B-flat/A-flat, cymbals,  
bass drum, guiro, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle and strings

Program notes for *Jeu de cartes*, *Danses concertantes* and  
*The Rite of Spring* by **Eric Bromberger**.

Jean Cocteau's drawing  
of Stravinsky conducting  
his *The Rite of Spring*.

