

Stravinsky

SIDE 1

SYMPHONY OF PSALMS

THE LA JOLLA CIVIC-UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS

DAVID CHASE, CONDUCTOR

SIDE 2

SUITE FROM *THE FIREBIRD* (1911 VERSION, PLUS *BERCEUSE* AND *FINALE*)

THE LA JOLLA CIVIC-UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA

THOMAS NEE, CONDUCTOR

Symphony of Psalms

Raised in the Russian Orthodox church, Stravinsky fell away from its practice in his youth, but in 1926 — at age 44 — he rejoined the church. Written on a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the *Symphony of Psalms* is an expression of the composer's newly-regained faith.

Stravinsky arranged his texts — taken from the Psalms — in an order denoting the sequence confession, forgiveness, and praise. Such a progression would seem to call for brilliant music, full of bright color and festive sounds. On the contrary, the *Symphony of Psalms* has a subdued tone, a funereal splendor that is more effective than a self-consciously celebratory work might be. Stravinsky conceived of the orchestra and voices as equal partners, but he eliminated violins, violas, and clarinets from the orchestration, and the absence of the bright color of the strings and the smooth texture of the clarinets helps intensify the archaic feel of the music.

Stravinsky began work on the *Symphony of Psalms* early in 1930. The repeated six-note sequence in the final movement was his initial musical idea, and he wrote this section first, then the opening movements. None of the movements has an Italian tempo indication. Instead, Stravinsky specifies only the desired metronome marking. The first movement (quarter note=92) — which Stravinsky said was composed “in a state of religious and musical ebullience” — opens with a crack of sound generated in large part by the two pianos, and the chorus enters with its plea to be heard. The second movement (eighth note=60) is a complex double fugue, first for woodwinds and then for voices. The final movement (quarter note=48) is the most varied. It opens with the chorus's *Alleluia*, but instead of being festive, the phrase is somberly, painfully beautiful. The original six-note germ occurs quietly, then explodes into life. At the end, the music moves steadily ahead

over a pulsing four-note ostinato. Once again, the celebration is muted and somber, and the *Symphony* comes to a close on the two phrases — *Alleluia* and *Laudate Dominum* — that have shaped the final movement.

Suite from “The Firebird”

In the fall of 1909, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev and his choreographer Michel Fokine asked the relatively-unknown Igor Stravinsky to compose the score for a ballet on Russian folk-themes to be presented by the Ballet Russe in Paris the following June. *The Firebird* tells of a young prince, Ivan Tsarevich, who captures the magic Firebird in the garden of the monstrous Katschei. In exchange for her release, the Firebird gives Ivan a magic feather and then vanishes. The prince follows a group of thirteen princesses to Katschei's castle, where he is confronted by the castle's hideous fiends. Ivan waves the feather, and the Firebird returns, puts all the ogres — including Katschei — to sleep, and shows him a hidden magic egg. When Ivan smashes the egg, Katschei and his fiends disappear, the princesses are freed, Katschei's castle is transformed into a cathedral, and Ivan marries the most beautiful of the princesses.

Stravinsky drew three orchestral suites from *The Firebird*. The first — in 1911 — used the opulent original orchestration but eliminated the pantomimes that connected the scenes and stopped with the dance of Katschei's fiends as they tried to resist the Firebird's spell. In the second suite (1919), Stravinsky greatly reduced and simplified the orchestration, took out some of the earlier sections, and added the *Berceuse* and *Finale*: this is by far the most familiar of the three suites. The last suite (1945) reintroduced the pantomimes; this version is seldom performed.

The performance recorded here does not conform to any of Stravinsky's published suites but consists

of the 1911 suite plus the *Berceuse* and *Finale*. This version, which uses the original orchestration, introduces the Firebird, depicts her prayer for release from Ivan, and portrays the thirteen princesses at play. A tremendous crash opens the *Infernal Dance of Katschei's Subjects*, as they try to resist the Firebird's spell. The famous *Berceuse* is the music with which the Firebird sings the fiends to sleep, and the magnificent finale is based on the Russian folksong “By the Gate.”

— Notes by Eric Bromberger

The La Jolla Civic-University Orchestra was founded in 1954 and since 1967 has been affiliated with the University of California, San Diego. **The La Jolla Civic-University Chorus** was founded in the mid-1960's. Non-professional organizations that draw their members from throughout the San Diego area, both have developed reputations for adventurous programming and a strong commitment to modern music.

Thoms Nee has been Music Director of the La Jolla Civic-University Orchestra since 1967 and Music Director of the New Hampshire Music Festival since 1960. A former director of the Minnesota Opera Company and assistant conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra, Nee has conducted the American Composers Orchestra and has given many premieres of new music.

David Chase has been conductor of the La Jolla Civic-University Chorus since 1973. A member of the faculty of Palomar College, he has also served as director of the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Symphony Chorus and of the Palomar Community Orchestra

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