

Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring

Michael Francis, *Conductor*

Friday, October 21, 2022, Straz Center - Morsani Hall at 8:00 pm

Saturday, October 22, 2022, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm

Sunday, October 23, 2022, Ruth Eckerd Hall at 7:30 pm

Michael Abels

(b. 1962)

Peter I. Tchaikovsky

(1840-1893)

Igor Stravinsky

(1882-1971)

Delights and Dances

Selected Suite from *Swan Lake*

Act I, Introduction Moderato assai

Act I, No. 2 Waltz (Valse)

Act II, No. 10 Introduction

Act II, No. 13 Variation IV Scene

Act II, No. 13 Variation V Pas d'Action

Act III, No. 20a Danse Russe

Act IV, No. 29 Finale

Intermission

Le sacre du printemps (*The Rite of Spring*) *

PART I: Adoration of the Earth

Introduction

The Augurs of Spring—Dances of the Young Girls

Ritual of Abduction

Spring Rounds

Ritual of the Rival Tribes

Procession of the Sage

The Sage

Dance of the Earth

PART II: The Sacrifice

Introduction

Mystic Circle of the Young Girls

Glorification of the Chosen One

Evocation of the Ancestors

Ritual Action of the Ancestors

Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)

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Michael Abels (1962-)

Delights & Dances

Duration: ca. 12 minutes

In its commitment to the works of today's composers, The Florida Orchestra balances the tried-and-true classics with pieces new to our ears, reminding us that the repertoire is less a collection of museum artifacts than an ongoing conversation.

True to this philosophy is *Delights & Dances* by Michael Abels, who may be best known for his score to the Oscar-winning film *Get Out*.

Completed in 2007, the work was commissioned by the Sphinx Organization for its 10th anniversary. Sphinx is dedicated to diversity in the arts and made up primarily of African-American and Latino artists.

Sphinx gave Abels the freedom to compose anything he wanted, with the one requirement being it feature a number of string soloists. Originally scored for a larger orchestra, Abels pared it down and made it more intimate.

"After the premiere, I revised the piece into this leaner version for string quartet and orchestra," Abels says. "It's with a kind of pas de deux between the cello and viola."

"Once joined by the whole quartet, this serves as an introduction to the bluesy first half of the piece, which is accompanied only by pizzicato," he adds. "This section features many solos for each of the quartet members, solos that are meant to sound improvised, but are in fact carefully notated. The second half of the piece is a rousing bluegrass reel which is a celebration of virtuoso string playing, and the joy of making music together."

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Selections from Swan Lake

Duration: ca. 32 minutes

Some composers knock it out of the ballpark on their first swing, while others struggle to make a base hit. In retrospect, Tchaikovsky enjoyed a musical home run with his initial ballet, the brilliant and now-ubiquitous *Swan Lake*.

Composed by the 35-year-old Muscovite, *Swan Lake* redefined and heightened the importance of music in ballet at the time, and set the standard until Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* – also on this program – turned tradition on its head. An intuitive musician, Tchaikovsky brilliantly married music and movement, embracing sumptuous melodies with tight rhythmic clarity. The ballet did not need to be designed around the music because the music was ideally scored for every motion – and emotion – of the ballet.

"The unity of his integrated key scheme may lie beyond immediate perception," notes the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. "But his mastery of dansante – of devising melodies that match physical movement perfectly – his vivid orchestration, his effective associative themes, and his continuity of thought in music with frequent breaks were unprecedented."

A tear-jerker, the story involves Odette, a beautiful woman who, due to her rejection of an evil sorcerer named Rothbart, turns into a swan each day at sunset. On a hunting trip, the handsome Prince Siegfried comes across the flock of swans and falls in love with Odette.

Not to be outdone, Rothbart turns his own daughter, Odile, into the Black Swan to swoon Siegfried at a party. He falls for Odile and, realizing his mistake, dooms himself and the White Swan, who drown themselves in a lake. However, some productions reject the gloomy ending and have Odette and Siegfried live a happy life together. The expression of their love comes alive in the famous White Swan pas de deux, which is included regardless of the lovers' fate.

For tonight's performance, TFO Music Director Michael Francis has chosen seven popular selections from three acts, condensing the 2-1/2 hour ballet score into about 30 minutes. Heard back-to-back, *Swan Lake* and *The Rite of Spring* offer both stark differences and commonalities, Francis says.

"On one level, these iconic masterpieces are connected because they're two of the greatest ballets ever written, and celebrate human expression through dance," he says. "On another, they're written by two of the greatest Russian composers.

"But perhaps most interestingly, they deal with what binds us as individuals – are we enslaved to the traditions and rituals of our culture? Who controls our fate? What is the nature of sacrifice, and is it a sacrifice required by nature? Like all great works of art, both ballets offer multiple readings that are as relevant today as when they were both premiered."

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

The Rite of Spring

Duration: ca. 33 minutes

If you happened to be in Paris in May 1913, you had to wonder what all the fuss was about. Something strange was going on at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, where Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes staged the world premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, with music by the young Igor Stravinsky.

Through a pagan dance festival, Stravinsky took listeners from birth to death, and did so with music both simplistic and ferociously complex. Diaghilev knew he and Stravinsky had created something special, describing it as "a new thrill that will doubtless inspire heated discussion."

It did, and a riot broke out. Those who attended that first performance weren't expecting something so barbaric, elemental and savage. The well-to-do audience, with its conservative tastes, was shocked. First came the hoots and catcalls. Arguments ensued, then fist fights. The commotion drowned out the orchestra.

"Although we will most likely not witness a riot such as in 1913, the Rite can still get people excited with a committed performance," says TFO Music Director Michael Francis. "It can still incite extraordinary emotions and responses with audiences today. So let's see what happens when we perform it."

Many people attending one of this weekend's concerts will be hearing *Rite* for the first time. Others might be familiar with it from the dinosaur scene in Disney's 1940 animated classic, *Fantasia*. Stravinsky's primitive, pounding rhythms is some ways served as a precursor to the Minimalist movement in music, and more than one rock 'n roll band can thank Stravinsky for his revolutionary back beat.

Rite is a watershed piece that set the music of the 20th century in motion, notes the critic Alan Rich: "It remains his supreme score, most of all for the sheer arrogance that enabled its creation. It stands, beside Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel and Beethoven's Eroica as one of the truly brave, inexplicable forward steps in the arts."

From the opening bassoon solo in its highest register, each instrument emerges, in the composer's description, "like a bud which grows on the bard of an aged tree." The music shifts meter with nearly every measure, a series of stop-and-go tempos, silences and dramatic eruptions. Melody is pulverized into flat pellets of sound.

Cast in two parts – Adoration of the Earth and The Sacrifice – the ballet is both a springtime sacrament and a dance of death, clothed in music of ferocious instrumental color and stabbing rhythm. Here is Stravinsky's outline for the ballet:

Part 1 – Adoration of the Earth

Introduction

Auguries of Spring

Dances of Adolescent Girls

Game of Abduction

Spring Rounds

Games of the Rival Tribes

Procession of the Sage

The Sage

Dance of the Earth

Part 2 – The Sacrifice

Introduction

Mysterious Circles

Glorification of the Chosen One

Evocation of the Elders

Ritual Action of the Elders

Sacrificial Dance

Program notes by Kurt Loft, a St. Petersburg-based freelance writer and former music critic for The Tampa Tribune.