

Eventually, the collaborators decided on four characters: actors for the Soldier, the Narrator, and the Devil, and a dancer for the Princess. There would be only seven instrumentalists: representatives of high and low woodwinds, brasses, and strings (clarinet and bassoon, cornet and trombone, violin and double-bass) and a percussionist. Stravinsky bought a set of drums and learned to play them. The staging would be simple: a tiny stage raised on a central platform (the original one, Stravinsky said, was about the size of two armchairs), with the Narrator seated on one side of it and the band on the other.

It would be a compact, portable show, easy to tour. The first performance, conducted by Ernest Ansermet, was given in the Lausanne Municipal Theatre in September 28th, 1918, and it was a success. But the proposed tour had to be dropped: the participants one after another succumbed to the post-war epidemic of Spanish flu. In London in 1920, Ansermet conducted the concert suite that Stravinsky had extracted from the piece, but *The Soldier's Tale* was not staged again until 1924. That year, it was produced in several cities: Berlin, Paris (by Diaghilev), Frankfurt, and Weisbaden (conducted by Klemperer) among them. Ever since then, the performances have been frequent, and *The Soldier's Tale* remains as fresh as ever. Every young stage director, every enthusiastic music theatre ensemble wants to tackle it.

It is worth recalling some of the things that went into its making. One was a dream: Stravinsky dreamt of a young gypsy sitting by the roadside and playing a fiddle to her child with long sweeps of the bow. On waking, he recalled the motif she played, and used it in the 'Little Concert' section (played by the Soldier after he regains his fiddle); the score includes the instruction "with the full length of the bow." Another was a memory: of standing in a street in Seville with Diaghilev and listening to a "bullfight" band – cornet, trombone, and bassoon – playing a 'pasodoble' (a lilting Hispanic dance). Then a big band came blaring down the street and drowned out the little one. This lies behind the 'Royal March'.

There are Lutheran chorales: There is a tango – a sexy dance that was becoming popular in Switzerland. And there is jazz: Stravinsky had never heard any jazz, but Ansermet had come back from an American tour with some sheet music, and from it Stravinsky – in the *Ragtime* and *The Soldier's Tale* – imagined what it might sound like. From folk tales (which are mirror of human experience), from dreams and memories, from diverse musical sources that span the ages, an inspired work was created – international, timeless. Its masterly economy, conciseness, and precision have made it unfading. It can be enjoyed and re-enjoyed on many levels – for its tunes, its bright instrumental colour, its cunning formal structures, and its curiously moving drama. They all work together. The piece gets under its listener's skin. On the simplest level, the fiddle represents the Soldier's soul and the percussion the machinations of the Devil. In the final number, 'The Devil's Triumphal March', violin and percussion start out together. At the chilling close, the violin fades out, and only a dry drumming is heard.

Note by Andrew Porter [Chester/Novello]



Faculty Recital Series

2009-2010 Season

Tuesday, September 22
Sara M. Snell Music Theater
7:30 PM

L'Histoire du Soldat (The Soldier's Tale) (1918)

Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

Libretto by Charles Ferdinand Ramuz
Translation by Michael Flanders and Kitty Black

David Pittman-Jennings, the Narrator, Soldier and Devil
Raphael Sanders, Clarinet
Carol Cope Lowe, Bassoon
John Ellis, Trumpet
Mark Hartman, Trombone
John Lindsey, Violin
John Geggie, Double Bass
Scott LaVine, Percussion
Brian K. Doyle, Conductor

Part I

The Soldier's March
The Soldier on the bank of a stream...

Music for Scene One

Airs by a Stream
An offer from the Devil...
Reprise: The Soldier's March
The Soldier arrives home at last...

Music for Scene Two

Pastorale
The confrontation...
Pastorale – Conclusion
The Soldier profits from the Devils' Book...
Reprise: Airs by a Stream
The Soldier laments his fortune...

Music for Scene Three
Reprise: Airs by a Stream

Part II

Reprise: The Soldier's March
The Soldier comes to another land....
The Royal March
An invitation from the King and a game of cards with the Devil...
The Little Concert
Three Dances: Tango – Waltz – Ragtime
The Soldier and Princess embrace. The devil approaches, in agony.
The Devil's Dance
The Kiss...
Little Chorale
The Devil's Song
Grand Chorale
A forbidden attempt to go home again...
Triumphal March of the Devil

In order to ensure a pleasant concert experience for both performers and audience, please refrain from:

- Entering or leaving during the performance.
- Bringing food or drink into the concert hall.
- Taking flash photographs.
- Using electronic devices (please remember to turn off your cellular phone, pagers and watches that chime on the hour).

Children who are able to sit quietly during the performance are welcome to our concerts.

Tape/video recording of performances is strictly prohibited without permission of the performers!

Thank you!

L'HISTOIRE DU SOLDAT

Igor Stravinsky

The story of Faust – the man who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for riches, power, youth or wisdom (the legend takes various forms) – strikes resonances in every heart. Underlying it is the Biblical text, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" In real life, it is not so much a matter of gaining "the whole world" as of the day-to-day decisions when we are tempted to compromise between ideals and ease or expediency - to do something that instinct says is not quite right (though it may not be very wrong) for the sake of quick reward. Stravinsky's lifelike Faust - the Soldier in *The Soldier's Tale* - is closer to our everyday experience than the heroic Faust of Marlowe and Goethe. He is not vastly ambitious. He is not faced with one tremendous decision, but several smaller, almost casual ones: to barter his fiddle, to have a go at winning the Princess, to gamble away his remaining cash, to cross a forbidden frontier and see his mother again. He gets good advice (from the Narrator) and gets bad advice (from the Devil). He gets cheated. It seems almost unfair that, at the end, the Devil should win.

But then *The Soldier's Tale* is not a cut-and-dried, consistent allegory. "Do not forget," Bernard Shaw once wrote, "that an allegory is never quite consistent except when it is written by someone without dramatic faculty." The story was distilled from Alexander Afanasiev's collection of Russian tales, which had been the source for several other Stravinsky works. One of them was *Renard*, composed in 1916 – a twenty-minute dramatic piece for fifteen players, four singers, and "clowns, dancers and acrobats." It was not staged until 1922. *Renard* was a smaller work than the big-orchestra ballets that preceded it, but it was still unwieldy. Stravinsky's thoughts turned to something more practicable.

In 1918, he was in Switzerland, cut off by the Great War from his Russian family estates and the royalties of his Russian publishers. The Diaghilev Ballet, which did his *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *Rite of Spring*, was stranded in Lisbon, without a prospect of further engagements. In a discussion with the Swiss writer C.F. Ramuz (who had made French versions of several Stravinsky texts), an idea occurred: "Why not do something quite simple? Why not write together a piece that would need no vast theatre or large public? Something with two or three characters and a handful of instrumentalists." Thus *The Soldier's Tale* came into being.

Stravinsky translated Afanasiev stories about soldiers and the Devil to Ramuz (who knew no Russian), and the scenario was worked out between them.