Concerts of Thursday, April 30, and Saturday, May 2, 2020, at 8:00p

Stephen Mulligan, Conductor

Stuart Stephenson, trumpet

Lieutenant Kijé, Symphonic Suite, Opus 60 (1934)

I. The Birth of Kijé

II. Romance

III. Kijé's Wedding

IV. Troïka

V. The Burial of Kijé

Alexander Arutiunian (1920-2012)

Trumpet Concerto (1950)

Stuart Stephenson, trumpet

Intermission

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Le sacre du printemps (1913, rev. 1947)

Part I—The Adoration of the Earth

Part II—The Sacrifice

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Lieutenant Kijé, Symphonic Suite, Opus 60 (1934)

Sergei Prokofiev was born in Sontsovka, Ukraine, Russian Empire, on April 23, 1891, and died in Moscow, Russia, on March 5, 1953. The Lieutenant Kijé Suite is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, tenor saxophone, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, cornet, three trombones, tuba, bass drum, tambourine, snare drum, sleigh bells, harp, piano, celesta, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty minutes.
First Classical Subscription Performances: March 19 and 20, 1959, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.


In 1933, Sergei Prokofiev returned to his native Russia after fifteen years of residence abroad, first in the United States, then in France. He soon began work on the first of several film scores, *Lt. Kijé*, based upon a story by Yury Tynianov and directed by Alexander Faintsimmer. Despite some early misgivings, Prokofiev soon realized that *Lt. Kijé* would afford him the chance to fulfill his ambition to compose music that would appeal to the Soviet people. As the composer recalled, *Lt. Kijé* “gave me a welcome opportunity to try my hand, if not at a Soviet subject, then at music for Soviet audiences, and a mass audience at that.” There is also no question that Prokofiev, known for his keen, dry sense of humor, was strongly attracted to Tynianov’s cynical political tale.

The story of *Lt. Kijé* takes place in Tsarist Russia around the turn of the 19th century. Due to an office clerk’s typographical error, a military roster contains the name of a nonexistent person, one Lt. Kijé. The Tsar wants to learn more about this “Lt. Kijé.” Rather than admit the mistake, the Tsar’s officers engage in all sorts of contortions to satisfy their leader and create a Lt. Kijé, complete with a detailed life history. At one point, Kijé is sentenced to Siberia, but the Tsar pardons his subject and promotes him to the rank of general. Lt. Kijé dies a hero, although of course, he is “buried” in an empty coffin.

Prokofiev composed sixteen separate numbers for the original film. In 1934, Prokofiev created a symphonic suite derived from the original *Lt. Kijé* film score. Prokofiev noted: “(t)his gave me much more trouble than the music for the film itself, since I had to find the proper form, reorchestrate the whole thing, polish it up and even combine several of the themes.” The *Lt. Kijé Suite* received its American premiere on October 14, 1937, with Serge Koussevitsky conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Despite the composer’s professed difficulties in adapting his film music for the concert hall, the *Lt. Kijé Suite* remains one of Prokofiev’s most popular scores. It brilliantly complements the wit and pathos of a tale of the desire to please authority, even at the expense of the truth.

**The Lt. Kijé Suite**

The *Lt. Kijé* Suite comprises five sections.

I. *The Birth of Kijé*—An offstage cornet, military drum, and piccolo herald Kijé’s arrival. The oboe introduces a melody that will appear throughout the Suite. The music builds to a series of brass fanfares. The excitement abates and the opening music returns, concluding with the offstage cornet.

II. *Romance*—This slow-tempo movement is based upon a romantic folk song “The Little Gray Dove is Cooing.” In the film, a baritone sings the melody. In this
orchestral adaptation, the vocal line is given to the solo double bass, as well as, notably, the celesta, tenor sax, and bassoon.

III. Kijé’s Wedding—The wedding ceremony begins with a grandiose orchestral introduction, immediately followed by a rather jaunty cornet solo. The contrast of the two sections is heightened by the reprise of the introduction in the middle and conclusion of the movement.

IV. Troïka—In the fourth movement, Prokofiev incorporates yet another melody, the drinking song, “A Woman's Heart is Like an Inn.” After a brief moderato introduction, the orchestra launches into a vibrant presentation of the melody, marked allegro con brio. The use of sleigh bells and repeated rhythms suggests the racing of a troika, a Russian sleigh drawn by three horses.

V. The Burial of Kijé—The final movement opens with the offstage cornet. Echoes of Kijé’s birth, romance and marriage appear, often intertwined with each other. While the final movement begins in appropriately reverential fashion, soon there is more than a hint of jocularity, suggesting that the Tsar’s officers are relieved to be done with the charade of Kijé’s supposed existence. The offstage cornet appears for the final time to conclude Prokofiev's Lt. Kijé Suite.

Trumpet Concerto (1950)

Alexander Arutiunian was born in Yerevan, Armenia, on September 23, 1920, and died there on March 28, 2012. In addition to the solo trumpet, the Concerto is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, snare drum, triangle, cymbals, harp, and strings. Approximate performance time is sixteen minutes.

These are the First Classical Subscription Performances.

Alexander Arutiunian’s Trumpet Concerto was inspired in part by the Armenian composer’s friend, Tsolak Vartazarian, principal trumpet of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra. Vartazarian died in World War II. The soloist in the first performance of the Trumpet Concerto was Aykaz Messiayan. Without question, the most famous interpreter of the Arutiunian Trumpet Concerto was the great Russian virtuoso, Timofei Dokshizer (1921-2005). Dokshizer performed the work more than 200 times during his life, and the solo cadenza he wrote for the piece remains the preferred choice.

The Arutiunian Trumpet Concerto is in a single movement, containing several contrasting sections. The Concerto opens with a brief and dramatic slow-tempo introduction (Andante), featuring an arresting dialogue between the orchestra and soloist. After a short pause, the strings initiate the Concerto’s central quick-tempo section (Allegro energico), setting the stage for the soloist’s presentation of the work’s vivacious principal melody. A solo clarinet launches a far more relaxed episode, notable for its lovely writing for the winds and a shimmering
climax. The clarinet reprises the principal melody (*Tempo I*), now treated in varied form. The music grows in power and intensity, finally yielding once again to the solo clarinet. This marks the beginning of the equivalent of the Concerto’s slow-tempo movement (*Meno mosso*), delicately scored, with the soloist playing muted throughout. The bassoons and lower strings reprise the brusque figure from the Concerto’s opening measures (*Tempo I*), setting the stage for the soloist’s reprise of the Concerto’s central melody. After a solo cadenza, the Concerto hurtles to its emphatic conclusion.

**Le sacre du printemps (1913, rev. 1947)**

Igor Stravinsky was born in Lomonosov, Russia, on June 17, 1882, and died in New York on April 6, 1971. The first performance of *Le sacre du printemps* took place in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées on May 29, 1913, with Pierre Monteux conducting. *Le sacre du printemps* is scored for two piccolos, three flutes, alto flute, four oboes, two English horns, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, two bass clarinets, four bassoons, two contrabassoons, eight horns, two Wagner tubas, piccolo trumpet, four trumpets, bass trumpet, three trombones, two tubas, timpani (two players), antique cymbals (in A-flat and B-flat), triangle, güiro, tambourine, cymbals a2, bass drum, tam-tam, and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-five minutes.


Recording (Telarc CD: 80266) Yoel Levi, Conductor.

**Stravinsky, Diaghilev and The Rite of Spring**

Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, one of the landmarks of 20th-century music, was the final work in a trilogy—along with *The Firebird* (1910) and *Pétrouchka* (1911)—composed for Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. It was during completion of *The Firebird* that Stravinsky received his inspiration for *The Rite of Spring*:

> I had a fleeting vision which came to me as a complete surprise, my mind at the moment being full of other things. I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring. Such was the theme of the *Sacre du Printemps*.

However, Stravinsky realized that composing *The Rite of Spring* would be “a long and difficult task,” and he first looked for a project that would “refresh” him. And
so, Stravinsky composed *Pétrouchka*, which received its first performance in Paris on June 13, 1911. After the premiere, Stravinsky returned to Russia to begin work on *The Rite of Spring*. There, Stravinsky and his friend Nicholas Roerich met to create the ballet’s scenario. Roerich in turn forwarded the synopsis to Diaghilev.

**Nijinsky**

With the scenario completed, Stravinsky began composition and finally completed *The Rite of Spring* on March 29, 1913. Stravinsky created a version of the score for one piano, four hands, for use at rehearsals. Diaghilev chose Vaslav Nijinsky—the lead male dancer of the Ballets Russes—to choreograph the premiere. Nijinsky, a brilliant dancer who had offered perhaps his crowning performance as Pétrouchka, was described as Stravinsky as “one of the most beautiful visions that ever appeared on the stage.” However, Stravinsky added that Nijinsky hardly seemed the appropriate person to choreograph such a complex and revolutionary score:

> His ignorance of the most elementary notions of music was flagrant. The poor boy knew nothing of music. He could neither read it nor play any instrument, and his reactions to music were expressed in banal phrases or repetition of what he had heard others say. As one was unable to discover any individual impressions, one began to doubt whether he had any.

Stravinsky's lack of confidence in Nijinsky's musical abilities was seconded by the great French maestro, Pierre Monteux, who conducted the premieres of *Pétrouchka* and *The Rite of String*. Monteux commented that Nijinsky's intelligence “was mainly to be found in his feet, legs and arms.”

Stravinsky tried his best to teach Nijinsky:

> the very rudiments of music: values...bars, rhythm, tempo, and so on. He had the greatest difficulty in remembering any of this. Nor was that all. When, in listening to music, he contemplated movements, it was always necessary to remind him that he must make them accord with the tempo, its divisions and values. It was an exasperating task, and we advanced at a snail’s pace.

**Paris: May 29, 1913**

The dress rehearsal for *The Rite of Spring* took place without incident. However, the May 29, 1913 premiere at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées was quite another story. Members of the audience began jeering during the very first bars of the prelude. Matters only worsened when the curtain rose on, according to Stravinsky, “knock-kneed and long-braided Lolitas jumping up and down”:
These demonstrations, at first isolated, soon became general, provoking counter-demonstrations and very quickly developing into a terrific uproar. During the whole performance I was at Nijinsky's side in the wings. He was standing on a chair, screaming "sixteen, seventeen, eighteen"—they had their own method of counting to keep time. Naturally, the poor dancers could hear nothing by reasons of the row in the auditorium and the sound of their own dance steps. I had to hold Nijinsky by his clothes, for he was furious, and ready to dash on the stage at any moment and create a scandal. Diaghileff kept ordering the electricians to turn the lights on or off, hoping in that way to put a stop to the noise. That is all I can remember about the first performance.

Others present during one of the most infamous moments in music history attested to actual physical altercations between audience members. Throughout the performance, Monteux, according to Stravinsky, "stood there apparently impervious and nerveless as a crocodile. It is still almost incredible to me that he actually brought the orchestra to the end."

Stravinsky was inclined to blame the production and Nijinsky’s choreography as the reasons for the scandalous premiere. The composer received his vindication when, on April 5, 1914, Monteux led a Paris concert performance of *The Rite of Spring*:

The hall was crowded. The audience, with no scenery to distract them, listened with concentrated attention and applauded with an enthusiasm I had been far from expecting and which greatly moved me. Certain critics who had censured the *Sacre* the year before now openly admitted their mistake. This conquest of the public naturally gave me intense and lasting satisfaction.

*The Rite of Spring* has long been one of the staples of 20th-century orchestral repertoire. Still, one cannot ignore the effect the music itself must have had upon those attending the premiere. Monteux himself admitted that when he first heard the score, played by Stravinsky at the piano, he “did not understand one note of *Le sacre du printemps*. My one desire was to flee that room and find a quiet corner in which to rest my aching head.”

Stravinsky was, of course, depicting in music a barbaric tale of pagan sacrificial rites. And it is perhaps also helpful to keep in mind that when Robert Craft asked Stravinsky what he most remembered about his childhood in Russia, the composer responded:

The violent Russian spring that seemed to begin in an hour and was like the whole earth cracking. That was the most wonderful event of every year in my childhood...The ice...was several feet thick, a fact that will help you imagine the crash it made the first
hour of the spring thaw. The noise then was so great that we could hardly talk...

With such influences at play, it’s not surprising that what emerged was a score of unrivaled elemental power, one that still has the capacity to stir, and even shock audiences.

**The Rite of Spring**

Part I—*The Adoration of the Earth*

*Introduction. Lento, tempo rubato*—The atmospheric introduction, featuring the woodwinds throughout, opens with a bassoon solo derived from a Lithuanian folk melody.

*The Augurs of Spring, Dances of the Young Girls. Tempo giusto*—The strings repeat a forceful rhythmic pattern that is punctuated by syncopated accents. Another repeated figure is played by the English horn. A solo horn introduces a more lyrical passage, soon taken by other instruments. The music builds to a climax.

*Ritual of Abduction. Presto*—This brief, frenetic passage opens with mighty strokes of the timpani and bass drum, to which the winds respond with a flurry of activity. Flute trills serve as a bridge to the next section.

*Spring Rounds. Tranquillo; Sostenuto e pesante; Vivo; Tranquillo*—This section begins softly, but the strings soon introduce a three-note figure that develops into an inexorable motif. It continues to gather strength and finally explodes with frightening power. A reprise of the *Tranquillo* opening passage concludes *Spring Rounds*.

*Ritual of the Rival Tribes. Molto allegro*—This section juxtaposes violent and lyrical elements.

*Procession of the Sage*—Horns, playing in octaves, herald the arrival of the Sage. The section concludes with a measure of silence.

*The Sage. Lento*—A passage of four reflective measures of woodwind chords, punctuated by timpani strokes.

*Dance of the Earth. Prestissimo*—The bass drum introduces the First Part's concluding section, a terse passage of unrestrained, violent energy.

Part II—*The Sacrifice*

Mystic Circles of the Young Girls. Andante con moto—The mystery of the Introduction continues with a passage for divided strings. The horns play a refrain that is repeated by the strings and winds. Suddenly, there is a crescendo and acceleration of tempo. Eleven brutal chords precede the next section.

Glorification of the Chosen One. Vivo—This brief passage features constantly fluctuating time signatures and piercing orchestral sonorities.

Evocation of the Ancestors. L’istesso movimento—Massive drumbeats alternate with orchestral fanfares.

Ritual Action of the Ancestors—The section begins quietly, as rhythmic orchestral figures accompany English horn and alto flute solos. Muted trumpets play a motif that is soon repeated by the oboes and muted horns in a mighty orchestral proclamation, followed by a restatement of the opening music.

Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)—The final section of The Rite of Spring is an episode of extraordinary power and rhythmic complexity. Shifting time signatures and violent syncopations accompany the sacrificial dance. The relentless power of the music continues and then comes to a quick halt. A brief ascending flute passage and final emphatic chord mark the stunning conclusion to The Rite of Spring.