



In 1913, in a theater house in Paris, a hushed and expectant audience sat awaiting the start of the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* a new ballet by prominent Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky. What began as murmurs of protest from the audience at the unusual music of the opening refrain, erupted into a riot as the violent rhythms and wild dance movements intensified. It was a scandal of unprecedented proportions in the music scene of Paris and yet history remembers it as one of the defining moments in ushering in the **modern** era of music.

Stravinsky's early exposure to music was through his father who was a Russian opera singer. Despite his obvious talent, his parents wanted him to become a lawyer and he dutifully began his studies at university. He was not interested in law, however, and skipped class often! Eventually he abandoned it altogether and devoted himself entirely to composing music.

Like so many artists around the turn of the century and beyond, Stravinsky was truly cosmopolitan. He lived for significant periods of time in France, Switzerland and the United States. There were so many different musical techniques and styles being developed around the world during this time and it would be safe to say that Stravinsky experimented with most of them. He also influenced many other composers into doing so as well. He wrote **nationalistic** Russian music, **neoclassical** music (music which borrowed styles or forms from previous eras such as the Baroque or Classical eras), **serial** or **twelve tone** music, and very modern sounding music. He is probably best known for his ballets which include *The Firebird*, *Petrouchka* and *The Rite of Spring*, although he also wrote **concertos**, **oratorios**, **choral music**, and **instrumental music** in unusual combinations. Despite all these different styles and forms, his unique and remarkable musical signature can be heard throughout all his works.

The Rite of Spring, with its departure from conventional and accepted forms of composition, opened the floodgates of musical experimentation as the 20th century progressed. His creativity and influence changed musical composition forever, and in doing so, earned him a place in Time Magazine's list of the "100 most influential people of the 20th century".

Fast Facts

Name: Igor Stravinsky
Dates: 1882-1971
Country of birth: Russia
Historical Era: 20th century
Contemporary Composers: Ravel, Schoenberg, Copeland, Gershwin
Contemporary Artists: Picasso, Degas
Other People/Events: Einstein, Freud, J.F. Kennedy, World War 1, World War 11, first man on the moon, invention of the television

Fun Fact

In 1940, Stravinsky was arrested in Boston, USA for breaking a law that forbade tampering with the National Anthem. Stravinsky had added an unusual harmony to his arrangement of the Star Spangled Banner and was subsequently taken into custody. He was released when he finally convinced the police that he meant no harm by the arrangement. You can see a photo of his mug-shot here: http://besttheorypresentationever.com/stravinsky_trivia.html