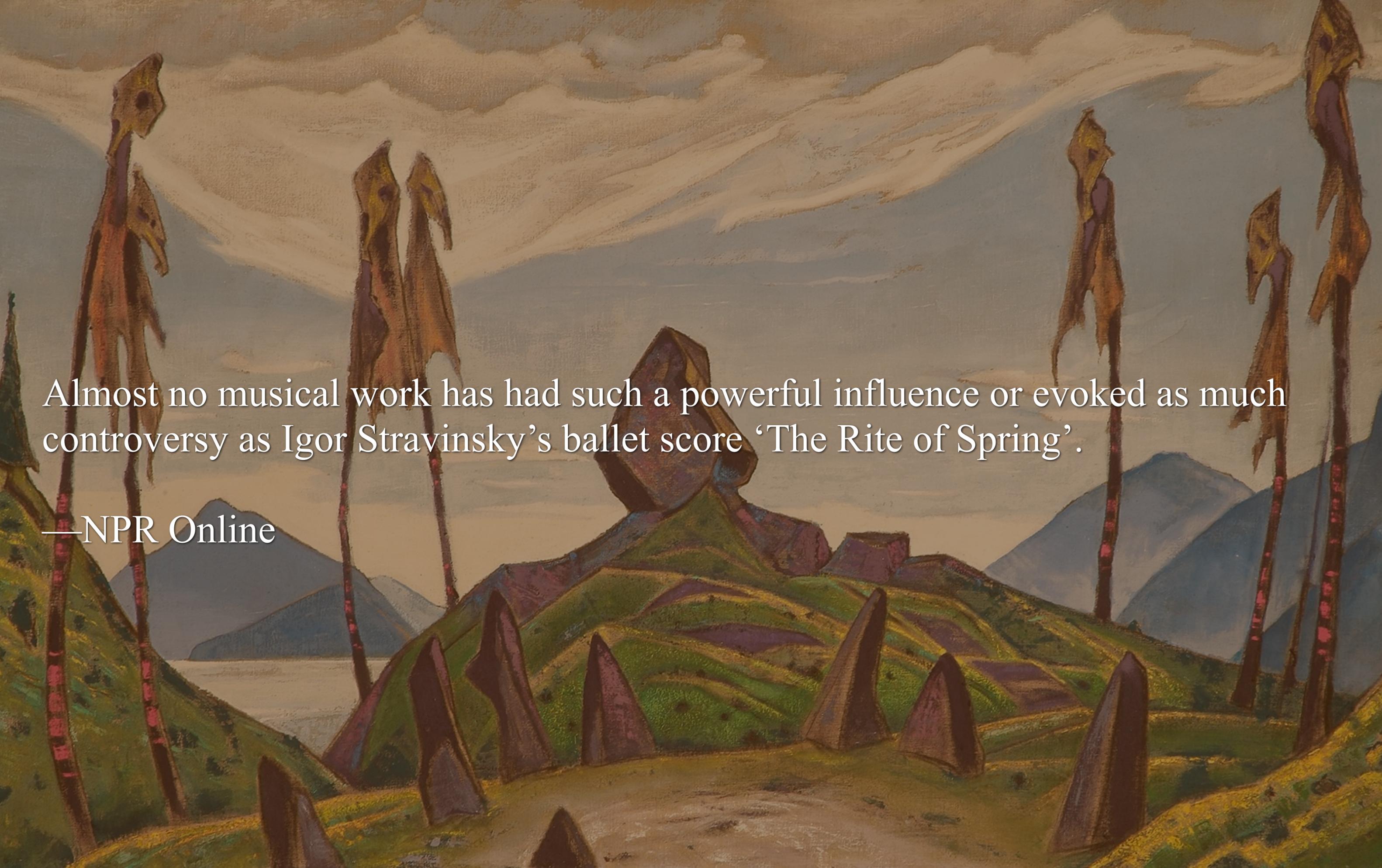


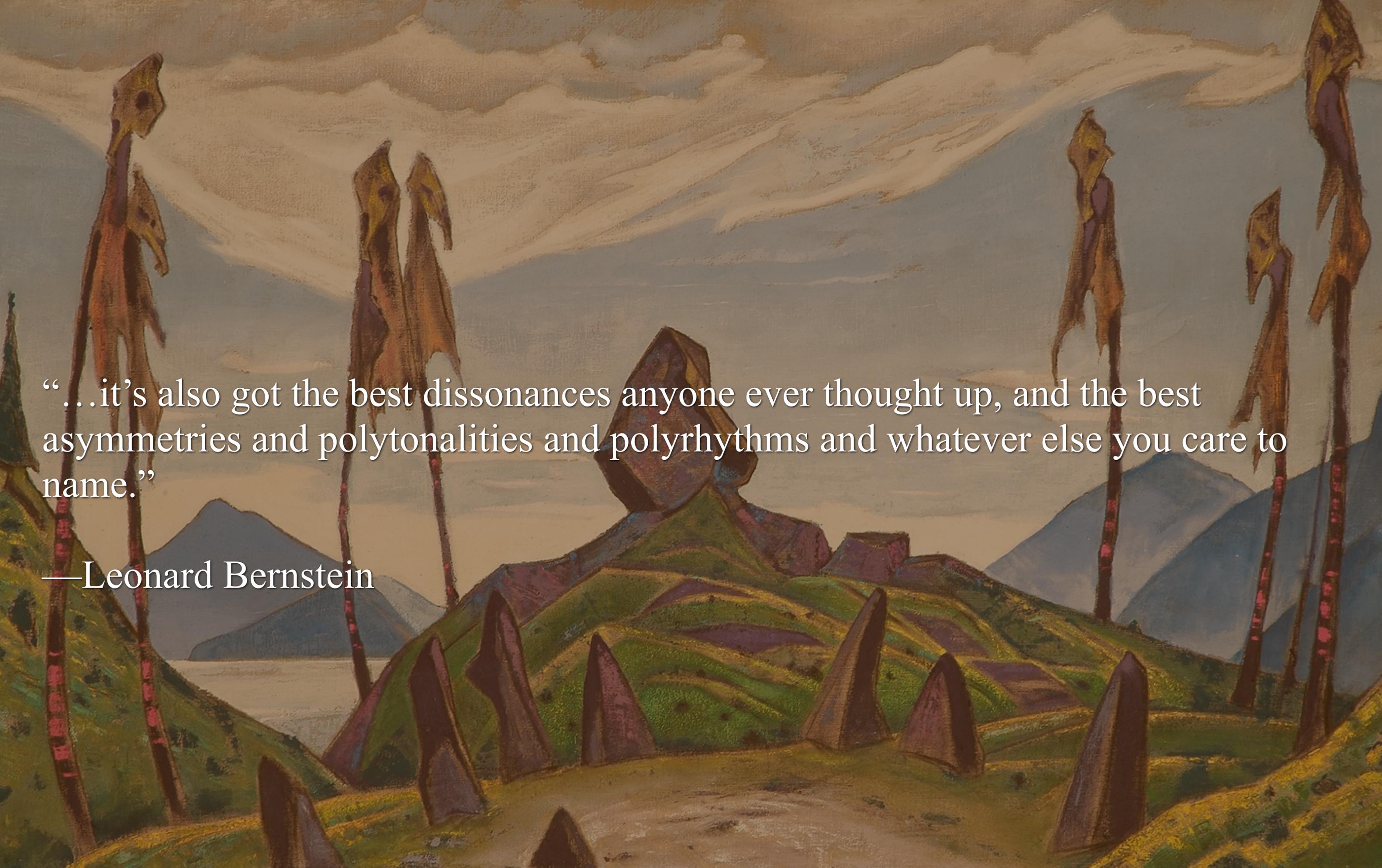
Music as Mirror

6 - The Nationalist Ethos: Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*



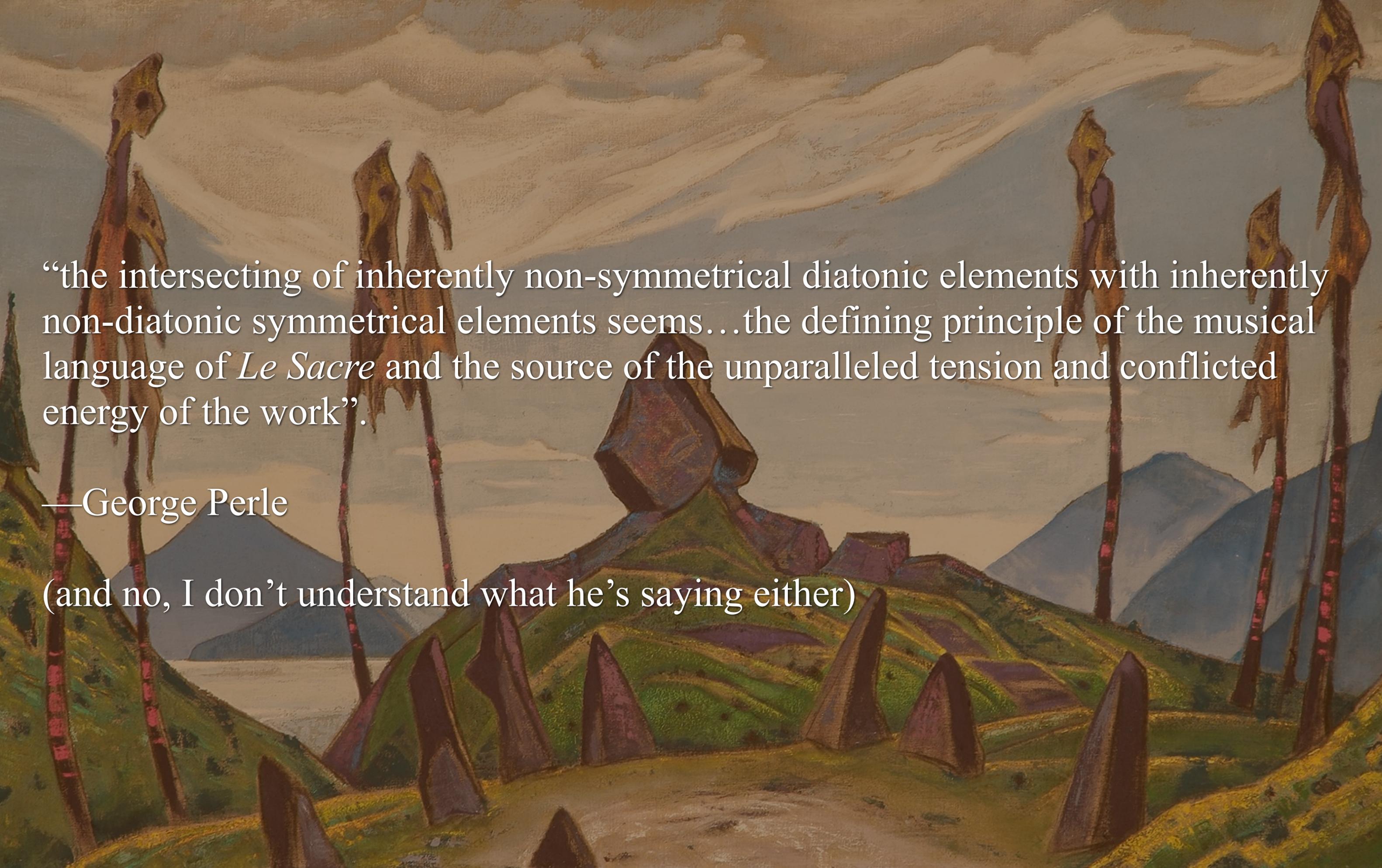
Almost no musical work has had such a powerful influence or evoked as much controversy as Igor Stravinsky's ballet score 'The Rite of Spring'.

—NPR Online



“...it’s also got the best dissonances anyone ever thought up, and the best asymmetries and polytonalities and polyrhythms and whatever else you care to name.”

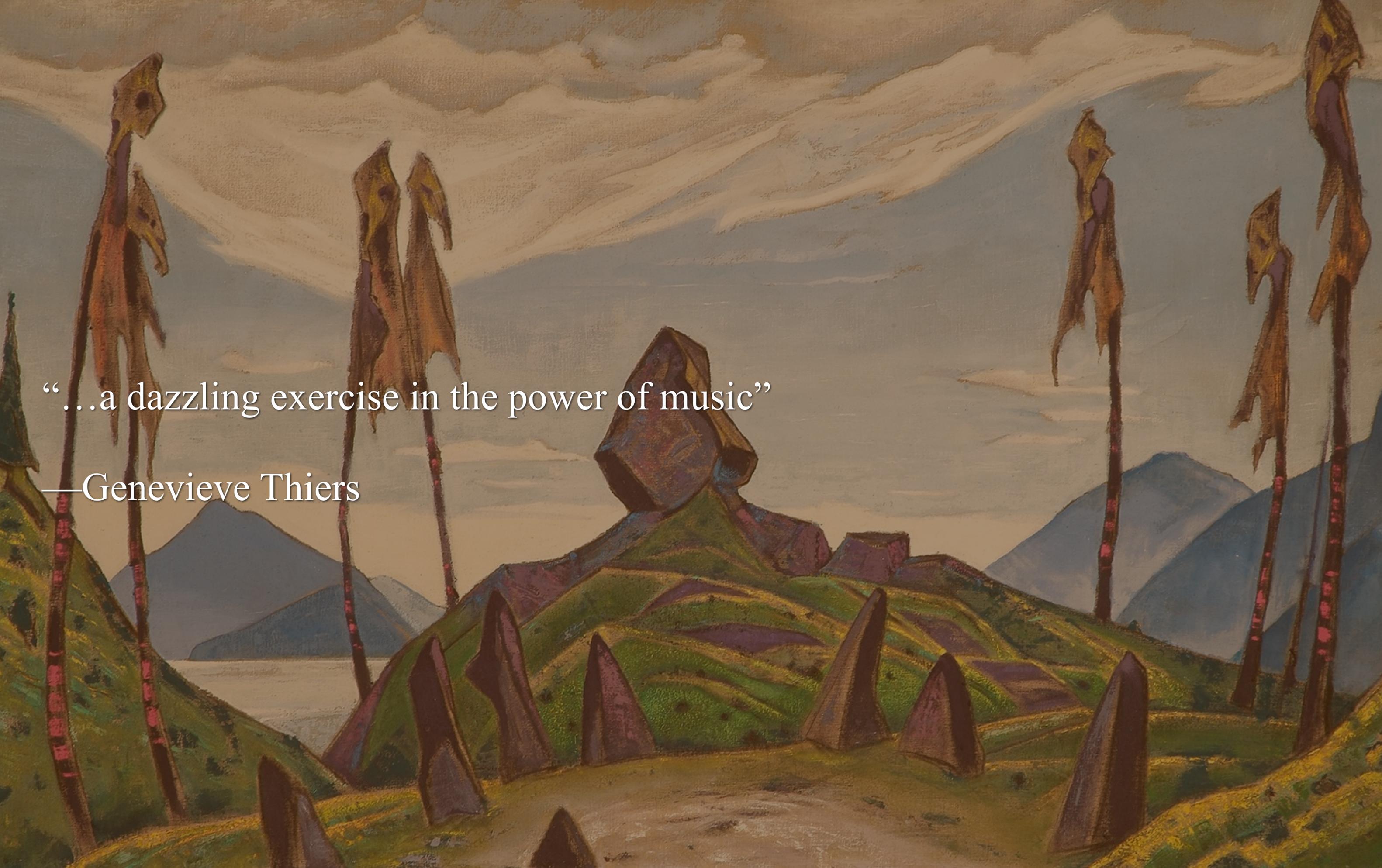
—Leonard Bernstein



“the intersecting of inherently non-symmetrical diatonic elements with inherently non-diatonic symmetrical elements seems...the defining principle of the musical language of *Le Sacre* and the source of the unparalleled tension and conflicted energy of the work”.

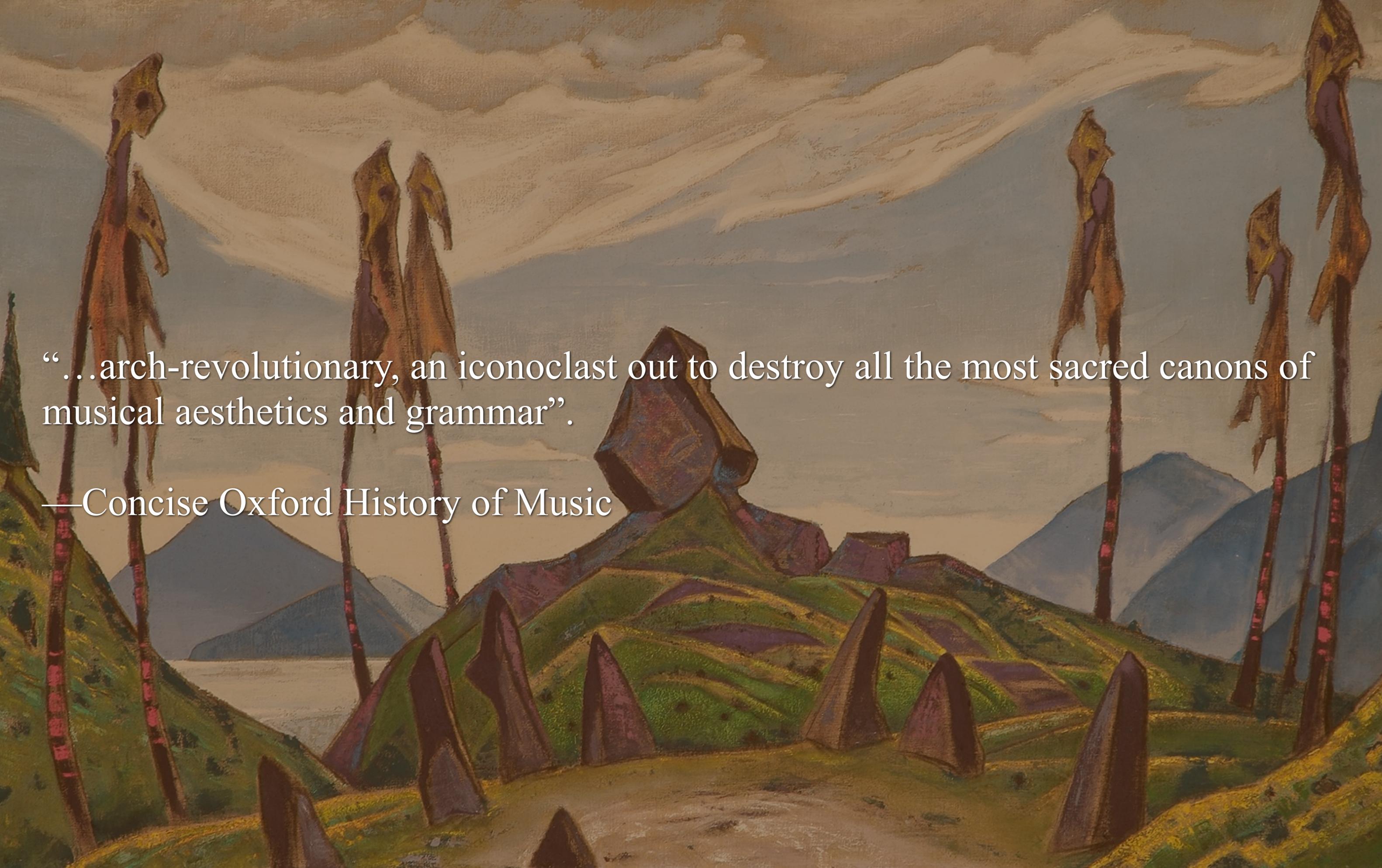
—George Perle

(and no, I don't understand what he's saying either)



“...a dazzling exercise in the power of music”

—Genevieve Thiers



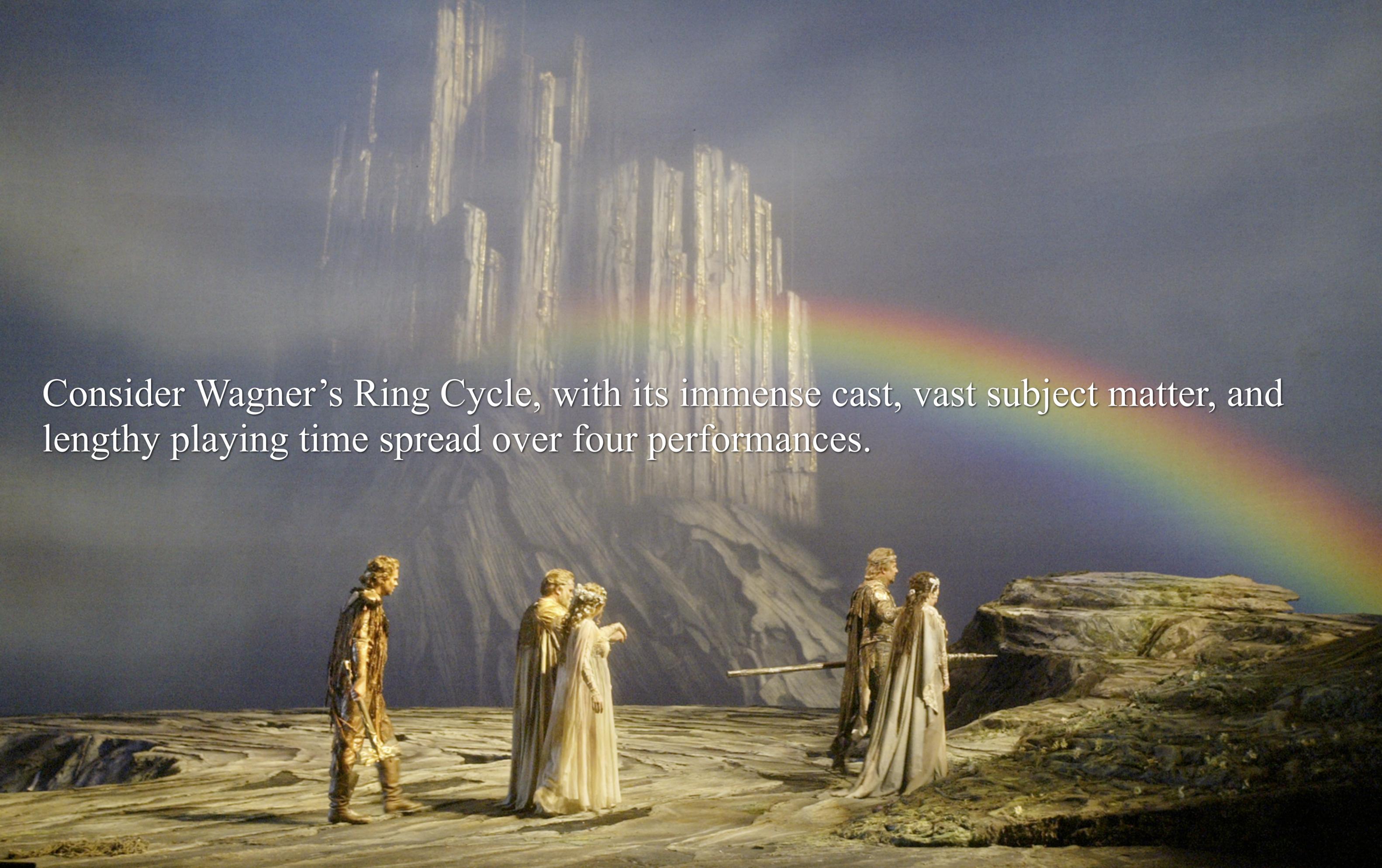
“...arch-revolutionary, an iconoclast out to destroy all the most sacred canons of musical aesthetics and grammar”.

—Concise Oxford History of Music



The late Romantic muse displayed a penchant for the oversized. Heroic paintings, epic novels, and gigantic orchestral works all played a part in the abundance of the era.

Consider Wagner's Ring Cycle, with its immense cast, vast subject matter, and lengthy playing time spread over four performances.

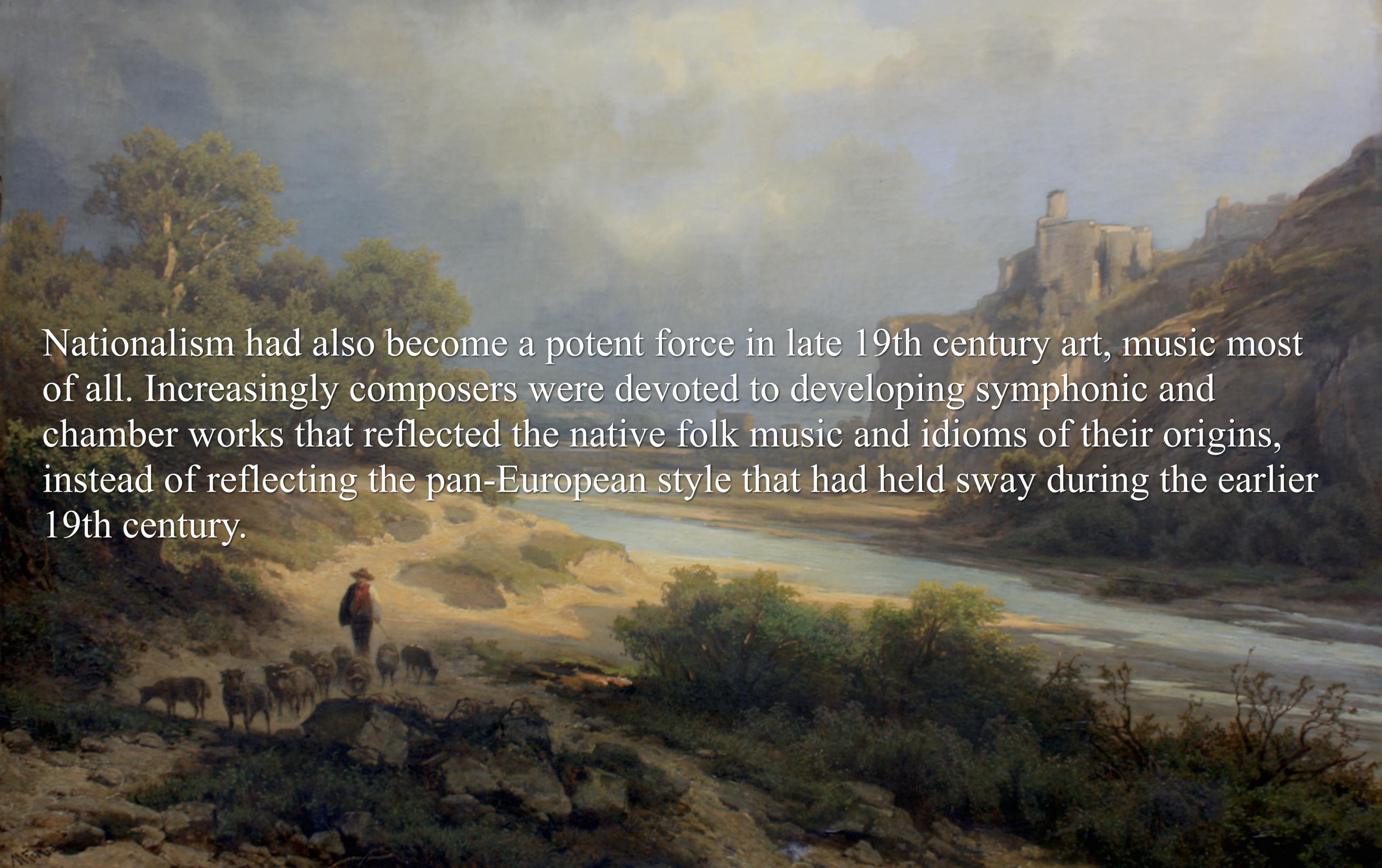


A sepia-toned photograph of a grand concert hall. The stage is filled with a large symphony orchestra, with musicians seated in rows, holding their instruments. A conductor stands at the front center of the stage. The audience, consisting of many people, is seated in the tiered seating area, filling the hall. The architecture is classical, with large columns and decorative elements. The lighting is soft, and the overall atmosphere is formal and grand.

Or Mahler's symphonies, some of which require unprecedented performing forces. Consider the *Symphony of a Thousand*, a.k.a. Symphony No. 8.

A sepia-toned photograph of a grand concert hall. The stage is filled with a large symphony orchestra, with musicians seated in rows, holding their instruments. A conductor stands at the front center of the stage. The audience, consisting of many people, is seated in the tiered seating area, filling the hall. The architecture is classical, with large columns and decorative elements. The lighting is soft, and the overall atmosphere is formal and grand.

Or Mahler's symphonies, some of which require unprecedented performing forces. Consider the *Symphony of a Thousand*, a.k.a. Symphony No. 8.

A detailed landscape painting showing a shepherd in a wide-brimmed hat and dark clothing, leading a flock of sheep across a rocky, grassy slope. In the background, a wide river flows through a valley, and a large, stone castle or fortress sits atop a steep cliff. The sky is filled with soft, hazy clouds, and the overall atmosphere is one of a quiet, rural scene. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

Nationalism had also become a potent force in late 19th century art, music most of all. Increasingly composers were devoted to developing symphonic and chamber works that reflected the native folk music and idioms of their origins, instead of reflecting the pan-European style that had held sway during the earlier 19th century.

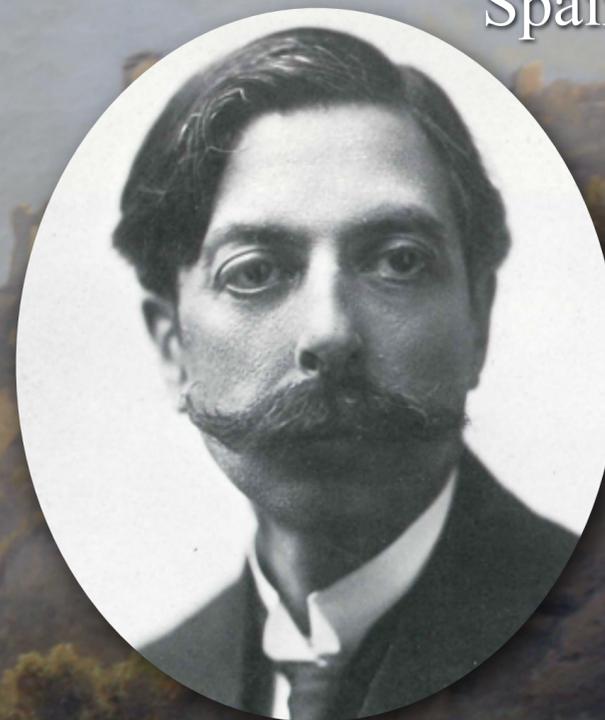
Bedřich Smetana
Bohemia



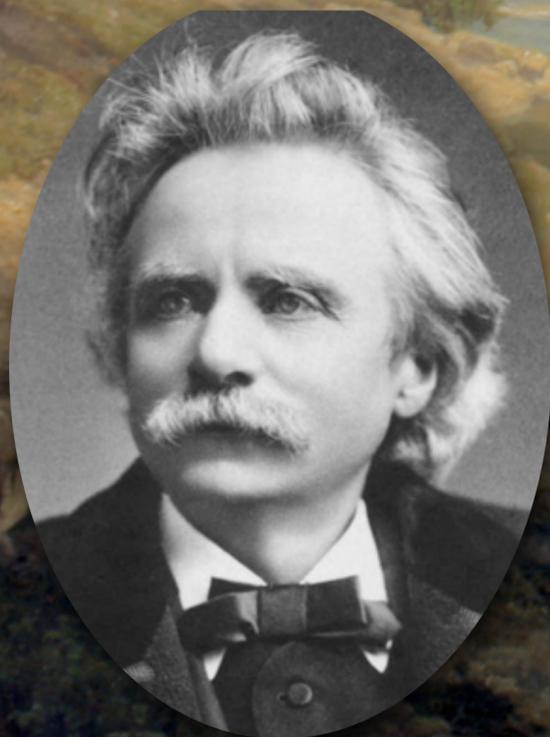
Antonin Dvořák
Bohemia



Enrique Granados
Spain

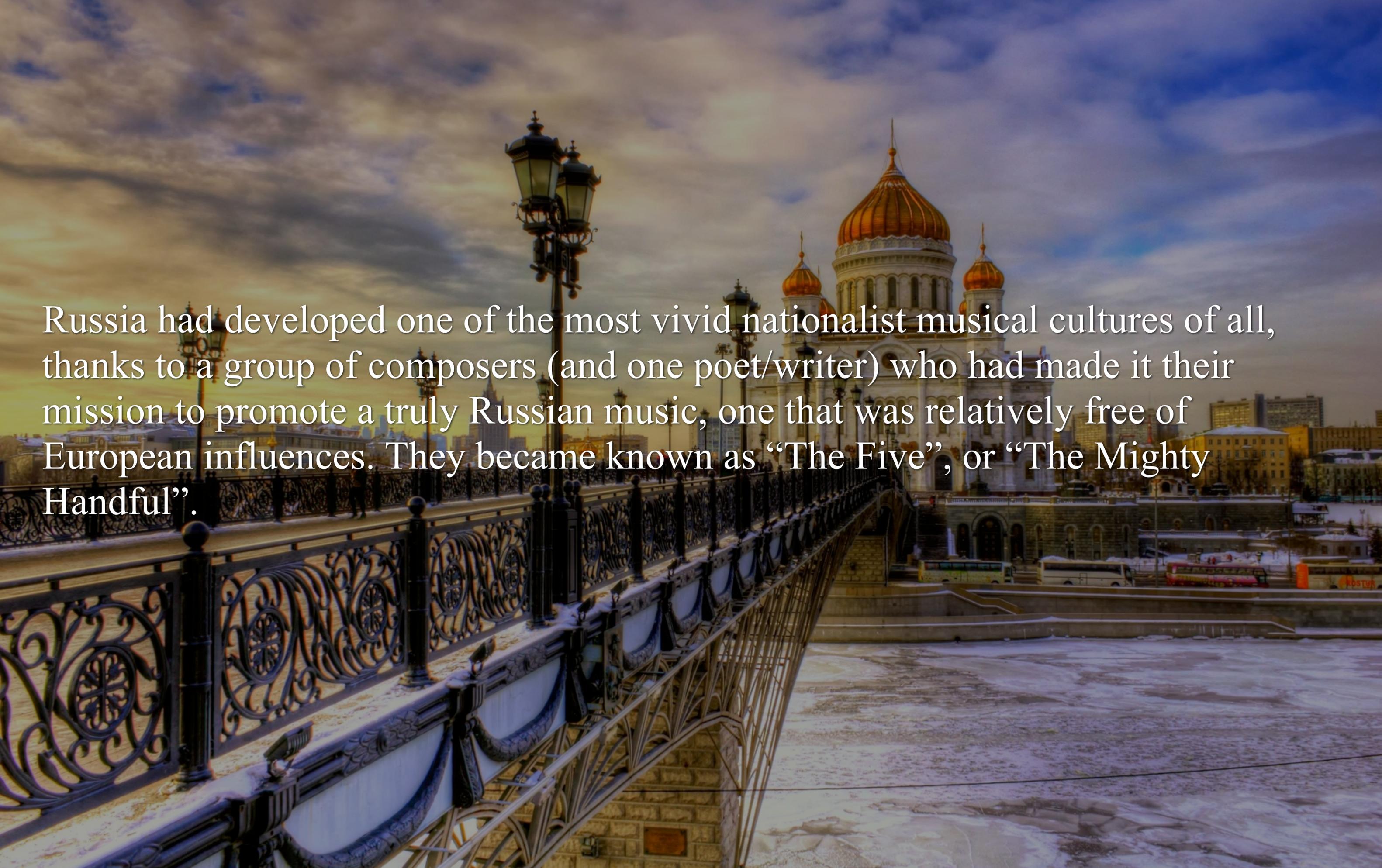


Edvard Grieg
Norway



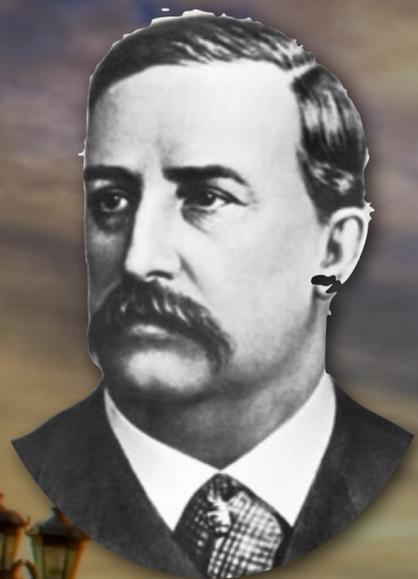
Jean Sibelius
Finland



A scenic view of the Isaac Cathedral in Saint-Petersburg, Russia, featuring a bridge railing in the foreground and a frozen river below. The cathedral's golden domes are prominent against a cloudy sky. The bridge railing is ornate with circular patterns. The river is covered in ice, and some buildings and a bus are visible in the background.

Russia had developed one of the most vivid nationalist musical cultures of all, thanks to a group of composers (and one poet/writer) who had made it their mission to promote a truly Russian music, one that was relatively free of European influences. They became known as “The Five”, or “The Mighty Handful”.

Borodin



Balakirev



Mussorgsky



Moguchaya Kuchka

The Mighty Handful



Cui

Rimsky-Korsakov



Stasov





Symphony No. 2, Op. 9 "Antar": III

Pierre Monteux / San Francisco Symphony (RCA Victor DM-1203, recorded 1946)

The Story of Antar

Antar, an enemy of all mankind, has become a recluse in the desert. He saves a gazelle from a large bird. Weary from fighting the bird, he falls asleep exhausted. He dreams he is in the palace of the Queen of Palmyra. The queen, the fairy Gul-Nazar, was the gazelle Antar saved from the bird.

As a reward, she permits Antar to fulfill three of life's greatest joys — vengeance, power and love. He accepts these gifts with gratitude, then makes a request himself. He asks the queen to take his life if these pleasures become tiresome. He then falls in love with the queen. After some time, however, he becomes weary of his passion. The queen takes him in her arms, kissing him with such ferocity that his life ebbs away.

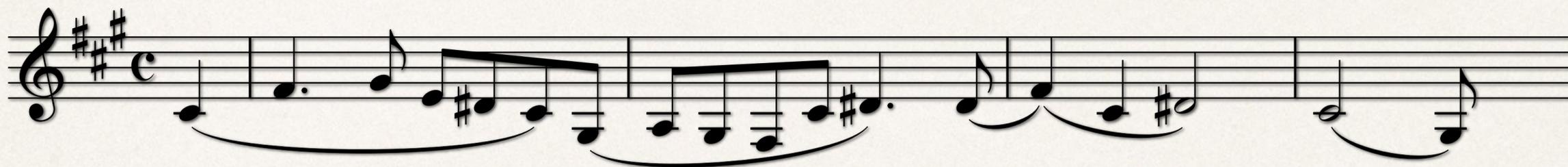
The Third Movement

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF
Antar Symphony
No. 2, Op. 9

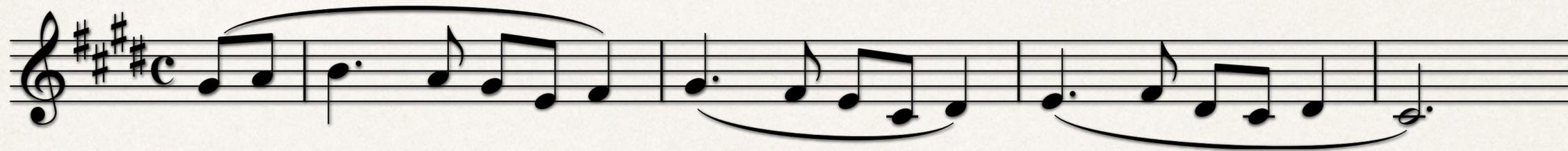
The third movement "Joy of Power" is a specifies of triumphal march, with a subsidiary Oriental cantabile melody and a conclusion on Antar's theme.



Antar Theme



Cantabile Theme



March



Trio



Transition

March



Trio



Transition

March



Transition

Close

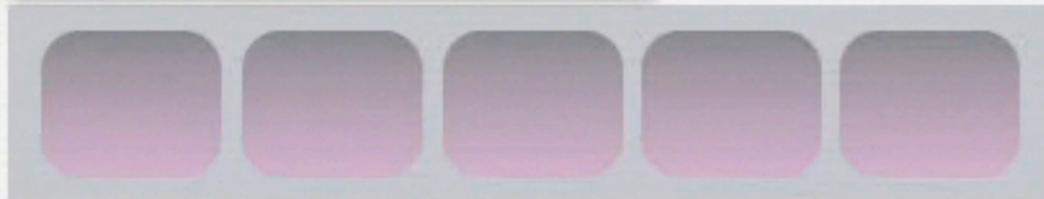


March



March Theme: Winds

Trio

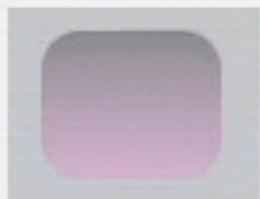


Transition

March

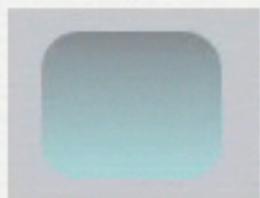


Trio



Transition

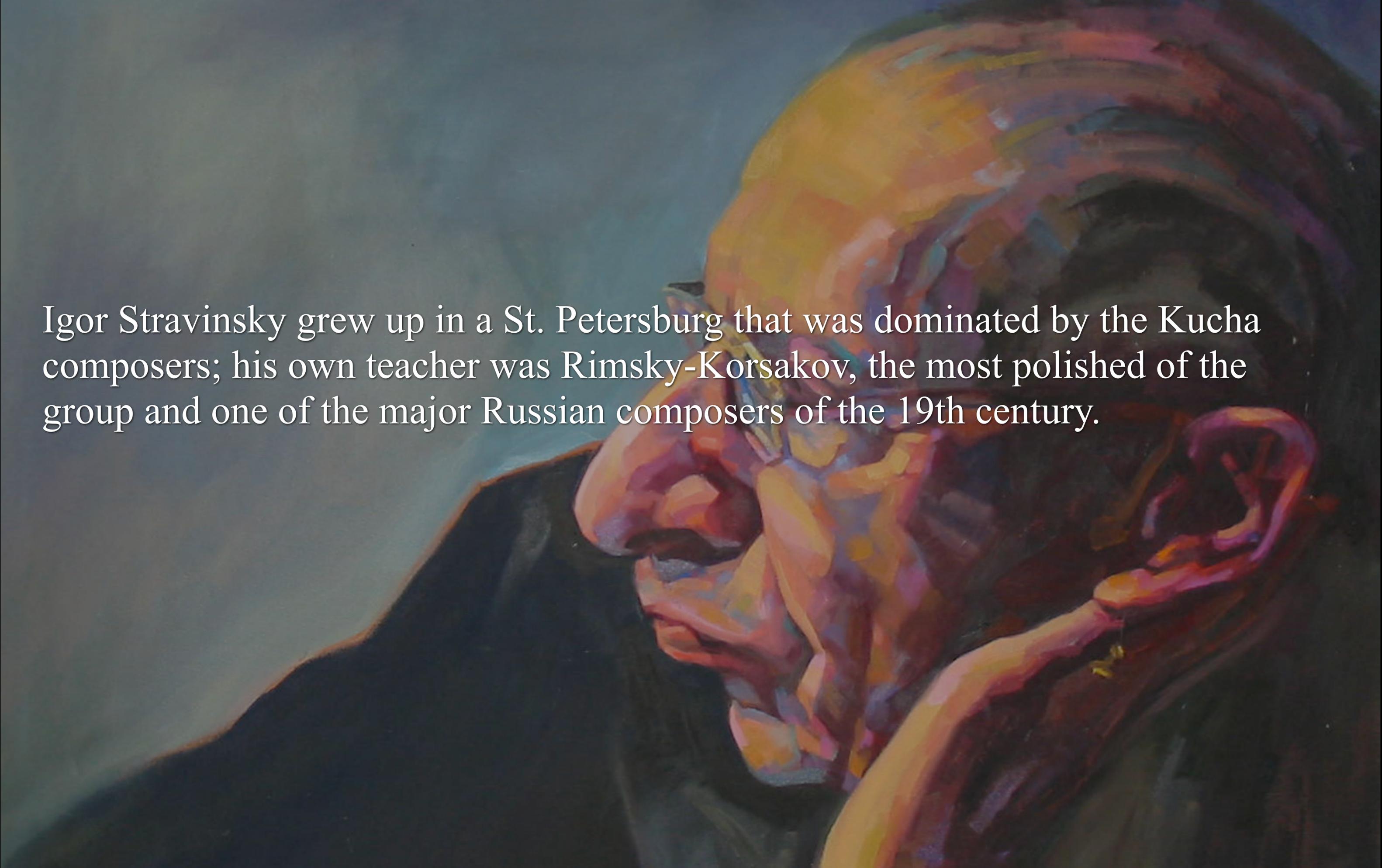
March



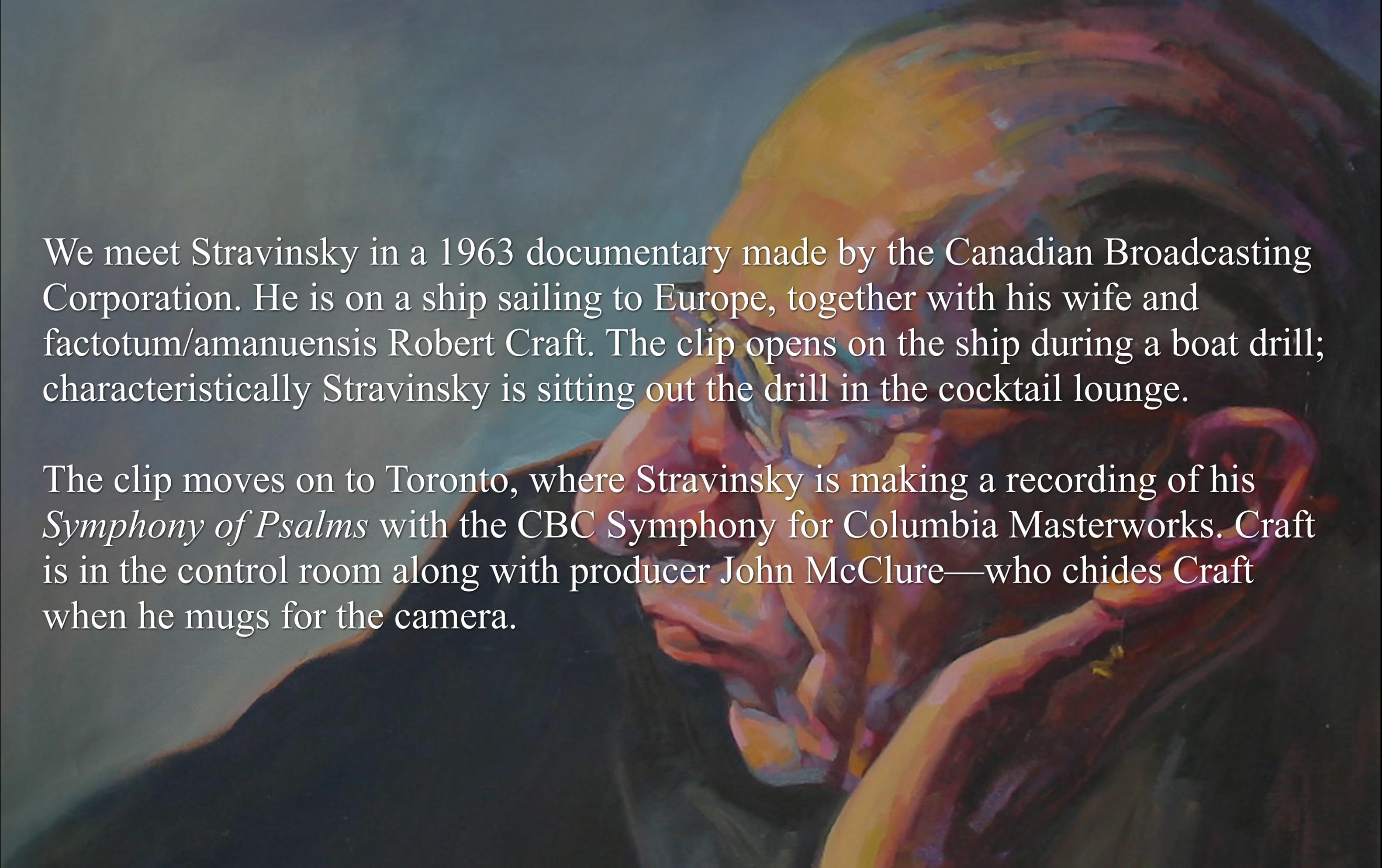
Transition

Close





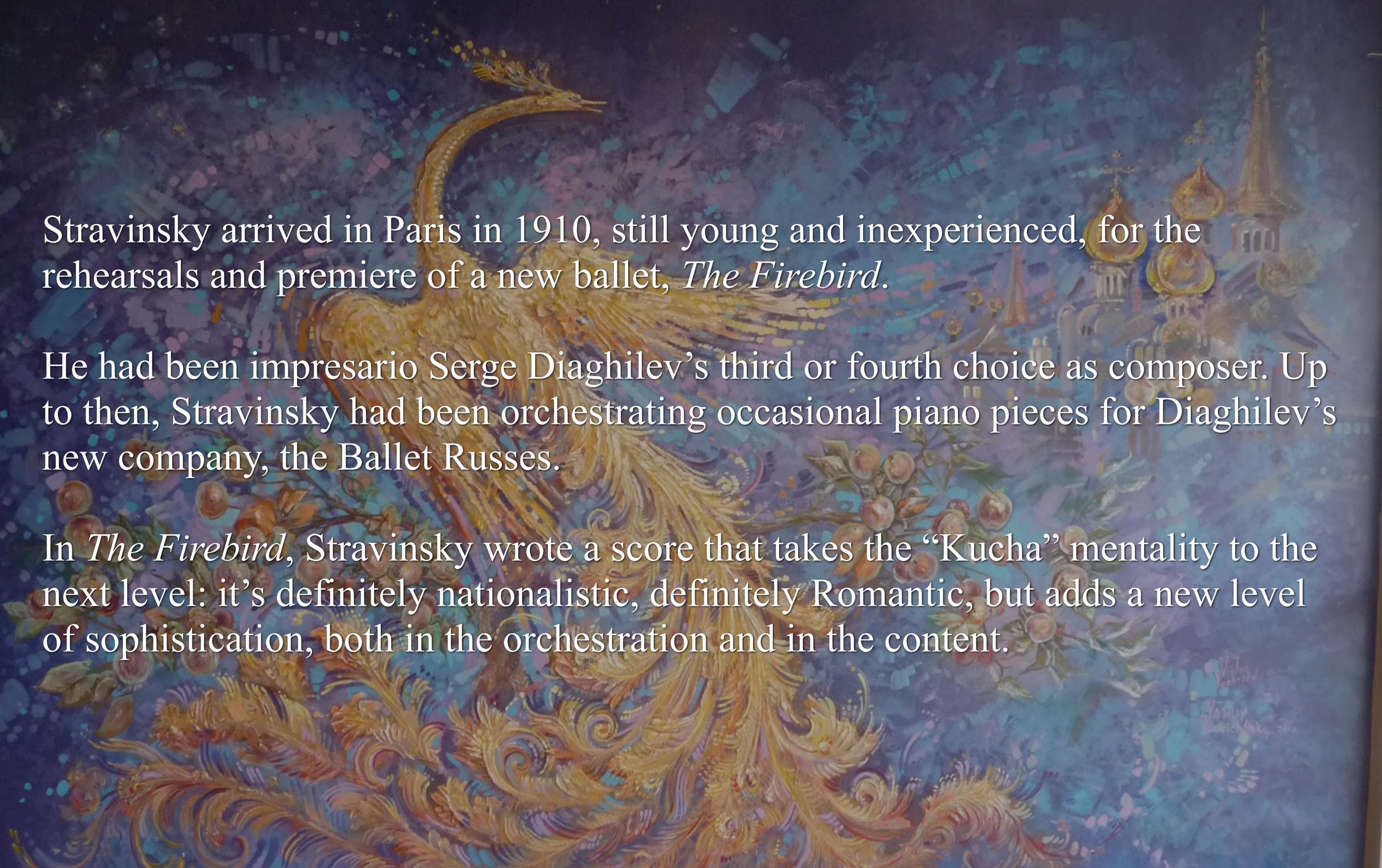
Igor Stravinsky grew up in a St. Petersburg that was dominated by the Kucha composers; his own teacher was Rimsky-Korsakov, the most polished of the group and one of the major Russian composers of the 19th century.



We meet Stravinsky in a 1963 documentary made by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He is on a ship sailing to Europe, together with his wife and factotum/amanuensis Robert Craft. The clip opens on the ship during a boat drill; characteristically Stravinsky is sitting out the drill in the cocktail lounge.

The clip moves on to Toronto, where Stravinsky is making a recording of his *Symphony of Psalms* with the CBC Symphony for Columbia Masterworks. Craft is in the control room along with producer John McClure—who chides Craft when he mugs for the camera.





Stravinsky arrived in Paris in 1910, still young and inexperienced, for the rehearsals and premiere of a new ballet, *The Firebird*.

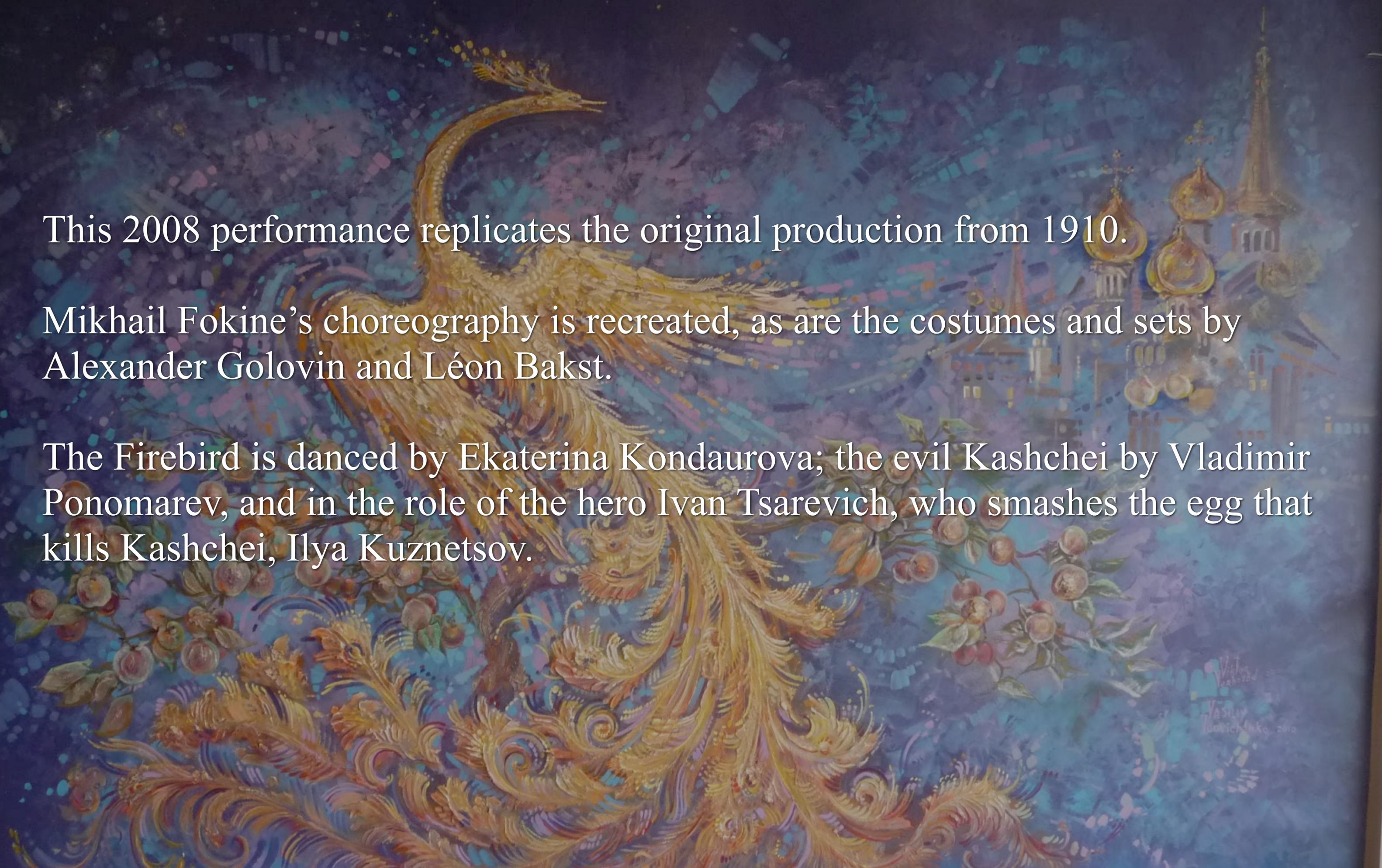
He had been impresario Serge Diaghilev's third or fourth choice as composer. Up to then, Stravinsky had been orchestrating occasional piano pieces for Diaghilev's new company, the Ballet Russes.

In *The Firebird*, Stravinsky wrote a score that takes the "Kucha" mentality to the next level: it's definitely nationalistic, definitely Romantic, but adds a new level of sophistication, both in the orchestration and in the content.



The Firebird: Berceuse and Kaschei's Death

Valery Gergiev / Mariinsky Orchestra and Ballet



This 2008 performance replicates the original production from 1910.

Mikhail Fokine's choreography is recreated, as are the costumes and sets by Alexander Golovin and Léon Bakst.

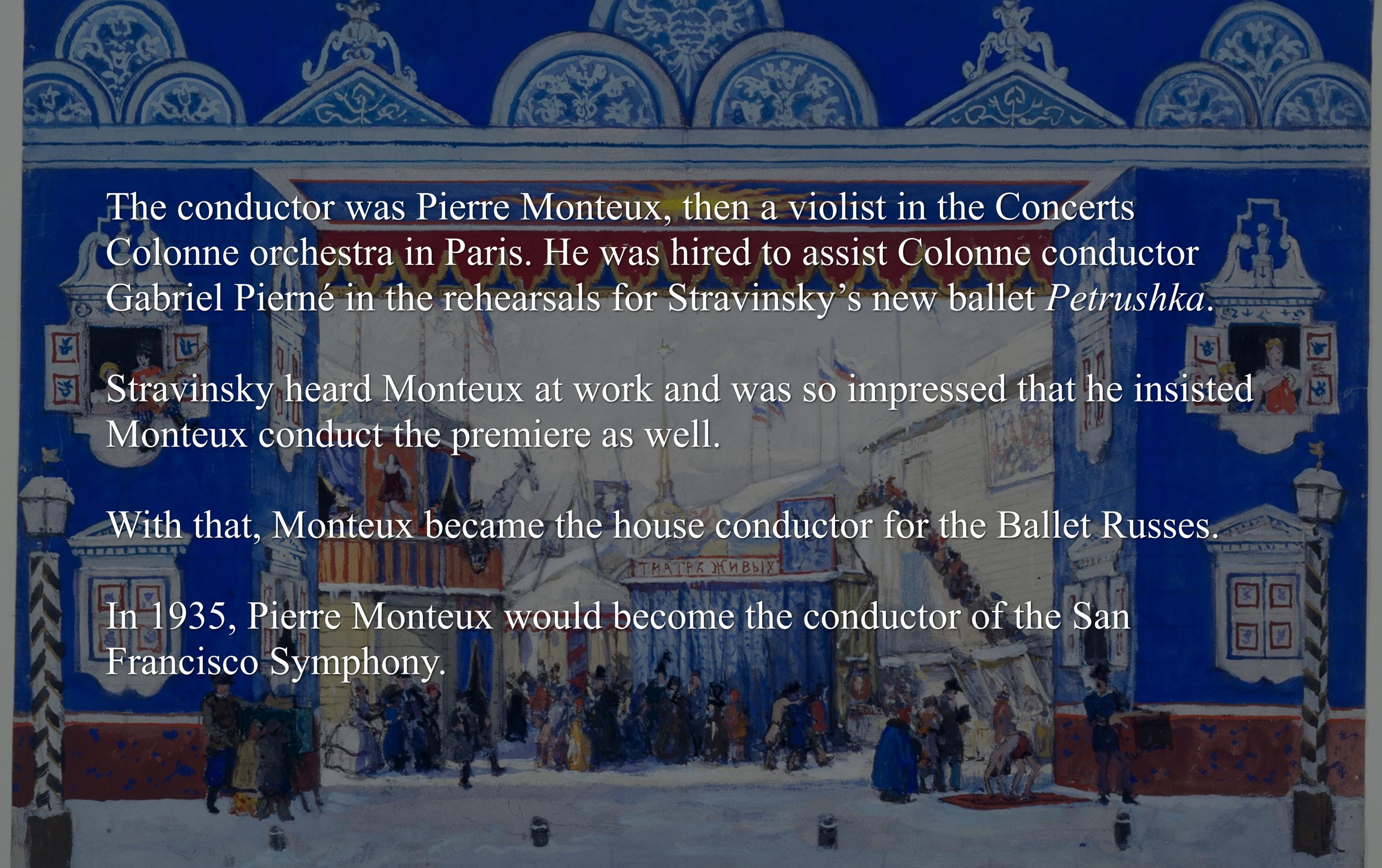
The Firebird is danced by Ekaterina Kondourova; the evil Kashchei by Vladimir Ponomarev, and in the role of the hero Ivan Tsarevich, who smashes the egg that kills Kashchei, Ilya Kuznetsov.



After *The Firebird* came *Petrushka* just one year later, a story of love and betrayal told from the point of view of puppets in community fair.

Petrushka takes its energy from Russian folk songs—there are dozens of them in the score—as well as the rhythmic drive of the folk music Stravinsky heard growing up in the countryside near St. Petersburg.

It also takes full advantage of some of the latest developments in modern music, particularly those pioneered by Stravinsky's own teacher, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

A painting of a snowy street scene. In the center, a white tent with a red and yellow striped awning is set up. A sign above the tent reads "ТЕАТРЪ ЖИВЫХ" (Theater of Living). People in winter clothing are walking on the snow-covered ground. In the background, there are buildings with blue and white facades and arched windows. The scene is framed by a decorative blue border with white floral patterns.

The conductor was Pierre Monteux, then a violist in the Concerts Colonne orchestra in Paris. He was hired to assist Colonne conductor Gabriel Pierné in the rehearsals for Stravinsky's new ballet *Petrushka*.

Stravinsky heard Monteux at work and was so impressed that he insisted Monteux conduct the premiere as well.

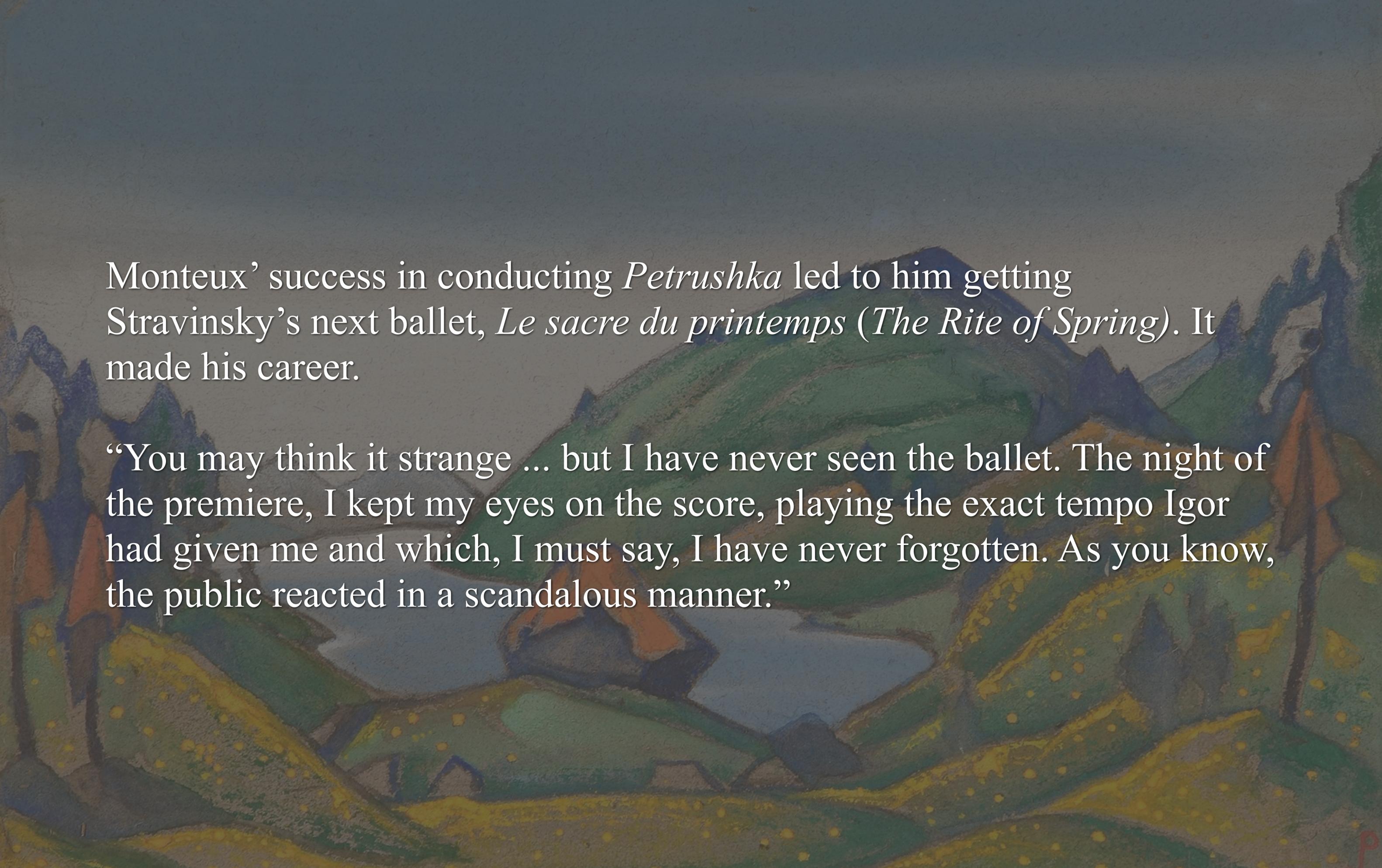
With that, Monteux became the house conductor for the Ballet Russes.

In 1935, Pierre Monteux would become the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony.



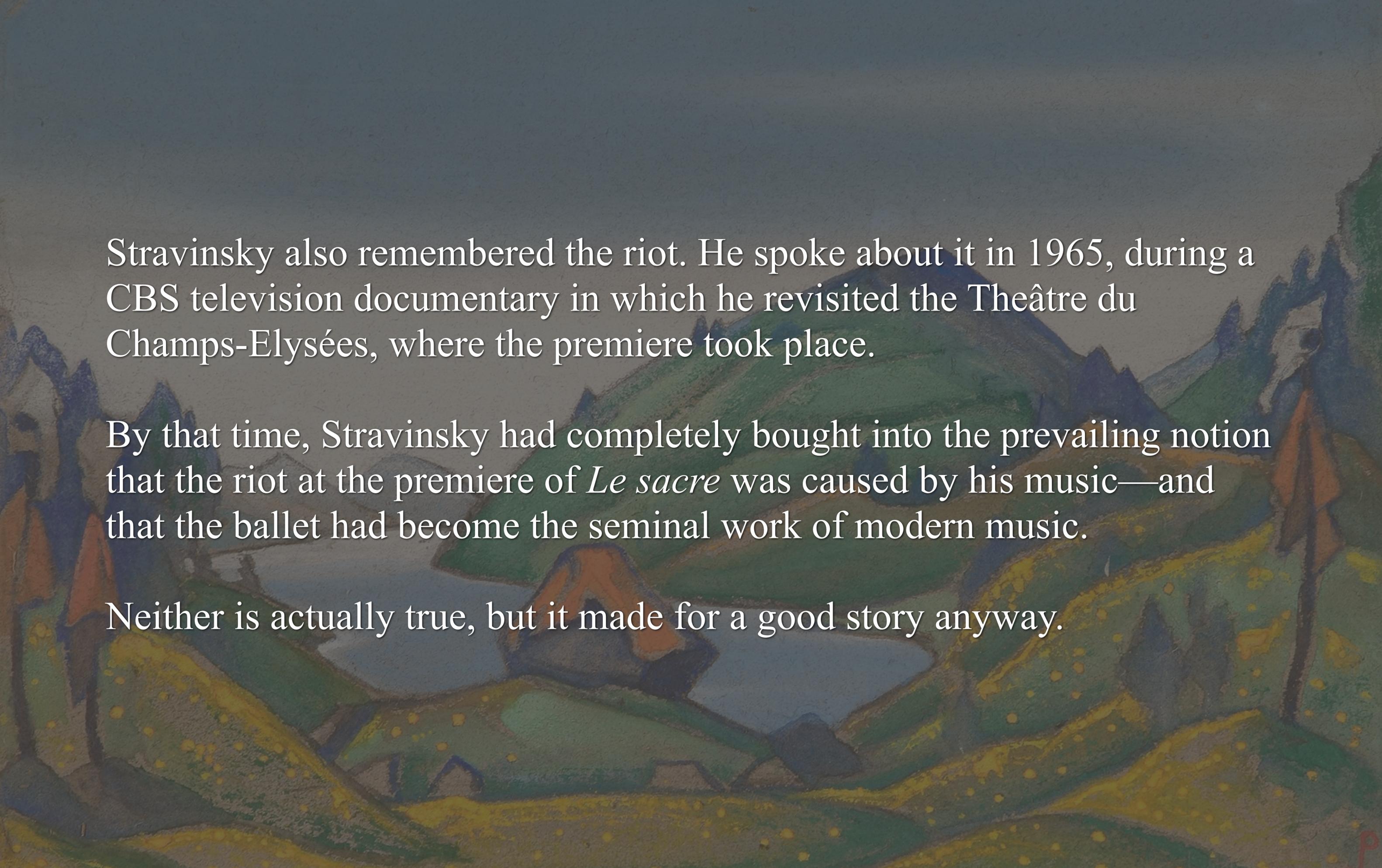
Stravinsky: Petrushka

Pierre Monteux / Boston Symphony Orchestra (RCA Red Seal 1959)

A painting of a landscape with rolling hills and a lake, serving as a background for the text. The hills are rendered in shades of green and yellow, with a blue lake in the center. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

Monteux' success in conducting *Petrushka* led to him getting Stravinsky's next ballet, *Le sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*). It made his career.

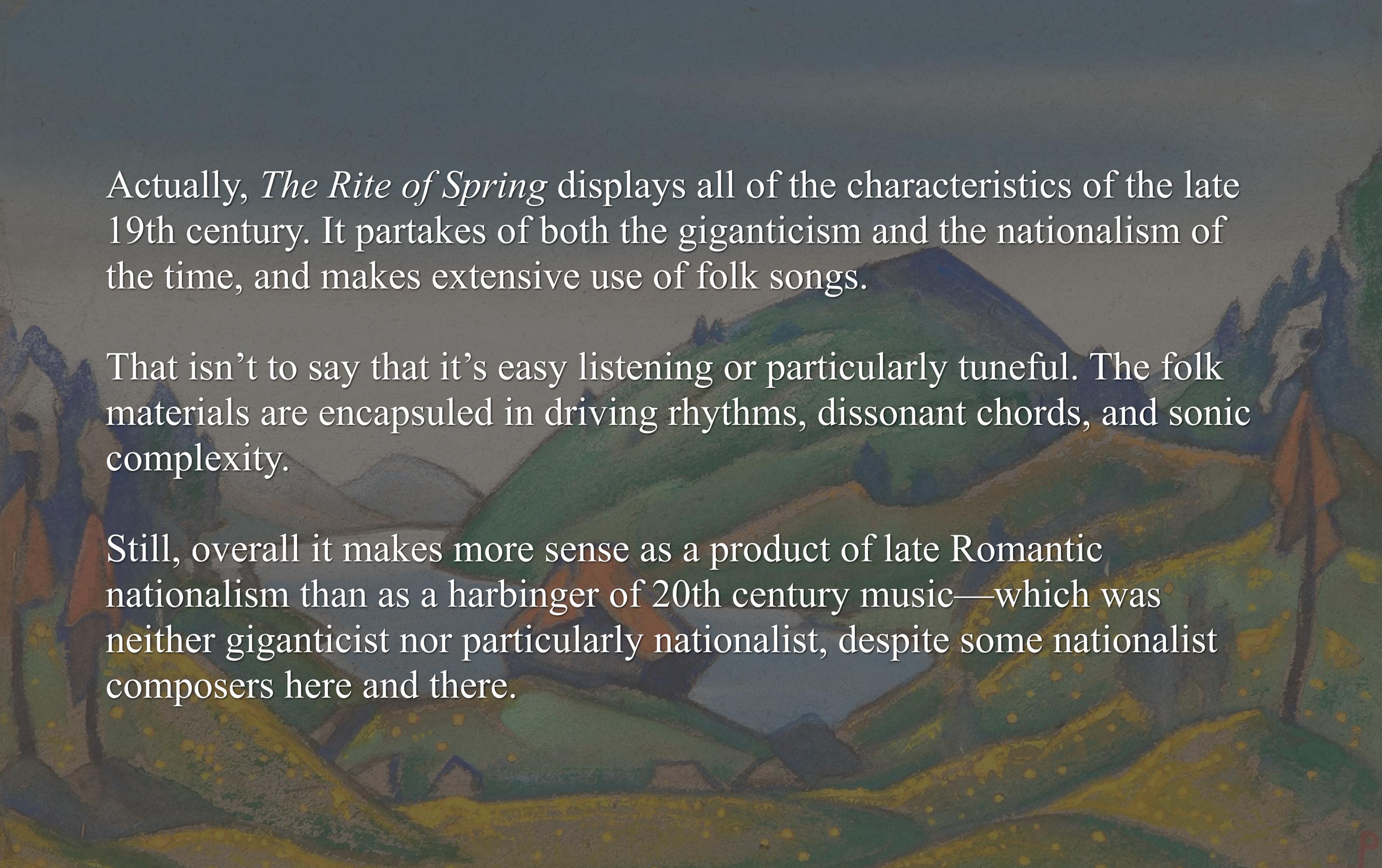
“You may think it strange ... but I have never seen the ballet. The night of the premiere, I kept my eyes on the score, playing the exact tempo Igor had given me and which, I must say, I have never forgotten. As you know, the public reacted in a scandalous manner.”



Stravinsky also remembered the riot. He spoke about it in 1965, during a CBS television documentary in which he revisited the Théâtre du Champs-Élysées, where the premiere took place.

By that time, Stravinsky had completely bought into the prevailing notion that the riot at the premiere of *Le sacre* was caused by his music—and that the ballet had become the seminal work of modern music.

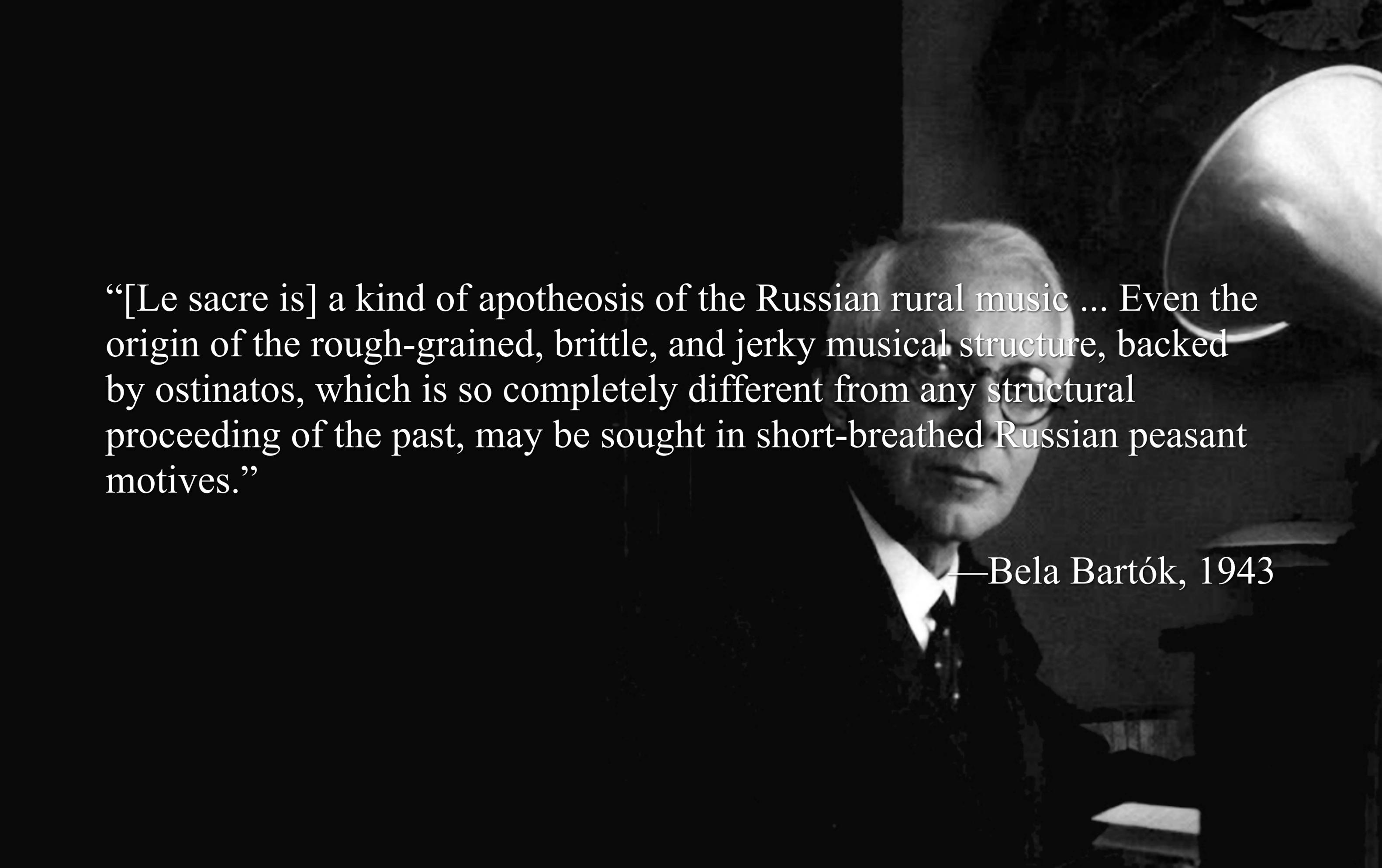
Neither is actually true, but it made for a good story anyway.



Actually, *The Rite of Spring* displays all of the characteristics of the late 19th century. It partakes of both the gigantism and the nationalism of the time, and makes extensive use of folk songs.

That isn't to say that it's easy listening or particularly tuneful. The folk materials are encapsulated in driving rhythms, dissonant chords, and sonic complexity.

Still, overall it makes more sense as a product of late Romantic nationalism than as a harbinger of 20th century music—which was neither giganticist nor particularly nationalist, despite some nationalist composers here and there.



“[Le sacre is] a kind of apotheosis of the Russian rural music ... Even the origin of the rough-grained, brittle, and jerky musical structure, backed by ostinatos, which is so completely different from any structural proceeding of the past, may be sought in short-breathed Russian peasant motives.”

—Bela Bartók, 1943



Le sacre du printemps: Act 1

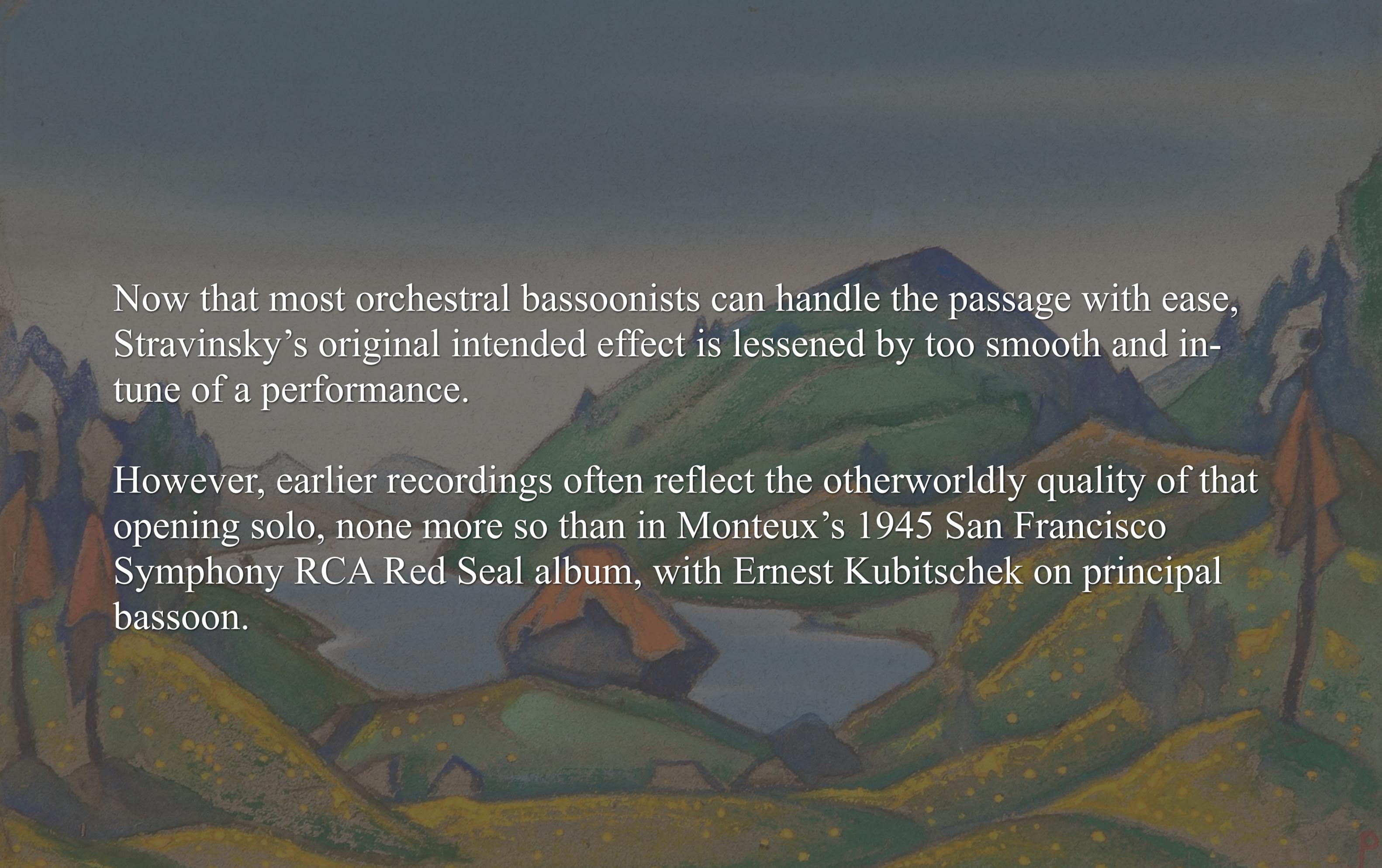
Valery Gergiev / Mariinsky Orchestra and Ballet



Even the very opening of *The Rite of Spring* is filled with nationalistic ideas.

The bassoon solo is actually a Ukrainian folk song called *Tu, manu seseréle*, which Stravinsky took from a collection called *Melodje ludowe litewskie*, published in Krakow in 1900.

By writing it a bit above the bassoon's natural register, the player would have to strain, resulting in a sound more like a rustic folk instrument rather than a sophisticated European symphonic instrument such as the bassoon.

A painting of a landscape with rolling hills, a lake, and trees, serving as a background for the text. The style is somewhat abstract and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette of greens, blues, and yellows. The hills are layered, creating a sense of depth. A small lake is visible in the middle ground, surrounded by trees and foliage. The overall mood is serene and somewhat melancholic.

Now that most orchestral bassoonists can handle the passage with ease, Stravinsky's original intended effect is lessened by too smooth and in-tune of a performance.

However, earlier recordings often reflect the otherworldly quality of that opening solo, none more so than in Monteux's 1945 San Francisco Symphony RCA Red Seal album, with Ernest Kubitschek on principal bassoon.

A stylized, colorful landscape painting. The scene features a central lake surrounded by rolling hills and mountains. The hills are rendered in various shades of green, blue, and yellow, with some areas appearing to have small yellow flowers or dots. The mountains in the background are depicted in shades of blue and grey. The sky is a pale, muted blue-grey. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century modernist art, possibly influenced by the Die Brücke movement.

* Dance of the Adolescents: Opening

* Folk song fragment No. 1



* Folk song fragment No. 2



* Folk song fragment No. 3

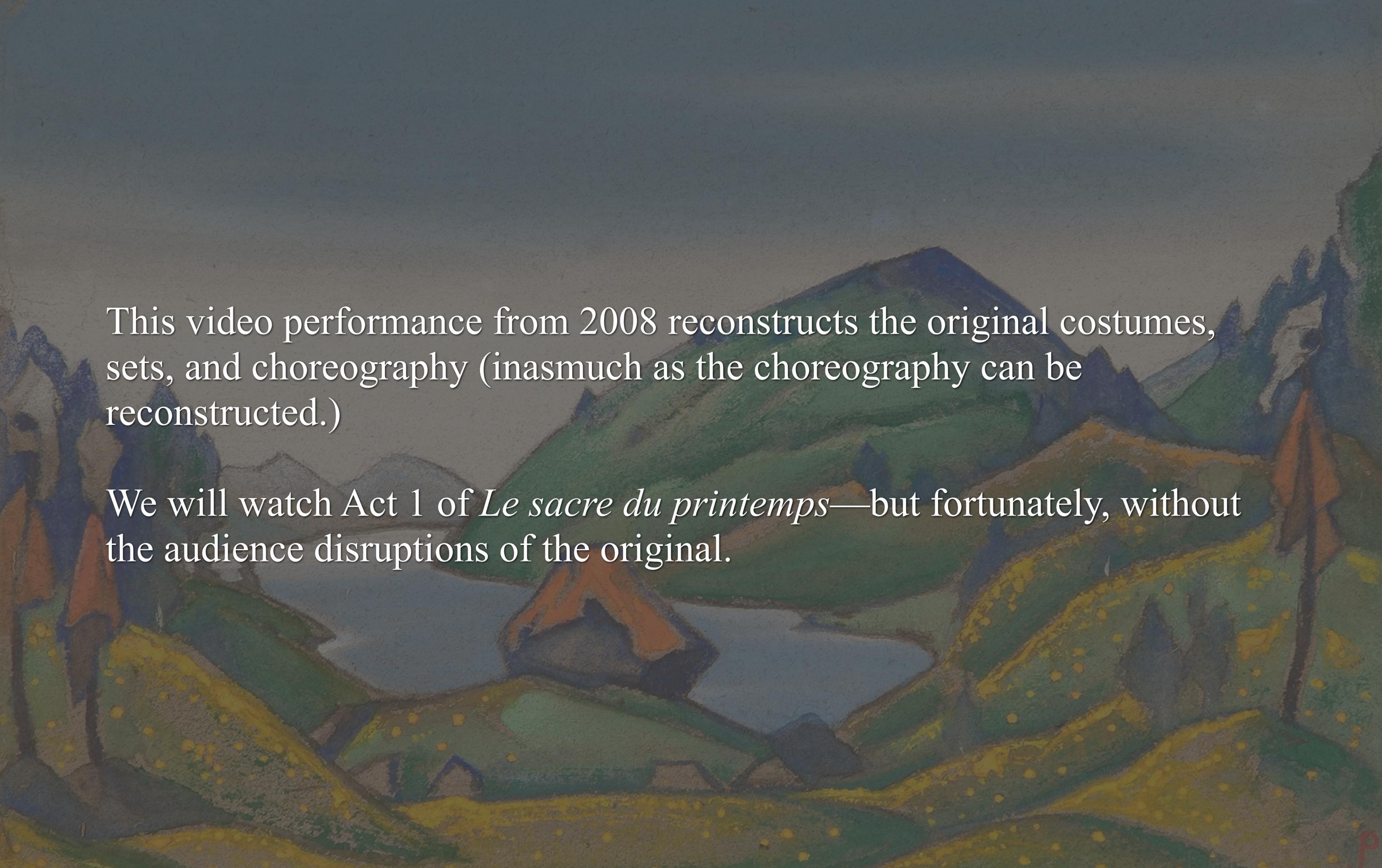


❖ Folk song fragment No. 4



* Folk song fragment No. 5



The background is a painting of a landscape. It features rolling hills in shades of green and yellow, a central lake or pond, and several trees with dark trunks and brown foliage. The overall style is somewhat abstract and textured, with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the painting.

This video performance from 2008 reconstructs the original costumes, sets, and choreography (inasmuch as the choreography can be reconstructed.)

We will watch Act 1 of *Le sacre du printemps*—but fortunately, without the audience disruptions of the original.

