



IGOR STRAVINSKI

1882-1971

NOCES

MAURICE OHANA

1914

CANTIGAS

**PERCUSSIONS DE STRASBOURG
CHŒUR CONTEMPORAIN**

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1 **IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)**

“NOCES” (“The Wedding”) (23’12)

(Chester J.W. Ltd, Londres)

Mireille Quercia, soprano - Sharon Cooper, mezzo - Pierre Capelle, tenor - Pali Marinov, bass - Jeanine Vieuxtemps, Roland Conil, Raffi Arzumianian, Jacques Raynaud, piano.

LES PERCUSSIONS DE STRASBOURG

CHŒUR CONTEMPORAIN

Art director : Monique Mathon

Conductor : Roland Hayrabedian

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2 **MAURICE OHANA (1914)**

“CANTIGAS” (28’33)

Mireille Quercia, Françoise Atlan, soloist - Alain Dinouard, Michel Giboureau, oboe - Pierre Christophe Brilloit, cor anglais - Pierre Clement, clarinet - Jean-Louis Estier, Frédéric Barron, bassoon - Pascal Vigneron, Francis Aubier, trumpet - Jean Pol Marchand, Bernard Rapaud, trombone - Joël Eude, bass trombone - Roland Conil, piano.

LES PERCUSSIONS DE STRASBOURG

CHŒUR CONTEMPORAIN

Art director : Maurice Ohana, Monique Mathon

Conductor : Roland Hayrabedian

2 **CANTIGA DE LOS REYES MAGOS (5’24)**

3 **CANTIGA DEL DESTIERRO (6’40)**

4 **CANTIGA DE VELA (4’01)**

5 **CANTIGA DEL AZAHAR (4’56)**

6 **CANTIGA DE LA NOCHE SANTA (3’40)**

7 **CANTIGA DEL NACIMIENTO (3’42)**

The history of the composition of “THE WEDDING” is long and complex. Begun in 1914, the score was not completed until 1917, and its final orchestration only in 1923.

With four pianos and a percussion ensemble, STRAVINSKY achieved, as regards sonority, his aim of expression and reduction to essentials that he had already attained regarding the musical language by his composition, an aim which is to be one of the essential marks of all his future music.

“The Wedding” is a ballet ; one could easily forget this, the music is so rich in itself. Four tableaux follow one another, four moments depicting a ritual of Russian peasant weddings, reinvented by Stravinsky from popular tents that he chose and put together himself. Symbol characters take part in this ritual : the bride, the bridegroom, the fathers and mothers and the friends at the wedding, consequently the soloist voices are not attributed to one or other of them but are only used as “carrier” voices suiting here or there, the necessary development of the ceremonial, a festive and collective ceremonial in which the vital expansion and spontaneity naturally glides in the set form of traditional rites. The symbol is treated as a familiar sign of concrete reality, such as the erotic symbols, so frequent in popular poetry - which can by no means be interpreted here as licentious or lascivious - grave images expressing the gravity of things in life, and particularly of this moment when the man and the woman are, for the first time, going to participate in its mystery. All the preparations for the wedding and its fulfilment lead to this truly sacrificial act.

There is no respite in this implacable impetus towards the final accomplishment. The rhythmic scansion, isochronic multiplication of a first time irregularly stressed, bears the musical flow in one elan from the first to the last note of the work. One can distinguish however two big moments.

First of all, a triptych representing the wedding preparations :

— 1st tableau : the plait (index 1)

— 2nd tableau : at the bride’s home (index 4)

— 3rd tableau : the bride’s departure (index 6)

Then a 4th tableau lasting as long as the triptych (7), a collective scene round the “red table” where the wedding feast takes place, prelude to the final consummation.

The first tableau opens with a lamentation : the fiancée weeps for the coming loss of her virginity, symbolised by the loss of her plait that her friends tie for the last time. They console her for a moment (2) and praise the merits of the brilliant fiancé before the Virgin Mary is familiarly invited to join in the preparations (3).

This feminine and dramatic scene is followed by a religious, masculine scene (4). A man's chorus takes up once more the invocation to the Virgin Mary, interrupted by trivial soloist interventions. The parents' threnody is inserted, a lamentation on their son's departure, punctuated with implacable percussion. Another invocation to the Virgin Mary, this time powerfully brought to a conclusion is followed by the parents' blessing, episode commented upon by the choir which also implores the blessing of God and his Saints in a formidable progression, broken abruptly at the height of its expansion.

The atmosphere of the third tableau (6) rejoins the atmosphere in the first. The collective and expansive adieu to the bride is taken up by the two mothers in a threnody similar to that in the second tableau, a figure of poignant lamentation in its refusal of all that is pathetic.

The fourth tableau is divided into two parts : symbolic songs, interpellations, welcoming of the fiancée, the bride's song (the only song borrowed by Stravinsky from the popular repertoire), call for the general assembling, leading to the ritual action of the preparation of the bed that a couple of guests are going to warm for the bride and groom (8).

Overwhelmed with recommendations, knocked about in a friendly way, addressed on all sides, worked up whilst the general atmosphere warms and the existential fears are exorcised in noise and laughter, the fiancés are led up to the nuptial bed (9). In the impressive silence of the suddenly dumb and frozen company there rises the tender, anguished song of the young man confronted with the mysteries of life and death. Through his voice, tense and, as it were, constricted, at the limits of its tessitura, one can hear revealed "the" melody to which all the music in "The Wedding" was leading, now recognized as being the central presence and resolution of the work. Multiplied by the echo of imaginary bells, the extraordinary timbre of which is produced by a mixture of four pianos and the resonance of a bell and two crotala, festive chimes or knell, it melts and dies away into space.

A major score in Stravinsky's work, "The Wedding", touches the listener's innermost depths by its intense life force and its tragicalness free from the pathetic, by its solid roots in the concrete and its absence of realism, by its rigour and vigour, its "firmness" as Stravinsky liked to say. Thus this work has a universal value, over and beyond the local situation which dictates to the composer here the style and colour of his material, thanks to the verity of this situation.

One will recognize this same universal value in Maurice OHANA's "CANTIGAS", a work composed in 1953/54 and which fits into the line of the Spanish mystical tradition. Turning the proposition according to which Stravinsky makes the profane "sacred", one could suggest that Maurice Ohana, on the other hand, seizes everything that Iberian sacred poetry contains concerning familiarity with daily life to exalt its most universally human aspect.

He drew the texts of five of the six pieces which compose the work ("Poesia de la Edad Media y Poesia de Tipo Traditional" by Damaso Alonso - Ed. Losada SA, Buenos Aires, 1942) from an anthology of mediaeval Spanish poetry. The texts were written between the 13th and the 14th centuries. The text of the fourth piece, which gives its name to the ensemble of the work is a montage made by the composer himself from three of the famous "CANTIGAS DE SANTA MARIA", a collection written in the 13th century by king Alphonse The Wise. This mystical poetry is akin to the most authentic popular poetry in its profusion of images. The dazzling, sumptuous Virgins in the procession move side by side with horrifyingly bloody and emaciated Christs. In this coexistence of jubilation and drama, of sensuality and asceticism, Ohana encountered the atmosphere corresponding to the resonant vision that obsessed him at that time. The texts, chosen after the music had been written, glide in Spanish musical rhythmic without having engendered them, thanks to the plasticity of the Spanish language, which allows for stress shifts or syntactic infractions provoked by the musical necessities. The mixed choir, from which a few soloists occasionally stand out, is sustained - sometimes relayed - by an ensemble of fifteen instrumentalists (wind, percussion, and piano), a minimum orchestra based on a principle of economy and force, as in "The Wedding". The ensemble of six pieces, organized according to the complementary laws of contrast and progression, complies with a logic which is strictly musical. One will notice however that the last image, one of accomplishment :

"Life has come, has come, Ole ! to the world !" responds to the first image, one of commencement : "From where the dawn opens her balcony and emerges, smiling, the sun in her arms..."

This music, stern and sensual, violent and tender, wild and contemplative, is like Stravinsky's music, without complacency, drawing its universal force from concrete reality. Offering itself without imposing itself, it invites the listener to take an imaginary journey between the "space within" and the "space without", an alternance of sonorous images which, like the poetic images are deeply engraved in the sensitivity of the listener who knows how to receive them.

I. CANTIGA DE LOS REYES MAGOS (Cantiga of the Three Wise Men) - J. de Valdivielso (16th century) : The joy caused by the arrival of the Three Wise Men is combined in this first piece with the loving fascination that the "little virgin" (Virgen-cita) provokes.

Very clearly constructed, this piece contrasts two episodes, entrusted to women's voices written according to the modal chromaticism which is so characteristic of Maurice Ohana's melodic composition, with a central passage in counterpoint between male and female voices ("Oro, incenso y mirra").

II. CANTIGA DEL DESTIERRO (Cantiga of the exile) - Fray Ambrosio Montesino (15th century) : the Virgin is, once more, the central figure of this second piece evoking the flight into Egypt and the sorrow of exile, "Desterrado parte el niño y llora"; five times the mother tenderly repeats to the crying child "Callad, mi señor, agora" (Hush now, my Lord).

This lulling tender refrain punctuates each of the five verses of the poem. The three central verses, the hurried rhythm of which evokes the idea of the flight, are framed by two symmetrical lullaby-like verses.

III. CANTIGA DE VELA (Cantiga of the watch) - Gonzalo de Berceo (13th century) : the violence of the third piece conveys the violence of the text, an avenging and fanatical imprecation which urges the Jews to watch well over the sepulchre for fear that someone should steal the Lord's body : "Eya velar que non vos furten al Higo de Dios" (Go, watch, no one must steal the Son of God). Essentially entrusted to men's

and contraltos' voices, the piece develops with an implacable rhythmic regularity in a tempo which accelerates progressively up to the final choral, a kind of malediction, finishing with clamours.

IV. CANTIGA DEL AZAHAR (Cantiga of the orange blossom) - Don Alfonso El Sabio (13th century) : Almost entirely a capella, the fourth piece slowly and freely develops a sinuous melody which is divided between the voices of the soprano solo, contraltos and basses of the choir, and finally a mezzo-soprano and tenor solos. The beauty of this bare melody creates an atmosphere of sensual ecstasy in absolute contrast with the preceding piece - a contrast which is very characteristic of Ohana's style in which episodes of wild violence often alternate with ones of pure, poetic contemplation :

"Virgin of the orange blossom
Mother of green corn
Protector of solitude
Virgin of the Child
Love, April luminary"...

V. CANTIGA DE LA NOCHE SANA (Cantiga of the Holy Night) - Fray Ambrosio Montesino (15th century) : The fifth piece is a pilgrims' song. Assembled for the evening round the fire, on their way to Santiago di Compostella, they encourage each other not to sleep during the Holy Night, whilst the trembling Virgin waits in fear for the imminence of the birth of the divine Child she bears. Constructed according to a simple alternance of refrains (choir and orchestra) and of verses (mezzo-soprano a capella), this piece is linked directly with the sixth cantiga.

VI. CANTIGA DEL NACIMIENTO (Cantiga of the Nativity) Juan Alvarez Gato (15th century) : This last piece celebrates the birth of Christ : "Venida es, venida, ole ! al mundo la vida", in a kind of jubilant and luminous hymn.

Christine PROST

Couverture : Nature morte, sucrier, poires et tasse bleue (détail), Paul Cézanne - Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence
Cliché Bernard Terlay