

philharmonia orchestra

Tugan Sokhiev discusses Stravinsky's Rite of Spring

Tugan Sokhiev – Conductor

Musical extract

Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* – that's a kind of piece which shows an orchestra like Philharmonia at its best because you get wonderful, individual playing, like the beginning of the piece, which is bassoon solo. You get cor anglais solo. You get violins, you get trumpets suddenly sparkling. And then in the final sacred dance you get the whole orchestra going demented in this crazy, un-rhythmic... which sounds un-rhythmic, but in fact it is very rhythmic. All these tutti and all the instruments are playing, and that's what shows the brilliance of this orchestra – the real power and the real colour of this orchestra.

Musical extract

David Corkhill – Percussion

It's a challenge, it's not easy, but at the same time it has a familiarity to it which makes it easier to play.

Musical extract

But there's an extra *frissant*, I suppose, about the *Rite of Spring*. It's such an important work and it's so exciting to play, and it's so colourful.

Tugan Sokhiev

I started very, very early when I was seven years old. I heard the music coming from somewhere on the street, from the window and I just said, "I want to do that." I started my early piano lessons and at 16 I was transferred (by my own wish) into the conducting world. I probably didn't even understand how difficult it is. I saw a concert once and I remember sitting in the first row and I couldn't understand how it is possible that one man is standing there and organises all of those people. How does he make them all play together and the end result is so impressive?

I wasn't rushing into doing this piece, neither in Russia nor in Europe because it requires a certain strength, certain power, certain set of mind, which you have to gradually arrive to.

Musical extract

The details of this piece are very important. There is no one instrument that is just a part of the whole tutti or of the whole harmony. Every instrument plays its own significant role, either in character, or in colour, or in harmony, or in rhythm, because Stravinsky was probably one of the first composers who started using the orchestra instruments as rhythmical structure. He wouldn't just use the percussion, for instance. He would use the oboe for playing the melody, but it would be so clear, so strong, and so powerful rhythmically.

Stravinsky was very precise. He would always write the metronome and the tempi. He would be very, very precise in what he wants. But being an artist you always have to allow a little bit of, not interpretation, but a little bit of your own feeling. You always colour it with your own feeling.

It is a mixture of everything. It has, at the core, this Russian, pagan philosophy. You know, when you feel earth, soil, in your hands, it has to be that feeling with the sound as well because that is what gives it a pagan colour. When you think that it was written in 1913, it still today sounds so contemporary and I don't think anybody since then ever achieved that level of perfection of rhythm, melody, character, colour, power. It's unbelievable.

Musical extract