

philharmonia orchestra

ANDRÉ JOLIVET

(1905 – 1974)

***Cinq Danses rituelles* (1938-39)**

1. *Danse initiatique*
2. *Danse du héros*
3. *Danse nuptiale*
4. *Danse du rapt*
5. *Danse funéraire*

André Jolivet originally composed his *Cinq Danses rituelles* in 1938–9 as a work for solo piano, and the work was orchestrated in 1940. Jolivet himself described the ritualistic purpose of the dances at key moments in the lives of individuals in ancient societies. The parallels with Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* are clear. Jolivet wrote that his main preoccupation in this work was "to give back to music something of its original purpose: that's to say as magical and incantatory expressions of groups of people." He went on to say that this was a work that could refer to any society, but "particularly to those called 'primitive' in which the human spirit has remained uncorrupted... These are in fact dances of birth, puberty, war and virility, love and marriage, death and resurrection."

The leading Jolivet scholar Lucie Kayas has emphasised that while there are close links with *The Rite of Spring* and Jolivet's concept for the *Cinq Danses rituelles*, the resulting music is very different. For example, despite the clear indebtedness of the *Danse du rapt* to Stravinsky's *Jeu du rapt* in the *Rite*, Jolivet's savage evocation of sexual violence in music is entirely distinctive and extremely powerful in its own terms. Each of the dances is sharply characterised, and Jolivet's instrumental writing in his orchestral version adds a great deal not only in terms of physical impact, but also the range of colour. The incantatory nature of the musical language is by turns hypnotic and barbaric, each dance growing inexorably from small rhythmic cells.

On 5 December 1944, a few months after the Liberation of Paris, André Cluytens conducted the first performance of the *Cinq Danses rituelles* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The critic Antoine Goléa recalled the occasion as "a great success, but slightly controversial since sounds of protest mingled with the applause and the cheers of the majority. For me personally, this work was a violent shock: for the first time in a long while, I had the impression of being present at the birth of a masterpiece in the music of our time."

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