

Ballet



Origin of Ballet

Ballet developed out of court dancing during the Renaissance.



Court Dance during the Renaissance included many of the rhetorical elements that were found in the music of the Baroque era (think Handel's operas).

Dancing was used to showcase the opulence of the court.

Court Dance in the Baroque Era

- a symbol of refinement and elegance,
wealth and prestige

- featured opulent ornamentation,
lightness and grace

Choreography:

Formal organization of movement made up of a predetermined ordering of both length and frequency of specific positions and movements, often related to musical time

Court Ballet

During the 17th century, court ballet began to develop a life of its own outside of the court in public venues.

-Ballet was developed and popularized under King *Louis XIV* in France

-1661 *Academie Royale de Danse* was founded (the first professional dance training academy)

-*Jean-Baptiste Lully*, court composer for King Louis XIV, became the first director of the *Paris Opera Ballet* in 1672



Watch this excerpt of Court Dance from the
Reign of Louis XIV now:

<https://youtu.be/aLu6pIHMMtg>

Watch this excerpt of Lully's Ballet, Xerxes, now:

<https://youtu.be/Hy9M4mlaoMk>

Notice the refinement of the movements, and how the dancers often are on the balls of their feet with light leaping. These movements were meant to contrast the movements of folk dance which were quicker and heavier and directed towards the ground.

Ballet was an integral part of opera until the early 1800's

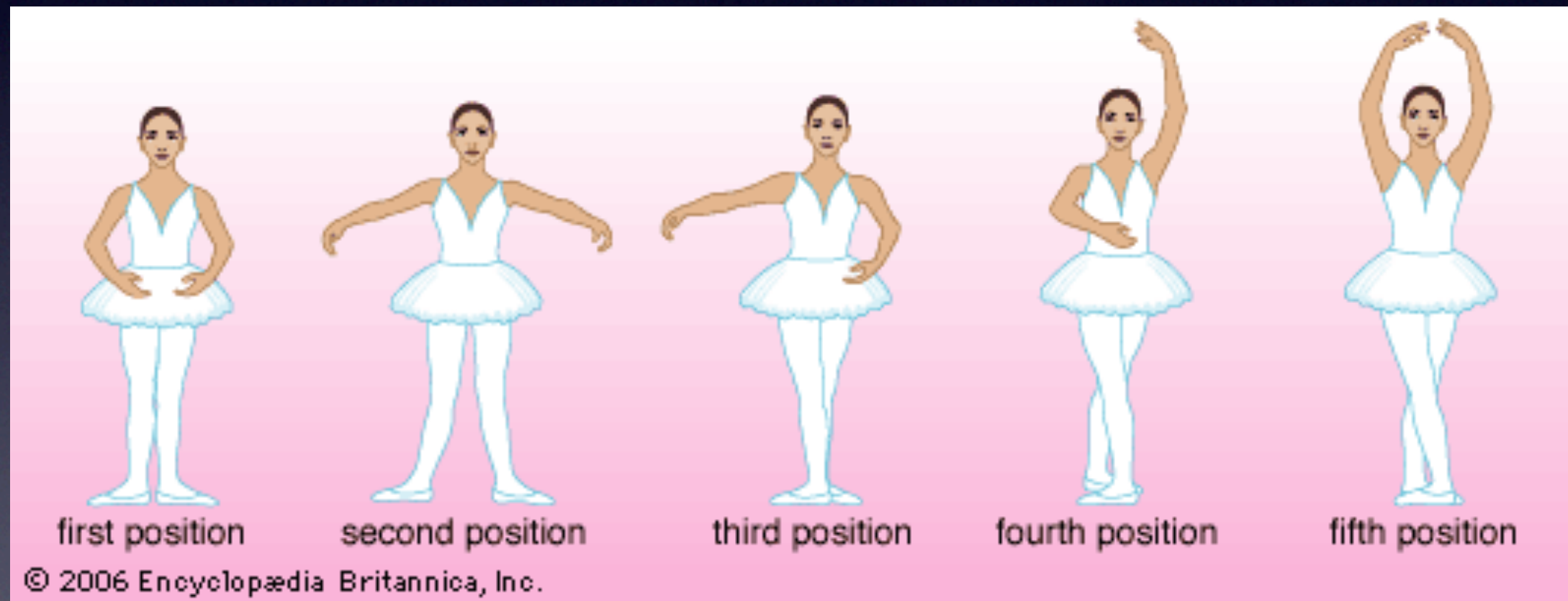
It was present in the earliest operas, such as the *Dance of the Nymphs* from *L'Orfeo* by Monteverdi:

Watch Now: https://youtu.be/TfI6_IGs7Ss

By the end of the 1700's ballet had discarded stately court influences for more gymnastic virtuosity, dancing on the *pointe* - tips of the toes.

Classical Ballet - formalized French style of choreography

-enables dancer to move with the greatest agility, control, speed, lightness and grace through the practice of specific positions for the feet and arms



By the 19th Century, many French and Russian composers wrote plot ballets. These ballets were similar to operas in story line and orchestration, however dancing took the place of singing to convey the meaning of the story.

Plot Ballet - Romantic, realistic or mythological
representation of dramatic and emotional situations
-featured a planned sequence of dance numbers
-dancing replaces libretto

Recitative becomes *Pantomime*
(gestural mimicry, as developed in
Commedia dell'arte in Renaissance Italy)

Arias become larger dances featuring a soloist or pair of dancers



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Russian Composer

Romantic Period

Composer known for Plot
Ballets:

- The Nutcracker
- Swan Lake
- The Sleeping Beauty

Style:

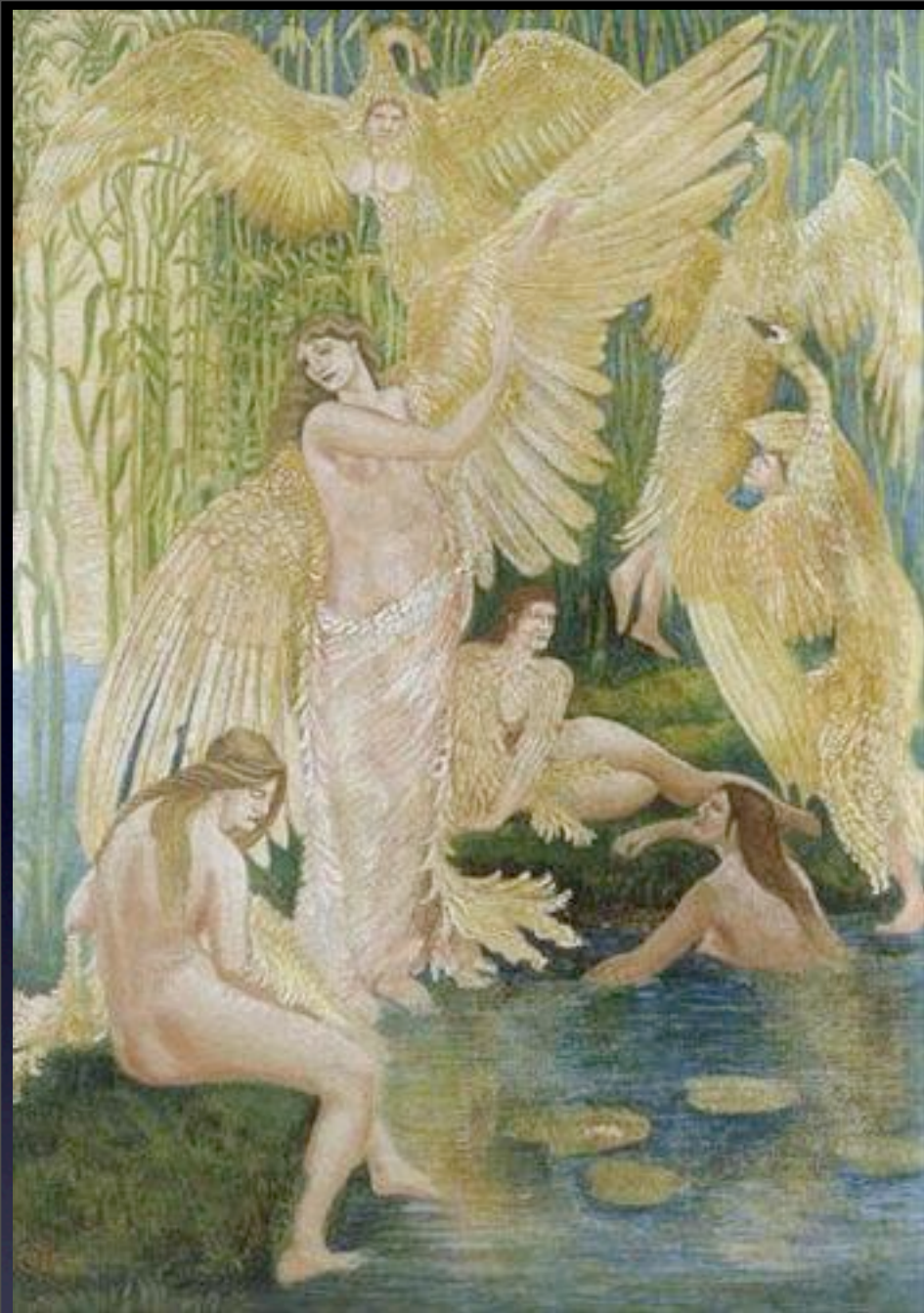
Mix of Western Classical
and Russian Folk Styles

Swan Lake (1875-76)

Plot Ballet by Tchaikovsky

Story is based on Russian folk tales

Premiered in Moscow, Russia



- Odette* - *prima ballerina* role (lead role)
- She and her companions are transformed into swans by the sorcerer, *Von Rothbart*
- The swans live in a lake magically formed from the tears of Odette's mother
- She can only regain human form at night
- Rothbart's spell can only be broken by the power of eternal love between Odette and a young man who will remain faithful to her
- If the vow is broken, she will remain a swan forever

- Odette falls in love with Prince Siegfried who vows faithfulness
- Prince Siegfried is tricked by the Black Swan, a false version of Odette and breaks his vow, believing that the Black Swan is Odette
- Odette is trapped as a swan
- Odette and Siegfried drown themselves in the lake to escape the curse and are reunited in death

Musical Themes in ballet work similarly to Leitmotif in opera and film, helping to clarify the action of the storyline.

Watch the Main Theme from Swan Lake, featuring Odette and Prince Siegfried now:

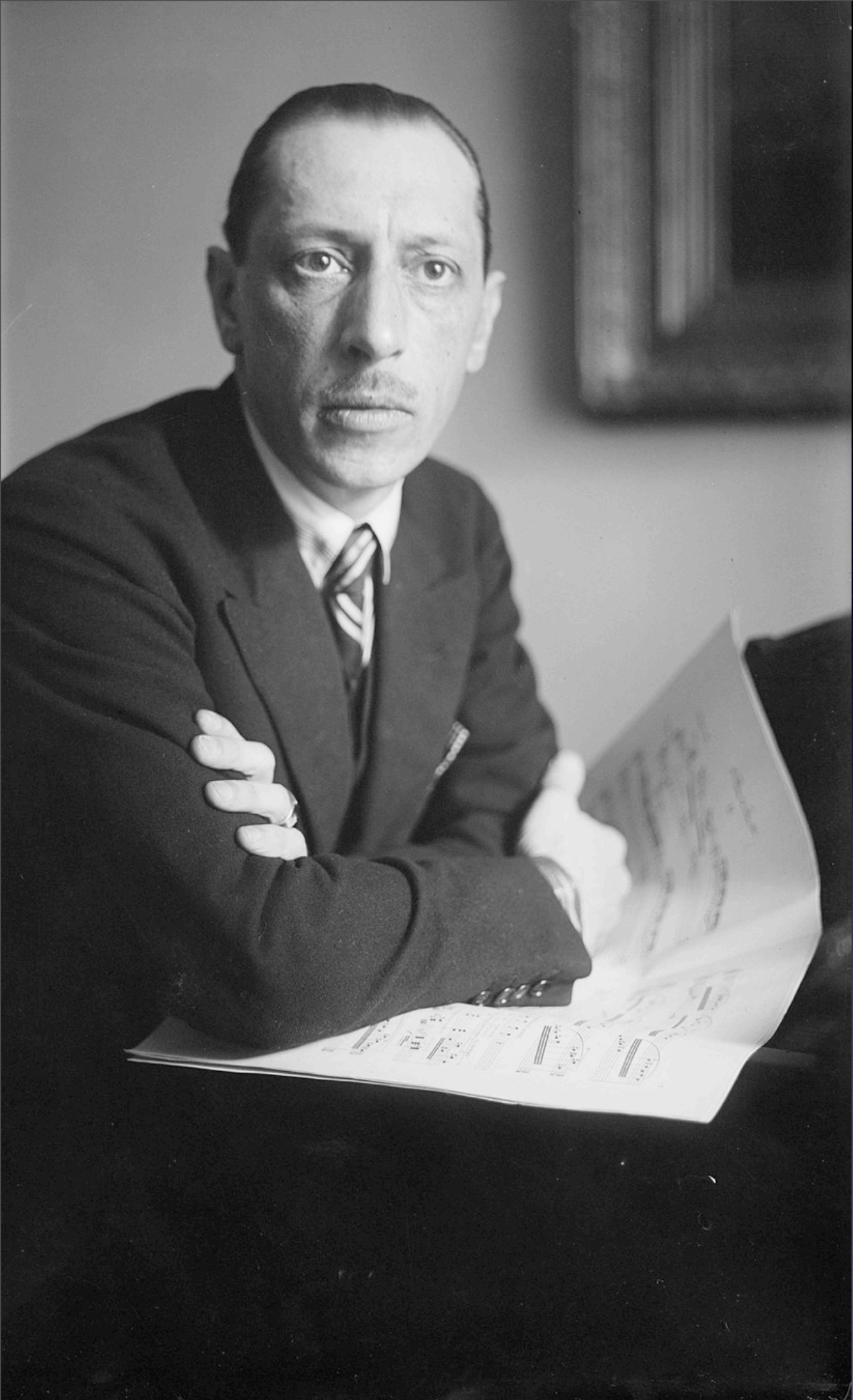
<https://youtu.be/jjDYW46PjA8>

Pas de deux: “step of two”

- a dance duet, usually featuring one male and one female dancer (pair of principle dancers)
- Usually in five parts: introduction, adagio (slow section), variation 1 (dance solo), variation 2 (dance solo), coda (finale)

Watch the Act II *Pas de Deux* from *Swan Lake* now:

<https://youtu.be/FNSII Dowqo4>



Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

-Russian Composer

-Wrote Ballets:

Firebird

Petrushka

The Rite of Spring

Les Noces

Style:

-Inclusion of Western Classical Music
Ideas and Russian Folk tunes

-Experimented with atonality,
meter, rhythm, stress, and
dissonance

The Rite of Spring (Premiered 1913)

“I had dreamed a scene of a pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death.”

-Igor Stravinsky

Choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky

Produced by Sergei Diaghilev

Performed by the Ballets Russes in Paris

The Rite of Spring featured changes in dance and music style that challenged the expectations of the audience and led to a scandal and near-riot at its premiere.

Stravinsky's Primitivism:

- Took musical and dance elements assumed from folk cultures.
- Music featured: shifts of harmony and rhythm, avoidance of regular beat, and dissonance
- Dance featured: heavy stomping and asymmetrical movements, much in contrast to classical ballet.

Story and Structural Divisions in *The Rite of Spring*:

Episode	English translation	Synopsis ^[n 1]
Part I: <i>L'Adoration de la Terre</i> (Adoration of the Earth) ^[9]		
<i>Introduction</i>	Introduction	Before the curtain rises, an orchestral introduction resembles, according to Stravinsky, "a swarm of spring pipes [<i>dudki</i>]" ^[10]
<i>Les Augures printaniers</i>	Augurs of Spring	The celebration of spring begins in the hills. An old woman enters and begins to foretell the future.
<i>Jeu du rapt</i>	Ritual of Abduction	Young girls arrive from the river, in single file. They begin the "Dance of the Abduction".
<i>Rondes printanières</i>	Spring Rounds	The young girls dance the <i>Khorovod</i> , the "Spring Rounds".
<i>Jeux des cités rivales</i>	Ritual of the Rival Tribes	The people divide into two groups in opposition to each other, and begin the "Ritual of the Rival Tribes".
<i>Cortège du sage: Le Sage</i>	Procession of the Sage: The Sage	A holy procession leads to the entry of the wise elders, headed by the Sage who brings the games to a pause and blesses the earth.
<i>Embrasse de la terre</i>	Kiss of the Earth	The sage blesses the earth with a kiss. Note: This episode is only included in some editions.
<i>Danse de la terre</i>	Dance of the Earth	The people break into a passionate dance, sanctifying and becoming one with the earth.

Part II: <i>Le Sacrifice</i> (The Sacrifice) ^[9]		
<i>Introduction</i>	Introduction	
<i>Cercles mystérieux des adolescentes</i>	Mystic Circles of the Young Girls	The young girls engage in mysterious games, walking in circles.
<i>Glorification de l'élue</i>	Glorification of the Chosen One	One of the young girls is selected by fate, being twice caught in the perpetual circle, and is honoured as the "Chosen One" with a martial dance.
<i>Evocation des ancêtres</i>	Evocation of the Ancestors	In a brief dance, the young girls invoke the ancestors.
<i>Action rituelle des ancêtres</i>	Ritual Action of the Ancestors	The Chosen One is entrusted to the care of the old wise men.
<i>Danse sacrale (L'Élue)</i>	Sacrificial Dance	The Chosen One dances to death in the presence of the old men, in the great "Sacrificial Dance".

Watch excerpts from *The Rite of Spring* now:

(Act I: Ritual of the Rival Tribes/Procession of the Sage/Dance of the Earth

Act II: Mystic Circles of Young Girls/Glorification of the Chosen One):

<https://youtu.be/iHlt0pCchxM>

Sacrificial Dance:

<https://youtu.be/d6d8wacBjPQ>

Les noces/ The Wedding (1923)

“Choreographes Scenes with Music and Voices” by Igor Stravinsky

- A Ballet and Orchestral Concert Work
- Featured percussion, pianists, chorus, vocal soloists (not a traditional orchestra)
- Premiered at the Ballet Russes in Paris
- Featured feministic choreography by Bronislava Nijinska (sister of Vaslav Nijinsky, who choreographed *The Rite of Spring*)
- Libretto by Stravinsky, after Russian wedding lyrics (performed in Russian with the singers off-stage)

Les noces/ The Wedding

The scenes are separated into tableaux, rather than acts.

1st Tableau: Benediction of the Bride

2nd Tableau: Benediction of the Bridegroom

3rd Tableau: Departure of Bridegroom from Parental Home

4th Tableau: Wedding Feast

Watch this excerpt of *Les Noces* now:

<https://youtu.be/RDGI6bcVqSM>

Questions to consider:

How does the choreography relate to the story?

Does it seem happy? Free? Joyous?
Restrictive? Rigid?

What message does the choreography send?



Sergei Diaghilev (872-1929)

Russian art critic, patron
and

Impressario: person who organizes
and finances concerts, plays, operas,
ballets, etc.

-Founded the Ballets Russes in Paris

-Produced many of Stravinsky's
ballets

-Produced *Parade* by Satie

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

-French composer and pianist

-A part of the 20th century *avant-garde* scene (experimental arts)

-Was labeled “the laziest student in the Conservatoire”



Parade (1917)

Music Composed by Erik Satie

Story by Jean Cocteau

Costume and Set Design by Pablo Picasso

Premiered at Diaghilev's Ballet Russes

Choreography by Léonide Massine

Story: Publicity parade in which three groups of circus artists try to attract an audience to an indoor performance (and fail).

Features influences of commedia dell'arte, Parisian music halls, American silent films, and ragtime.

Features a variety of noise-making instruments: typewriter, foghorn, milk bottles, pistol, etc.

Artistic Styles of *Parade*:

Surrealism:

art movement seeking to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind, such as by the irrational juxtaposition of images

Cubism:

perspective with a single viewpoint abandoned for interlocking planes of simple geometric shapes

The premier of *Parade* was met with another almost-riot: There was booing and hissing followed by enthusiastic applause.

Watch Satie's *Parade* now:

https://youtu.be/YeipJ4kMH_0

Questions to consider:

What role does *EXPECTATION* play
in an audience's *experience* of a performance?

What other pieces/composers have challenged
the expectations of their listeners/viewers?
How?

How does art challenge society?