**The Firebird: Suite (1919)**

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes (2nd doubles English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, harp, piano/celesta, strings

Duration: 23 minutes.

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**THE COMPOSER** – IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971) – With the Great War finally over, Stravinsky probably expected his fortunes to rise with the peace tides. They did not, at least not right away. Many of the compositions he had written during the conflagration were done for little or no payment so Stravinsky’s financial circumstances were quite dire in 1919. In an attempt to raise some much-needed cash, he made a new suite from *The Firebird*.

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**THE HISTORY** – *The Firebird* was the piece that put Stravinsky on the international musical map back in 1910. It was both a fabulously successful and fortunate moment in his career. Had not Anatol Liadov been unable to meet the deadline of the Ballets Russes commission, the opportunity would not have fallen to Stravinsky and had he not been gifted with such a chance, the road to *The Rite of Spring* might not have been so open. *The Firebird* was a lifelong source of mixed emotions for the composer. He claimed to have been displeased with it from the start and was known to refer to it in later life as “that audience lollipop.” Stravinsky was immediately anxious to move beyond the elements of the score that so pleased everyone else – the assimilative “Russianness” of the orchestration first among them. He cursed the music as hopelessly derivative of his training and heritage and in truth it was, but not at all to its detriment. Stravinsky masterfully synthesized the best of his forbears (Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, et al) into something that, despite his objections, was wholly fresh and unique. Part of him must have known this deep down. He made three attempts to “rescue” the ballet as a concert suite – right away in 1911, again in 1919 and one final time in 1945. Was Stravinsky happy with it in the end? Probably not, but fortunately our adoration of this great masterpiece depends little on that.

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**THE WORLD** – Theodore Roosevelt died in 1919. This was also the year of the first Silesian Uprising in Poland, a revolution in Egypt and both the rise and fall of the extremely short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic.

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**THE CONNECTION** – Music from *The Firebird* is performed often by CCSO on various programs. The most recent concert presentation of the 1919 Suite was March 12, 2016 under Maestro John Giordano.