

PETRUSHKA

IGOR STRAVINSKY

inscape*

richard scerbo, director

INSCAPE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Richard Scerbo, director

PETRUSHKA

Igor Stravinsky

Transcribed by

David Plylar

Tableau I: The Shrovetide Fair 10:25

Tableau II: Petrushka's Room 4:59

Tableau III: The Moor's Room 7:32

Tableau IV: The Shrovetide Fair (Toward Evening) 14:30

Total time: 37:25

Transcription is inherently an act of homage. It is an activity that—perhaps more than any other, short of composing the piece in the first place—allows one to get to know a work from the inside out. Often the compulsion to translate music into a different medium stems from the unlikelihood of being able to perform the original version; for those of us who neither play a standard orchestral instrument nor conduct an ensemble, a vast repertoire of the music we admire is inaccessible to us from the standpoint of direct participation in its realization. In the age before recorded media, the infrequency of live performance also made accessibility to the music-loving public an issue; composers and publishers increasingly responded with the preparation of piano duet and other “reductions” that could be read by amateurs for entertainment and educational purposes. Such arrangements were not always utilitarian, however.

Setting aside the large body of works that have been composed “in response” to the original (such as variation sets, operatic paraphrases, and fantasies), there is a subset of adaptations where ease of use is not the primary consideration, though it is certainly a calculation. Into this category fall the arrangements that aim to provide a performance version of a work that is both faithful to the original and suitable to a new medium. There are many issues at play, the most contentious of which may be the conceptual dissonance between fidelity to the letter or spirit of the original music. Adherents to the *letter* tend to privilege the “notes on the page”—in particular their point of attack—while those for whom the *spirit* of the work plays an important role are willing to take a creative leap when adapting a problematic passage. An analogue of this would be the difference between a literal and lyrical translation of poem from an unknown language—it is through the creative choices of the translator that we recognize the art of the original work.

For me, the most meaningful historical models for transcriptions that successfully balance these issues of fidelity are Franz Liszt’s solo piano versions of the orchestral and vocal works of Beethoven, Berlioz, Schubert and Wagner. Since the sound of a piano, unlike most orchestral instruments, decays after the initial attack, many thoughtful provisions must be made for the music to be successful in its new setting. I think of this as “orchestrating” for the piano—something as simple as managing a crescendo may require, for instance, the adjustment of accompanimental figures, the reinforcement of a melody, or the displacement of register to allow comprehensibility of an idea, or simply its execution. These types of considerations are always at the front of my mind in my own transcriptions, from the selective doubling of the opening trumpet solo in my version of Mahler’s fifth symphony for solo piano, to the transposition to C major (from B-flat) of Beethoven’s op. 106 *Hammerklavier* sonata in my transcription of that work for string quartet (a transposition that allowed more effective use of the open strings of the quartet).

When I was asked by Inscape to transcribe the 1911 version of Igor Stravinsky’s “Petrushka” for a chamber orchestra of seventeen players, I responded with equal parts excitement and trepidation. The principles of translation were in essence the same—create a musically successful version of a work in a new medium—but added to the mix was the orchestrational precedent of Stravinsky himself. I was using many of the same instruments that Stravinsky used in his score, which meant that people would expect to hear iconic solos performed by the same instrument Stravinsky used, and may likewise have similar sonic expectations for other textures in the piece. While many of the solos remained intact (except where issues such as balance and fatigue were factors), much of Stravinsky’s imaginative score required adaptation to the new chamber environment. Consider that in the first and fourth tableaux of “Petrushka” Stravinsky orchestrated wonderful waves



Richard Scerbo	conductor
Susanna Loewy	flute/piccolo
Bethany Slater	oboe/English horn
Evan Ross Solomon	clarinet
Ashley Booher	clarinet/bass clarinet
Benjamin Greanya	bassoon
Chandra Cervantes	horn
Brandon Almagro	trumpet
James Anderson	trombone
R. Timothy McReynolds	piano
Cara Fleck	harp
Eric Plewinski	percussion
Paul Keesling	percussion
Ross Monroe Winter	violin
Sarah D'Angelo	violin
Megan Yanik	viola
Kacy Clopton	cello
Ali Cook	bass

of sound, made possible by the use of choirs of homogenous instruments. Using four of the same instruments to create a background wash of sound, Stravinsky could hide the moments when each player needed to breathe, whereas a single horn needs to both breathe and rest, for instance. My solutions for these kinds of problems involved the careful control of the timbre and register of sustaining instruments, and the use of percussion not used by Stravinsky in those contexts to provide consistency of sound—in particular the marimba, vibraphone and piano. The final score of the transcription preserves as much of the Stravinsky sound as possible, but it is also filled with decisions of mine that were intended to make it successful in this new chamber orchestra context. After all, if you do not have a tuba or contrabassoon available for the great moments Stravinsky provided them, you have to do *something*.

It was a privilege to work so closely with “Petrushka,” and with the musicians of Inscape. While transcription is indeed an act of respect, it is also a perilous endeavor that requires a deep-seated sense of responsibility to the original composer, who has already given us so much. Too often the haphazard reduction or arrangement is passed off as a substitute for the original without acknowledging the anonymous arranger’s liability for its faults—at least in this case you know who to blame for any inadequacies in the arrangement. For me the impulse to transcribe is not to replace the original—which we will always have—but to commune with the music in a new way. It is also the hope that the smaller complement of instruments involved in my transcription may make it more practical for musicians without a large orchestra at hand to perform the work. I extend my appreciation to Inscape for initiating our collaboration and performing this transcription of *Petrushka*, to Sono Luminus for recording it and making it available to the public, and to Stravinsky for writing such a magnificent piece in the first place.

—David Plylar



Inscape

Founded in 2004 by Artistic Director Richard Scerbo, INSCAPE Chamber Orchestra is pushing the boundaries of classical music in riveting performances that reach across genres and generations, and transcend the confines of the traditional classical concert experience.

With its flexible roster and unique brand of programming, this critically acclaimed, GRAMMY®-nominated group of high energy master musicians has quickly established itself as one of the premier performing ensembles in the Washington, DC region and beyond.

Inscape has worked joyously and often with emerging American composers and has a commitment to presenting concerts featuring the music of our time. Since its inception, Inscape has commissioned and premiered over twenty new works. Inscape members regularly perform with the National, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit, Virginia, Richmond, and Delaware symphonies. Former Inscape performers are members of orchestras across the United States and abroad. Inscape's roots can be traced to the University of Maryland School of Music when Scerbo and other music students collaborated at the Clarice Smith Center as the Philharmonia Ensemble.

Inscape regularly performs at the National Gallery of Art, Strathmore Music Center, Kennedy Center and other local and national venues. Inscape records exclusively for Sono Luminus.

Richard Scerbo

Richard Scerbo maintains an active schedule as a conductor, performer, teacher, and arts administrator. He studied bassoon with Daniel Matsukawa, Linda Harwell, and Sue Heineman (B.A., University of Maryland) before pursuing conducting studies with James Ross (M.M., University of Maryland). His primary work as an arts administrator has been with the National Orchestral Institute where he has worked in various roles since 2002. In 2006 he was appointed Managing Director of the program, and in 2012 he was appointed Associate Artistic Director and General Manger. In this capacity, he is honored to work annually with internationally renowned conductors and orchestral musicians, as well as some of the most talented music students in the nation. He serves concurrently as the Assistant Director for Artistic Planning and Operations for the University of Maryland School of Music.

As a conductor, he co-founded the Philharmonia Ensemble with violinist Dale Barltrop, and in 2004 founded the Inscape Chamber Orchestra, which The Washington Post has praised for its "guts and musical sensitivity." Inscape's dedication to performing new works has led to numerous commissions from emerging American composers. Many of these works, conducted by Mr. Scerbo, were released on his GRAMMY®-nominated debut album, *Sprung Rhythm* (DSL-92170) on the Sono Luminus label. His follow up album, *American Aggregate* (DSL-92179), was released in August 2014. In 2003, he made his operatic debut conducting Dominick Argento's "A Water Bird Talk" with the Philharmonia Ensemble and Handel's "Xerxes" with the Maryland Opera Studio. That same year, Mr. Scerbo helped launch the Londontowne Symphony Orchestra (Maryland) when he was invited to conduct their inaugural concert, and returned the following year to conduct their season opening concert. He has been guided in his studies by Leonard Slatkin, Heinz Fricke, Gustav Meier, and Johannes Schlaefli at the Musikhochschule Zurich.

Inscape Chamber Orchestra

Petrushka
SLD-97204

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sonoluminusstudios.com

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Piano: Steinway Model D #590904 (New York)

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