

## Translation of a Rite of Spring critique by M.Casalonga

The unique conception of the Rite of Spring would lead to great astonishment among the first crowds that attended this curious dance performance, more so than upon hearing the score of the musician which was literally appropriate or rather of a rigorous rhythmic adaptation. Let us attempt to fathom the work that had been germinating for several years already in the active imagination of the young Slav, familiar with all the choreographies of a school where he had pursued all the means available.

Oh what distance has been covered since the dancing graces of *Les Sylphides* and the delicious *Carnaval*, or the powerful barbaric dances of Igor and the oriental refinements of *Scheherazade*.

After *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (the Afternoon of a Faun), Nijinsky led us close to nature, with the almost bestial aspect of a faun pursuing nymphs. An archaic and mythological blend, drawing inspiration from Ancient Greece. Yet, he dreamt of going further into nature; he was tempted by the Primary Period: and, so, the Rite of Spring was born. Before, or at the same time, we would have seen *Jeux* (Games), where the choreography, stylized into decomposed movements and living frescoes, ensues from a same principle.

But here, the style adorns an incredibly fanciful form: childish games, sulking, coquetties, simpering airs and graces; simple puerile amusements rather than sportive ones, in a garden. In the Rite, it is really the awakening of the first rites and the first rhythms instinctively discovered by people of the first periods.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

In the first scene, against a basic decor, yet powerfully implemented, that evokes nature from a primary age, the characters with a few primitive costumes that announce the period, a gaily-coloured aspect is presented through the rustic, white shirts of the boys with their curly manes of hair that blend in with the young women's scarlet red tunics. The groups sketch out simplistic movements first of all, feet joined together, chanting the musical rhythm, on the spot, stamping the generous Earth. The masses perform diversely-regulated movements in groups. A one hundred year-old arrives on the scene and advances, supported by young men; he lies down facing the Earth, arms forming a cross, and blesses it. Suddenly, a generalized tremor shakes the motionless bodies of the masses. The elements unleash their wrath, the orchestral polyphony explodes, and the women run one by one forming a large circle, like the wind, whilst, continuing to keep up with the uncontrollable rhythm, the men surround the old man. It is a unified trepidation where the clamour of the orchestra accompanies this general fury with primitive rhythms, through the storm.

The second scene evokes the spring. Young girls in short, white tunics, move around the virgin, chosen as the sacrificial offering. Strange old men, priests or ancestral sorcerers, enter, one by one, adorned with animal skins, in the form of black hoods; they walk heavily depicting a type of circular procession and collapse successively, around the motionless young girl, frozen solid since the departure of her companions. Suddenly, the petrified dancer comes back to life, her body vibrates on the spot, slowly but surely her gestures intensify, her dance opens up, she jumps, the movements of her head and bust increase. The rhythm of the orchestra maddens, the dancer follows suit with a frenzy of movements on the spot and spaced-out jumps; finally she becomes exhausted, is lifted up by the priests, for the sacrifice and the apotheosis.





Stravinsky's music is totally dedicated to rhythm, and its instrumental power makes the beauty burst forth in spite of audacious juxtapositions of sounds. In the gestures invoking the light and in the incantations to Earth, Nijinsky strived to create, through frescoes and movements, a dance evoking primordial worship. His groups are sometimes motionless, sometimes twitching, vibrating from the bust, affect developments, continually chanting persistently the rhythm of life, like a leitmotiv obsessor of the movement. Our distinguished, academic collaborator Calvocoressi will proclaim to you the merits of Stravinsky's score, inspired by the poem of the painter-decorator Roerich. We can feel, moreover, that there is a close partnership between the musician, the decorator and the author of the dances, all three are artists of the same race.

There is in this Rite of Spring a patient, considerable amount of work that deserves to endure. The development of the masks, the precision of the rhythms, the intentional art that accompanied this, is of high value. This courage, this effort that are established must be applauded. Freedom of opinion is customary, nowadays. We could say about this artistic creation: is its plastic as exquisite as that of former ballet?

Is this kind of rapprochement with nature an advancement or an error as regards dance?

And can we consider as progress movements that are admirably regulated, but with ungainly insistence, yet disconcerting through their primitive aspect? Yes, if a sincere art prompted this reconstruction of another age. Art has its evolutions. It also has its reactions. Yet we can accept everything when the effort comes from a genuine artist. Nijinsky cannot disappoint us, we should follow the path that he has set foot on, with the quiet confidence that he has shown himself. Only a great artist is capable of "daring", and should not stop at contingencies on the path to be treaded. Let's follow him, and thank him for the powerful, new interest he has now given to the incredibly rich elements of contemporary ballet.

