Petrushka or Petrushka (French: Pétrouchka; Russian: Петрушка) is a ballet with music by Russian composer Igor Stravinsky.

Petrushka is a story of a Russian traditional puppet, Petrushka, who is made of straw and with a bag of sawdust as his body, but who comes to life and develops emotions.

According to Andrew Wachtel, Petrushka is a work that fuses music, ballet, choreography and history in perfect balance. It resembles Richard Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk (total artwork), but with a Russian approach.[1]

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Composition

Stravinsky composed the music during the winter of 1910–11 for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. It was premiered in Paris at the Théâtre du Châtelet on June 13, 1911 under conductor Pierre Monteux, with choreography by Mikhail Fokine and sets by Alexandre Benois. The title role was danced by Vaslav Nijinsky.[2]

While the production was generally a success, some members of the audience were taken aback by music that was brittle, caustic, and at times even grotesque. One critic approached Diaghilev after a dress rehearsal and said, "And it was to hear this that you invited us?" Diaghilev succinctly replied, "Exactly".[citation needed] When Diaghilev and his company traveled to Vienna in 1913, the Vienna Philharmonic initially refused to play the score, deriding Petrushka as schmutzige Musik ("dirty music").[citation needed]

The work is characterized by the so-called Petrushka chord (consisting of C major and F♯ major triads played together), a bitonality device heralding the appearance of the main character.

Instrumentation

1911 original version

The original 1911 version of Petrushka is scored for 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (4th doubling English horn), 3 clarinets in B flat, bass clarinet in B flat (doubling clarinet 4), 3 bassoons, contra-bassoon (doubling bassoon 4), 4 horns in E, 3 trumpets in B flat (after doubling cornets 2), 2 trombones, tuba, 2 timpani, triangle, castanets, cymbals, bass drum, glockenspiel, harp, piano, and 2 harps.
The fourth and final scene returns to the carnival. Some time has passed; it is now early evening. The puppet flees for his life, with the Moor chasing him, and escapes from the room. The clown-attacks the Moor but soon realizes he is too small and weak. The Moor beats Petrushka. Petrushka finally breaks free from his cell, and he interrupts the seduction of the Ballerina. Petrushka dances with the Moor.

In the third scene the audience learns that the Moor leads a much more comfortable "life" than Petrushka. The Moor's room is spacious and lavishly decorated and is painted in bright reds, greens and blues. Rabbits, palm trees and exotic flowers decorate the walls and floor. The Moor reclines on a divan and plays with a coconut, attempting to cut it with his scimitar. When he fails he believes that the coconut must be a god and proceeds to pray to it.

The Charlatan casts a magic spell with his flute. The puppets come to life, leap from their little stage and perform a vigorous Russian Dance among the astounded carnival-goers.

The ballet opens on St. Petersburg's Admiralty Square. In progress is the Shrovetide fair known as Maslenitsa, a Russian carnival before Lent, analogous to Mardi Gras. The people rejoice before the privations of the long fast.

Stravinsky's orchestration and rapidly changing rhythms depict the hustle and bustle of the fair. An organ grinder and two dancing girls entertain the crowd to the popular French song Une Jambe de Bois. Drummers announce the appearance of the Charlatan, who charms the captivated audience. Suddenly, the curtain rises on a tiny theater, as the Charlatan introduces the inert, lifeless puppet figures of Petrushka, a Ballerina and a Moor.

The Charlatan casts a magic spell with his flute. The puppets come to life, leap from their little stage and perform a vigorous Russian Dance among the astounded carnival-goers.

The second scene, after the performance, is set in Petrushka's Cell 'inside' the little theatre. The walls are painted in dark colors and decorated with stars, a half-moon and jagged icebergs or snow-capped mountains. With a resounding crash, the Charlatan kicks Petrushka into this barren cell. We see that Petrushka leads a dismal "life" behind the show curtains. Although Petrushka is a puppet he feels human emotions which include bitterness toward the Charlatan for his imprisonment as well as love for the beautiful Ballerina. All of this is sensitively described by Stravinsky's Expressionist piano breaks. A frowning portrait of his jailer hangs above him as if to remind Petrushka that he is a mere puppet. The infuriated clown-puppet shakes his fists at the Charlatan's stern glare and tries to escape from his cell but fails.

The Charlatan places the Ballerina in the Moor's room. The Ballerina is attracted to the Moor's handsome appearance. She plays a saucy tune on a toy trumpet (represented by a cornet in the original 1911 orchestration) and dances with the Moor.

Petrushka finally breaks free from his cell, and he interrupts the seduction of the Ballerina. Petrushka attacks the Moor but soon realizes he is too small and weak. The Moor beats Petrushka. The clown-puppet flees for his life, with the Moor chasing him, and escapes from the room.

The fourth and final scene returns to the carnival. Some time has passed; it is now early evening. The

1947 revised version

Stravinsky's 1947 revised version is scored for the following smaller orchestra: 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets in B flat (3rd doubling bass clarinet in B flat), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns in F, 3 trumpets in B flat and C, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, tam-tam, xylophone, piano, celesta, 2 harps and strings.

Compared to the 1911 version, the 1947 version requires: one fewer flute; two fewer oboes, but a dedicated English horn player instead of one doubled by the fourth oboe; one fewer bassoon, but a dedicated contrabassoon; neither of two cornets, but an additional trumpet; one fewer snare drum and one fewer tambourine by removing the offstage instruments; no glockenspiel; and one fewer harp.

Story

The libretto was written by Alexandre Benois and Igor Stravinsky. According to Leonard Bernstein on his Young People's Concerts, one of the hallmarks of this ballet and Stravinsky's The Firebird is that there are no divertissements in them; every single dance is firmly integrated into the plotline.

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The Charlatan then enters the room. Petrushka ineptly attempts to express his love for her but she rejects his pathetic, self-conscious advances and hastily departs. Petrushka collapses in a melancholic reverie.

In the third scene the audience learns that the Moor leads a much more comfortable "life" than Petrushka. The Moor's room is spacious and lavishly decorated and is painted in bright reds, greens and blues. Rabbits, palm trees and exotic flowers decorate the walls and floor. The Moor reclines on a divan and plays with a coconut, attempting to cut it with his scimitar. When he fails he believes that the coconut must be a god and proceeds to pray to it.

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The fourth and final scene returns to the carnival. Some time has passed; it is now early evening. The
orchestra introduces a chain of colourful dances as a series of apparently unrelated characters come and go about the stage as snow begins to fall. The first and most prominent is the Wet-Nurses' Dance, performed to the tune of the folk song "Down the Petersky Road". Then comes a peasant with his dancing bear, followed in turn by a group of a gypsies, coachmen and grooms and masqueraders.

As the merrymaking reaches its peak, a cry is heard from the puppet-theater. Petrushka suddenly runs across the scene, followed by the Moor in hot pursuit brandishing his sword. The crowd is horrified when the Moor catches up with Petrushka and slays him with a single stroke of his blade. The police question the Charlatan. The Charlatan seeks to restore calm by holding the "corpse" above his head and shaking it to remind everyone that Petrushka is but a puppet.

As night falls and the crowd disperses, the Charlatan leaves, carrying Petrushka's limp body. All of a sudden, Petrushka's ghost appears on the roof of the little theatre, his cry now in the form of angry defiance. Petrushka's spirit thumbs its nose at his tormentor from beyond the wood and straw of his carcass.

Now completely alone, the Charlatan is terrified to see the leering ghost of Petrushka. He runs away whilst allowing himself a single frightened glance over his shoulder. The scene is hushed, leaving the audience to wonder who is "real" and who is not.

Sections

The work is divided into four parts (tableaux) with the following scenes:

Part I: The Shrovetide Fair
- Introduction (at the Shrovetide Fair)
- The Charlatan's Booth
- Russian Dance

Part II: Petrushka's Cell
- Petrushka's Cell

Part III: The Moor's Room
- The Moor's Room
- Dance of the Ballerina
- Waltz - The Ballerina & the Moor

Part IV: The Shrovetide Fair (Evening)
- Dance of the Wet Nurses
- Peasant With Bear
- The Jovial Merchant with Two Gypsy Girls
- Dance of the Coachmen and Grooms
- The Masqueraders
- The Fight - The Moor and Petrushka
- Death of Petrushka
- Apparition of Petrushka's Double.

Other versions

In 1921, Stravinsky created a piano arrangement for Arthur Rubinstein entitled Trois mouvements de Petrouchka, which the composer admittedly could not play himself for lack of adequate left hand technique.

In 1947, Stravinsky penned a revised version of Petrushka for a smaller orchestra, in part because the original version was not covered by copyright and Stravinsky wanted to profit from the work's popularity. The drumrolls linking each scene, optional in the 1911 original, are compulsory in the 1947 edition. The ballerina's tune is assigned to a trumpet in the 1947 version instead of a cornet as in the original. The 1947 version provides an optional fff (fortississimo) near the piano conclusion of the original. Stravinsky also removed some of the difficult metric modulations in the original version of the first tableau from the 1947 revision.

He also created a suite for concert performance, an almost complete version of the ballet but cutting the last three sections: The Fight - The Moor and Petrushka, Death of Petrushka, and Apparition of Petrushka.

In 1956, an animated version of the ballet appeared as part of NBC's Sol Hurok Music Hour. It was personally conducted by Stravinsky himself and was the first such collaboration. Directed by animator John David Wilson with Fine Arts Films, it has been noted as the first animated special ever to air on television.
In 1988, Maddalena Fagandini directed a version of *Petrushka* along with *The Sleeping Beauty* (Stravinsky), *The Nutcracker* and *The Mouse King* (Tchaikovsky) and *Coppélia* (Delibes) in the BBC puppet film, *Musical Tales* which was released in VHS. *Basil Twist* debuted his puppetry version of *Petrushka* at Lincoln Center in 2001; it was performed as well at New York City Center's 2009 Fall for Dance Festival.

*Expressions Dance Company* performed a contemporary adaptation of *Petrushka* at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts in 2009. The performance was entitled *Score!* and drew heavily on the concept of Reality Television.

The *Spirit of Atlanta Drum and Bugle Corps* used the work as it's 1988 competitive program...a radical change from its previous Southern music theme.

**Notable recordings**

- Arturo Toscanini conducting the [NBC Symphony Orchestra](https://www.nbc.com), live performance from 1940, [RCA](https://www.rca.com) (1911 concert suite) (mono)
- Ferenc Fricsay conducting the [RIAS Symphony Orchestra](https://www.rias.de), live performance from 1953, Deutsche Grammophon, (1947 concert suite) (mono)
- Ernest Ansermet conducting the [Orchestre de la Suisse Romande](https://www.wilspac.ch), studio recording from 1957, Decca, (1911 version)
- Pierre Monteux conducting the [Boston Symphony Orchestra](https://www.bso.org), studio recording from 1959, RCA (1911 version)
- Igor Stravinsky conducting the [Columbia Symphony Orchestra](https://www.columbia.edu), studio recording from 1961, Sony (1911 version)
- Karel Ančerl conducting the [Czech Philharmonic Orchestra](https://www.czechtv.cz), studio recording from 1962, Supraphon (1947 version)
- Antal Doráti conducting the [Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra](https://www.minneapolismusic.org), studio recording from 1962, Mercury (1947 version)
- Leonard Bernstein conducting the [New York Philharmonic](https://www.nyphil.org), studio recording from 1969, Sony Classical (1947 version)
- Pierre Boulez conducting the [New York Philharmonic](https://www.nyphil.org), studio recording from 1971, Sony (1911 version)
- Kirill Kondrashin conducting the [Concertgebouw Orchestra](https://www.cmm.be), live performance from 1973, Philips (1947 version)
- Bernard Haitink conducting the [London Philharmonic Orchestra](https://www.lpo.co.uk), studio recording from 1973, Philips (1911 version)
- Sir Colin Davis conducting the [Concertgebouw Orchestra](https://www.cmm.be), studio recording from 1977, Philips (1947 version)
- Claudio Abbado conducting the [Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra](https://www.concertgebouw.nl), studio recording from 1980, Deutsche Grammophon
- Riccardo Chailly conducting the [Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra](https://www.concertgebouw.nl), studio recording from 1995, London (1947 version)

**Notes**


**External links**

- [Book review](https://www.tbr.com) on Wachtel's book
- [Book review](https://www.tbr.com) on Wachtel's book (subscription required)
- [Book review](https://www.tbr.com) on Wachtel's book (subscription required)
- Public Domain Scores of Petrushka were available at the [International Music Score Library Project](https://www.imslp.org)
- [Recordings of Stravinsky's Three Movements of Petrushka -piano version-](https://www.youtube.com) by Alberto Cobo

**Bibliography**

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