

Igor Stravinsky: Firebird - Jeu de Cartes (1989)

Written by bluesever

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1 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Introduction (Molto moderato)* 2 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Scene 1: Katchei's enchanted Garden* 3 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): The Firebird appears, pursued by Prince Ivan (Allegro assai)* 4 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Dance of the Firebird* 5 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): The Firebird is captured by Prince Ivan* 6 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): The Firebird's Pleading (Adagio)* 7 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Appearance of the thirteen enchanted Princesses* 8 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Scene II: The Princesses play with the Golden Apples (Scherzo: Allegretto)* 9 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Prince Ivan suddenly appears (Larghetto)* 10 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Round Dance of the Princesses (Moderato)* 11 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Daybreak (Piu mosso)* 12 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Prince Ivan enters Kastchei's Palace. Fairy Carillon. Kastchei's monsters appear and capture Prince Ivan* 13 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Arrival of Kastchei the Immortal (Sostenuto)* 14 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Dialogue between Kastchei and Prince Ivan (Poco meno mosso)* 15 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): The Princesses intercede (Andantino dolente)* 16 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): The Firebird appears* 17 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): The Dance of Kastchei's court, bewitched by the Firebird (Alleg* 18 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Infernal Dance of Kastchei's Subjects (Allegro feroce)* 19 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Berceuse* 20 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Kastchei awakens* 21 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Death of Kastchei* 22 *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird): Scene III: The Palace and creatures of Kastchei disappear. The petrified knights come to life. General rejoicing* 23 *Jeu de cartes: First Deal* 24 *Jeu de cartes: Second Deal* Philharmonia Orchestra Esa-Pekka Salonen - conductor

No one would guess from his baby face that Esa-Pekka Salonen is a hard-edged, tough-guy modernist who got his start conducting works by Magnus Lindberg, the enfant terrible of Finnish music. But it is true and his recording career is proof. Nowhere in his discography is there a note of Beethoven or Brahms. Even in so conservative a company as Sony, Salonen has become the resident modernist with discs dedicated to Bartók, Debussy, and Mahler (that's Sony's modernism). He has even amassed an amazing series of Stravinsky recordings since his Sony debut in 1988.

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Salonen started with Stravinsky's first masterpiece, The Firebird. Rather than use Stravinsky's modest revision of the score, Salonen went back to the original 1910 version with its gargantuan orchestra of quadruple woodwinds, huge brass section plus a seven-piece brass band on-stage, an enormous percussion section that included bells, xylophone, celesta, and piano, plus three harps and 64 strings. Not that all this late-Romantic armament blunts the blade of Salonen's modernism. It only gives him more ammunition to aim at the work's Russian fairy tale heart.

Stravinsky later commented on The Firebird that "belongs to the style of its time." This is true as far as it goes. The use of diatonic folk-like melodies for humans and chromaticism for the supernatural does come out of Rimsky-Korsakov's late operas. But those are merely the work's point of origin. Under the right hands -- and Salonen's are the right hands -- numbers like "Fairy Carillon" and especially "Infernal Dance" become threats to musical complacency. Even such pretty little sound toys as the "Round Dances" and the "Lullaby" aren't exercises in late-Russian emotionality; in their own quiet way, they subvert the conventions of Romanticism through Stravinsky's nascent aesthetic of ironic stylization to distance the creator and, thus, the audience, from the creation. --- James Leonard, Rovi

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