

Two 'Rites' to Mark Stravinsky Centenary

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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PARIS — Russian conductor Valery Gergiev wants to evoke danger, but not too much, on Wednesday when he leads back-to-back ballets of Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" at the Paris theater where it caused one of music's biggest scandals 100 years ago.

"Danger, well, of course, danger," he said at the dress rehearsal Tuesday night when asked what he wants people to feel from his conducting of Stravinsky's groundbreaking work, with its fast-changing rhythms and blaring dissonance.

"I think this piece cannot be played as an entertainment or funny rhythmic exercise. It has to have theatrical, dramatic pacing, a huge contrast ... and above all this sense of danger, because it is very ritualistic."

Gergiev will conduct his St. Petersburg-based Mariinsky Orchestra and Ballet for a reconstruction of the 1913 original choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky and a new version by Berlin-based choreographer Sasha Waltz to mark one of the most notorious moments in music history.

On May 29, 1913, the premiere of Stravinsky's pulsating paean to pagan Russia, ending with a virgin dancing to her death, created an uproar at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees, near the Eiffel Tower, after the curtain was raised to reveal dancers in peasant costume jumping up and down to demonic rhythms.

Chairs were smashed, people booed, some barked like dogs and the police were called while the composer rushed backstage where he found Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, who had commissioned the work, flicking the house lights in a vain attempt to restore order.

A century on, after the destruction wrought by two world wars and the turmoil of communist rule, Gergiev said the music no longer has the power to create the tumult of the premiere.

Rather, he said Russia has embraced the masterwork of its emigre native son the way Germans have a special regard for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which was played in 1989 to mark the fall of the Berlin Wall.

"I think people look at it more or less with the same pride as Germans look at Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," he said.

Choreographers, too, have taken the brutalist piece that re-enacts a pagan fertility rite very much to heart.

For choreographer Millicent Hodson, who along with her husband Kenneth Archer recreated the Nijinsky ballet, replete with peasant-style costumes, decors and the jerky, jumpy dance steps of the original, the Rite has lost none of its relevance.

"I think this idea of sacrificing a young person in order to save the earth ... this has a great resonance for young people now," Hodson, who works from London, said.

"They are like 'ecowarriors,' somehow, and they understand this. This was just before World War I and it was the sacrifice of a generation. This is not such a primitive idea, it's not more primitive than war." Waltz said she was thrilled that her version, which has been described as "coolly ferocious," had been chosen to mark the centenary at the place where it all happened 100 years ago.

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