

MUSIC

Spring Rite

(See front cover)

While Yaqui Indians performed their vernal rites in desert Arizona, and Christians the world over celebrated Easter Sunday (with fire from heaven at Jerusalem), Spring came to the people who follow music in Philadelphia and Manhattan and set them to discussing a musical event-of-the-year: the stage presentation, first in Philadelphia, then in Manhattan, of the most controversial composition of the age, Igor Stravinsky's savage *Sacre du Printemps* ("Rite of Spring"). Executors of the event were the League of Composers, prime promoters of modern music, and Conductor Leopold Anton Stanislaw Boleslaw Stokowski who, with his Philadelphia Orchestra, is an institution unto himself. As companion piece or curtain-raiser was given Composer Arnold Schönberg's *Die Glückliche Hand* ("Hand of Fate").

Talking about *Sacre du Printemps* and what it means, what one is supposed to feel about it, was vastly facilitated by these performances. It was the first time the music had been visually translated in the U. S. by choreography. Music lovers whose inner selves had before this leapt up in convulsions of inarticulate joy or horror at Stravinsky's colossal strains, were supplied with a concrete ideology for their raptures or protests. No patience for the average soul's necessity to articulate has Composer Stravinsky. A poet of barbarism, he describes his outpourings as abstract sound; scorns, protests all attempts to translate him, to fit him into patterns of human thought. In deference to this idea the ballet directed by Leonide Massine, the setting and costumes by Nicholas Roerich, all aimed at abstraction of movement and form. But there was a libretto for non-abstract minds to follow. Many a humble spectator welcomed this crutch to keep up with "The Hand of Fate" as well as with "Rite of Spring."

Sacre. The curtain went up on some 40 Russian peasants, all adolescent youths and girls, dancing in a turbid wheel-like formation to woodwind music which was restive, foreboding. A haggish old woman interrupts, one who knows the secrets of Nature, of Spring. The adolescents whom she comes to enlighten are still of undetermined sex. They mix happily, spontaneously, but Spring is the season for fertility, for re-creation. The groups separate, quarrel, play self-consciously for the first time. A sage appears, the eldest of the clan. Face down he asks the blessing of the earth and new energy comes forth, seizes the adolescents, sets them dancing to a surging crescendo of relentless tom-tom rhythms.

This first tableau is called by Stravinsky "The Adoration of the Earth." The second tableau is "The Sacrifice," for according to primitive custom a virgin must be sacrificed before new birth is possible. A pagan prelude introduces it and then the young girls encircle, glorify the chosen one. Ancestors are invoked who cluster around her as she starts the propitiatory dance. Fearfully, madly she moves to crazy cross-grained rhythms,

falls dead finally across a human pyre built hastily that her body may not touch the sacred soil.

Magnificently gaunt last week was Stokowski's translation of Stravinsky's primitive, pornographic music—music which in its finale is tremendous enough truly to suggest an upheaval of the brutal earth. Lean, sallow Martha Graham did the sacrificial dance in accordance with the spirit of the whole production—jerking, stamping, lunging in the manner which seems to some beholders insane, to others sublime. Many seeing and hearing understood for the first time why the Paris production, put on by the late great Sergei Pavlovitch Diaghilev in 1913, was greeted by a riot, the audience shouting so that the dancers, unable to hear the music, continued only by watching the master's beat in the wings. Some even reacted like the Londoner who said it was a "threat against the foundations of our tonal institutions . . . [standing for] all the unnamable horrors of revolution, murder and rapine, and should have been dedicated to Dr. Crippen, the dentist who murdered seven wives in their baths."*



MARTHA GRAHAM

. . . jerking, stamping, lunging.