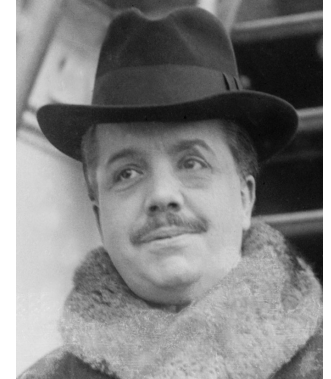


Program Notes for Ballet Fans

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THE FIREBIRD

The Firebird is a ballet based on Slavic folklore that premiered with great success in Paris in 1910. It was one of the first works created by the **Ballets Russes** (1909 - 1929), the most influential ballet company of the 20th century. The company was founded in St. Petersburg by its director, Serge Diaghilev, but never performed in Russia and never had a home theatre. Diaghilev was a master at discovering young talent - choreographers, composers, painters, writers, costume designers - and bringing them together with free rein to create. To name just a few: painters Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, fashion designer Coco Chanel, writer Jean Cocteau, composers Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, and dancers Ninette de Valois (founder of the Royal Ballet) and George Balanchine (founder of the American Ballet Theatre).



Serge Diaghilev, director
of the Ballets Russes

The Firebird was born in just this fashion. It was a close collaboration between choreographer Michel Fokine, artists Alexandre Benois, Aleksandr Golovin, and Léon Bakst, and the then-unknown young composer **Igor Stravinsky**. The *libretto* (the story of an opera or ballet, from the Italian word for “little book”) combined two characters from Slavic folk tales: the Firebird, a creature of powerful magic, and Koschei the Immortal, a villain who has hidden his soul in an egg to cheat death. Parisian audiences were enraptured by Stravinsky’s lush score, the rich sets and costuming of Golovin and Bakst, the exotic characters, and the dancing of prima ballerina Tamara Karsavina.

Tamara Karsavina as the
Firebird, 1910

OUR VERSION: As with all great ballets, The Firebird has been rechoreographed many times. For our version, we have made three small story changes to fit our

