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HOW A NOISY PREMIERE BECAME A RIOT

TROUBLE AT THE PREMIERE

On the evening of May 29, 1913, a Paris theatre that had opened only that spring filled up for the first performance of The Rite of Spring. Trouble started before anything happened on stage. A BASSOON, the deep double-reed voice at the bottom of the WOODWIND section, began alone, pushed up into a thin, strained register nobody expected from it, and somewhere in the hall people laughed. By the time the dancers appeared the laughing had turned to whistling and shouted OBJECTIONS, and Igor STRAVINSKY, who had written the music, left his seat.

SPELL Spell: WOODWIND

WOODWIND

SPELL Spell: OBJECTIONS

OBJECTIONS

KNOWN What is the last name of the composer who wrote the music for The Rite of Spring and left his seat during the premiere?

STRAVINSKY

KNOWN What is the deep double-reed instrument that opened the piece alone, pushed high into a thin, strained register?

BASSOON

OPEN The laughing began before a single dancer appeared. What do you think those first listeners were reacting to?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

THE SOUND AND THE STEPS

What the audience heard was deliberate. Stravinsky's score staged a pagan spring ritual in prehistoric Russia, built on **OSTINATO**, a short figure hammered over and over, under chords stacked from two keys at once, a **DISSONANCE** harsh enough to sound like an error rather than a choice. Its **METER**, the grouping of beats into bars, changed almost bar to bar, so the pulse never settled. Vaslav Nijinsky's **CHOREOGRAPHY** answered with turned-in feet and stamping instead of line and lift, Nicholas Roerich designed the costumes, Serge Diaghilev's company produced the evening, and Pierre Monteux conducted.

SPELL Spell: **OSTINATO**

OSTINATO

SPELL Spell: **CHOREOGRAPHY**

CHOREOGRAPHY

KNOWN Chords stacked from two keys at once clash harshly enough to sound like a mistake rather than a choice. What is that harsh clash called?

DISSONANCE

KNOWN What is the term for the grouping of beats into bars?

METER

OPEN The dancers stamped with turned-in feet instead of leaping. What is something ugly on purpose that you have come to like?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

MATH Suppose a passage in four-beat bars is played at 120 beats per minute. How many complete bars pass in one minute?

30

SECONDHAND ACCOUNTS

Almost everything vivid about the night reaches us secondhand. Nijinsky is remembered standing on a chair in the **WINGS**, the offstage space at the side of a stage where performers wait unseen, shouting counts to dancers who could not hear the pit. Stravinsky put that scene in his **AUTOBIOGRAPHY**, published more than twenty years after the performance. The claim that the orchestra was inaudible on stage traces to one dancer's **RECOLLECTION**, set down later still. Each retelling was written farther from the evening it described.

SPELL Spell: AUTOBIOGRAPHY**AUTOBIOGRAPHY****SPELL Spell: RECOLLECTION****RECOLLECTION****KNOWN What is the offstage space at the side of a stage, where performers wait unseen, called?****WINGS****OPEN The most vivid details of that night were written down decades later by people who were there. Which detail of your own best story do you suspect has grown in the telling?****Open response - use practitioner judgment****WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS**

The surviving evidence is noisier than the legend is exact. The PREMIERE, a work's first public performance, was covered within days by critics who describe WHISTLING, laughter, and arguing between defenders and OBJECTORS, yet the curtain came down on a finished ballet that was danced again in Paris and in London. The word riot appears to attach to the night only in writing published about eleven years afterwards. Historians who set REVIEWS, LETTERS, MEMOIRS, and INTERVIEWS against one another find a real disturbance rather than a hall in chaos.

SPELL Spell: WHISTLING**WHISTLING****SPELL Spell: OBJECTORS****OBJECTORS****KNOWN A work's first public performance is called what?****PREMIERE****SEMI_OPEN Which two kinds of evidence do historians set against one another to test what happened that night?****NEEDS 2 OF REVIEWS / LETTERS / MEMOIRS / INTERVIEWS**

OPEN The critics in the room describe whistling and arguing, and the ballet finished anyway. What would you have written the next morning?

Open response - use practitioner judgment

WHERE THE STORY CAME FROM

You do this with your own stories. The concert where the lights failed, the game that turned on one call - each retelling sharpens, and the sharp version is the one you keep. **PROVENANCE**, the question of where a claim came from and who first wrote it down, is worth asking of any famous scene. Before you repeat the picture of a hall howling while **DANCERS** stamped, ask whether the detail comes from someone sitting in that Paris theatre in 1913 or from a book written decades later. **HEARSAY**, a claim you hold only through other people's retelling, is not worthless, but it is dated.

SPELL Spell: **HEARSAY**

HEARSAY

SPELL Spell: **DANCERS**

DANCERS

KNOWN What is the term for the question of where a claim came from and who first wrote it down?

PROVENANCE

OPEN Someone tells you they sat in that theatre in 1913. What would make you believe them?

Open response - use practitioner judgment