

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Anne Trulove's aria from *The Rake's Progress*

Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum, Russia, on June 17, 1882, and died in New York City on April 6, 1971. *The Rake's Progress* was composed between 1947 and 1951, and premiered at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on September 11, 1951, with Stravinsky conducting. The opera—and this particular aria—is scored for a Classical-sized orchestra, including flutes, oboes (second doubling English horn), clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets in pairs, and strings.

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS is an oddity in Stravinsky's output—an English-language opera with music by a Russian émigré (Stravinsky) and a libretto co-written by a British émigré (W. H. Auden) and an American poet (Chester Kallman). To make matters stranger, the opera ultimately premiered in Venice, Italy. Early audiences and critics viewed *The Rake's Progress* with bemusement, if not outright derision. Upon its first American performance in 1953, Olin Downes of the *New York Times* called it, “artificial, unreal and actually unexpressive.” Nevertheless, the work has ultimately come to be recognized as one of Stravinsky's most celebrated achievements, the highpoint of

his neo-Classical style before his final career move towards serialism.

Taking inspiration from a series of satirical etchings by the eighteenth-century English artist William Hogarth, the plot follows one Tom Rakewell, the romantic but dimwitted suitor to the virtuous Anne Trulove. After Tom wishes for money, a mysterious stranger named Nick Shadow—later revealed to be the Devil—arrives to announce that an unknown uncle has died, leaving Tom a generous inheritance. Shadow entices the young man to accompany him to London and Tom promises to return for Anne once the paperwork is settled.

This four-part aria appears at the end of Act I. Months have passed and Tom has failed

to send word from London, instead reveling in the pleasures and vices of city life. At her father's house in the countryside, Anne reflects on Tom's absence. Opening with a wandering trio between oboe, English horn, and bassoon, Anne voices her initial fears that Tom is in trouble (“No word from Tom”). She then gently implores the moon to guide her as she sets off to find him (“Quietly, night”) while a bassoon countermelody flutters in the background. A brief moment of doubt ensues—expressed in a brief recitative (“My father! Can I desert him . . . ?”)—but Anne ultimately resolves to rescue her love. After one last prayer (sung over a tender horn duet), the scene launches into a virtuosic cabaletta (“I go, I go to him”). Anne's confidence here is mirrored in the bright, driving orchestration, which is bolstered by a first appearance of the trumpets. The aria concludes with a brilliant high C as Anne rushes off to London, where, unbeknownst to her, Tom's fate will be sealed. —© KM



A Rake's Progress, Plate I, 1735 (etching and engraving) by William Hogarth. This first of eight engravings depicts the first “stage” of the rake's progress. Tom is about to set off for London after inheriting a fortune upon a death in the family. Before doing so, he breaks off the marriage to his wife-to-be, Sarah Young—changed to “Anne Trulove” in Stravinsky's opera—as a tailor measures him for new finery. *Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Sarah Lazarus, 1891.*