The Players

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Alissa Fleming - violin
Kanade Oi - clarinet
Dr. Daryn Obrecht - cornet
Dr. Janis McKay - bassoon
James Nelson - trombone
Hayden Bryant - bass
Stephen Ferradino - percussion

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Special Thanks to:
Taras Krysa, Director of Orchestras
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Mika, Katienza, Jan and Alyson Brunson

L'Histoire du soldat
Saturday
20 October 2007
4:00pm

Doc Rando Recital Hall
Admission Free

Richard Brunson, Conductor
With these words begins the tale of the soldier who sells his violin (which represents his soul) to the Devil (represented by the percussion) for wealth, knowledge, power and marriage.

L'Histoire du Soldat was composed by Stravinsky in collaboration with the Swiss novelist C. F. Ramuz in 1917-18 “while down and out” in Switzerland. The Great War in Europe and the Revolution in Russia cut Stravinsky off from his family estates and publishers royalties. Serge Diaghilev’s Ballet Russe, for which Stravinsky had composed The Firebird, Petrouchka and The Rite of Spring, was similarly stranded in Lisbon without future engagements. Stravinsky, Ramuz and conductor Ernest Ansermet decided to form a “pocket theater” company which would produce pieces requiring just a few players and be easily portable, enabling them to travel a circuit of Swiss villages. Thus was born L'Histoire du Soldat “to be read, played and danced.” Though scored for only 3 actors, a female dancer and 7 instruments, even this low-budget operation was beyond Stravinsky’s means to produce. Financier and amateur clarinetist Werner Reinhardt generously bankrolled the production; “he paid for everybody and everything” recounted the composer. In appreciation for Reinhardt’s generosity, Stravinsky gave him the manuscript of L'Histoire du Soldat as well as composing for him the Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, and the L’Histoire du Soldat Concert Suite in the trio arrangement.

The first performance of L’Histoire du Soldat was a success. Opening night was also closing night. Due to the outbreak of the Spanish Influenza epidemic (which would kill almost 20 million people in Europe and 500 thousand in America) every public hall was closed by law. The illness struck even closer to home: before the official closing, two of the musicians fell sick and thus the second performance could not take place as planned. The work was not performed again until 1924.

L’Histoire du Soldat is a variant of the Faust Legend. Stravinsky would turn to this theme again some 30 years later in his opera The Rake’s Progress; joining Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, Gounod, Mahler, Rachmaninoff, Busoni, and others who were also inspired by the Faust legend. The Germanic tradition through Goethe has Faust redeemed at the end. In keeping with the French tradition, Stravinsky and Ramuz send him to Hell.

The influence of Jazz is discernable in L’Histoire du Soldat. Stravinsky describes this influence in the book Expositions and Developments co-authored by Robert Kraft as “a wholly new sound in my music, and L’Histoire marks my final break with the Russian Orchestral School.”