

## Joffrey Ballet Returns To San Antonio With Stravinsky's Notorious "Rite of Spring"

March 4, 2013

Nathan Cone and Arts San Antonio's John Toohey talk about the history and impact of "The Rite of Spring."

"The Rite of Spring' is not about flowers and birds singing. It's about the power of nature," says John Toohey, Executive Director of Arts San Antonio. ArtsSA is bringing "Rite" to San Antonio on [Friday, March 8 at Lila Cockrell Theatre](#) for the centennial of its notorious debut. The performance also marks the Joffrey Ballet's first performance in San Antonio in more than 20 years.

In 1913, Igor Stravinsky's ballet "The Rite of Spring" shocked the audience at its Paris premiere. The music was discordant, and the choreography, by Vaslav Nijinsky, based on ancient folkloric styles, must have looked primitive. John Toohey says until 1913, you could expect a night at the ballet to be "pleasant."

"The girls were pretty, the dresses were beautiful, and the men were heroic or evil," he explains matter-of-factly. "The expectation would be that one could have an evening with friends and it would be pleasant and unchallenging. What happened instead was that music changed, dance changed, the performing arts changed on that opening night, and a new era was born in the world."

Stravinsky's music is still arresting today, but for years, it was associated more with the death of the dinosaurs (in Disney's "Fantasia") than a pagan ritual.

It wasn't until the 1980s, when the world-famous Joffrey Ballet company embarked on an ambitious effort to re-stage the ballet using its original choreography, that "The Rite of Spring" would be seen in something approaching its intended form. The dance and design team of [Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer](#) spent years researching the writings of the early 20th century for Joffrey, looking for any scrap of information they could find about the production.

The Joffrey Ballet's reconstruction of "The Rite of Spring" debuted in 1987, and while several other companies abroad have utilized the reconstruction, it hasn't returned to America until this year, for the ballet's centennial. Though there likely won't be a violent uprising in the audience at Lila Cockrell, the on-stage performance is sure to be electrifying.

*Find out more information about the Joffrey's return to San Antonio, including a gala event on March 7 at the McNay Art Museum, and a Saturday morning master class for dancers, online: <http://www.artssanantonio.com/IndividualPrograms/TheJoffreyBallet>*