As the reedy, somewhat sleazy high-pitched sound of what might be a bassoon resonates from the orchestra pit, soon to be joined by other wind instruments quietly playing in mild cacophony, a feeling of unrest begins to spread over the assembled audience, most of whom have come to watch rather than listen. A loud high-pitched muted trumpet adds to the general confusion. For two minutes, silence from the crowd.

The tones subside, and again there is that strange-sounding instrument from the opening, the player straining to produce the notes. Boos and catcalls begin to be heard, first from the gallery, then from the lower floors. In a moment loud, repeated, oddly pulsating string chords, eight horns adding their irregular accents. Further shouts of dismay. Bedlam in the auditorium. Fist fights break out between those who approve of the proceedings and those who do not. At first this derision is directed at the dancers, but the musicians producing these strange and discordant sounds are soon the principal target of anger and ridicule. Various objects are tossed in their direction, yet the orchestra continues to play. The police are called in.

Incredibly, this din, this confusion, much worse than the performance that incited it, continues for the better part of half an hour, disrupting a historic musical and choreographic event. The dancer's can barely hear the orchestra; the choreographer shouts the beats from the wings; and the composer, fearful of bodily harm, escapes through a backstage window. Through it all, the imperturbable conductor continues to direct his musicians, even though at times he cannot hear them at all—he keeps track of where they are in the score by watching the players, where their bows are placed at any given moment, which wind instruments are playing or not playing—players he has already led through seventeen rehearsals. Since the work being performed contains some of the loudest music ever written up to that time, as well as the most complex, the audience's achievement in drowning out most of it is truly impressive. A final crashing chord and it is all over, save for additional protests mixed with applause. The most significant event in twentieth-century music is now history.

And what of that imperturbable conductor, that little round man with the large moustache? How did he come to be involved in this *scandale*? The event, the *scandale*, was, of course, the world premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. The date was 29 May 1913. The conductor was Pierre Monteux.

from John Canarina, *Pierre Monteux, Maître*, Amadeus Press, LLC (2003)