

On Thursday, 30 July, Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui welcomes musicians from Orchestra Wellington for the fourth instalment of our collaborative series *Between the Lines*. The theme for the evening's musical book club is 'The Devil's Bargain', diving into the music and literature associated with one of the oldest and most enduring ideas in storytelling: the Faustian pact, or the cost of getting what we want. We will explore these ideas through Igor Stravinsky's extraordinary *L'Histoire du Soldat* ('The Soldier's Tale').

During the First World War, Stravinsky settled in Switzerland with his young family, immersing himself in Russian folklore and poetry and preparing libretti for several future compositions. He also made contact with authors, poets, and playwrights similarly marooned in neutral Switzerland, and considered future collaborative projects with them. A setback occurred when his Germany-based publishing firm had to suspend operations and could no longer remit Stravinsky's royalties, placing him under financial pressure. Further pressure piled on when, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, Stravinsky also lost his Russian property and income.

Seeking to create a work that reflected the complexities of the times, Stravinsky collaborated with the French-speaking Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz on a piece inspired by the story *The Runaway Soldier and the Devil* from Russian folklorist and ethnographer Alexander Afanasyev's vast collection of Slavic stories. The finished piece, *L'Histoire du Soldat*, for instruments, a narrator, two actors (the Soldier and the Devil), and a dancer (the Princess), received its premiere in Lausanne on 28 September 1918.

At a time when many soldiers would willingly have sold their souls to the Devil to escape the horrors of warfare, Stravinsky wrote of the universality and timelessness of *L'Histoire du Soldat*.

My original idea was to transpose the period and style of our play to any time and [to] 1918 and to many nationalities and none, though without destroying the religio-cultural status of the Devil Our soldier, in 1918, was understood to be the victim of the then world conflict, despite the neutrality of the play in other respects. Histoire du Soldat remains my only stage work with a contemporary reference.

Stravinsky's music for *L'Histoire du Soldat* is bright, engaging, and exceptionally rich, filled with Stravinsky's acerbic manipulation of the popular dance styles of the day - the tango, paso doble, and waltz - as well as ragtime, klezmer, and chorales, as the

soldier Joseph Duprat discovers the cost of accepting a deal too good to be true. Stravinsky's music is bright and engaging,

Our reading list for 'The Devil's Bargain' explores how the Faustian pact has inspired authors, poets, and playwrights from the sixteenth century to the present day, while Joseph Roth's *Radetzky March* (published in 1932) and Jaroslav Hašek's satire *The Good Soldier Švejk* (published 1921–1923) are classic novels that emerged from the catastrophe and disillusionment of the First World War. Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Private Notebooks* offers another perspective on the military experience, while more recent novels show that Faustian trade-offs still inspire writers today.

[*Devil's Contract: the history of the Faustian bargain* | Ed Simon](#)

[*Stravinsky: a creative spring: Russia and France, 1882-1934* | Stephen Walsh](#)

[*The Good Soldier Svejk and his fortunes in the World War* | Jaroslav Hašek](#)

[*Diaghilev: a life* | Sjeng Scheijen](#)

['Mrs Faust' from *The World's Wife: Poems* | Carol Ann Duffy](#)

[*The Radetzky March* | Joseph Roth](#)

[*Doctor Faustus* | Thomas Mann](#)

[*The Devil Three Times* | Rickey Fayne](#)

[*Private Notebooks, 1914-1916* | Ludwig Wittgenstein](#)

['Doctor Faustus' from *The Complete Plays* | Christopher Marlowe](#)

[*Payback: debt and the shadow side of wealth* | Margaret Atwood](#)

[*The invisible life of Addie LaRue* | Victoria Schwab](#)

[*Mephisto* | Klaus Mann](#)

[*Minds at War: how great artists and their work were shaped by the First World War* |](#)

[BBC Radio 3 \(eAudio resource\)](#)