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STRAVINSKY.¹

SELDOM have the compositions of any composer provoked such hot debate, such violent hatreds and intense enthusiasms as has the work of Igor Stravinsky. The excitement and tumult which reigned at the first performance, in 1913, of the "Sacred Rites of Spring", an event which is usually referred to as "the battle of the *Sacre*", were such as to make one think one was attending some crucial session of the Chamber of Deputies, some sort of political manifestation rather than a performance of Diaghilew's Russian Ballet. People shouted, whistled, screamed, stamped and even came to blows over their no uncertain opinions, for it was impossible, in the presence of such music, to remain neutral. The suspended or the lukewarm judgment would have been ridiculous in such an atmosphere. One either loved or hated the music and that was the end of the matter. Now, of course, the work is universally recognized as a masterpiece and its composer is everywhere acknowledged to be the foremost figure in contemporary music and—what is more amusing, in the light of his supposed anarchistic tendencies—the chief representative of a return to classic traditions.

We will not attempt, in so short an article, to trace the

¹Igor Stravinsky was born at Oranienbaum in 1882. His father was an opera singer, yet, strangely enough, the boy studied first to be a lawyer and it was only at the age of twenty-one, after a meeting with Rimsky-Korsakow, that he abandoned the law and began, under Rimsky-Korsakow's direction, to prepare himself systematically for the career of a professional musician.

extraordinary evolution of Stravinsky's style, for to do so would entail individual discussion of a large part of his works, many of which are so distinctive, so different from the ones which precede or follow them,¹ that it is peculiarly difficult, and in some cases impossible, to find any logical and illuminating method of arranging them into groups or "periods". The limits of our lecture forbid our discussing the works, in large measure, singly and in detail. Hence we shall simply endeavor to sketch in the general outlines of Stravinsky's art, its underlying tendencies and to give the more important of the influences under which it has evolved.

The chief obstacle which blocks the way to most people's appreciation of Stravinsky's music is its dissonance, for all the works after "Petrouchka" *are* dissonant, some of them, extremely so. And what makes the obstacle especially difficult to overcome is the fact that Stravinsky's dissonance is far more contrapuntal than it is harmonic, that is, it results from the clash of melodic lines rather than the structure of chords. Ever since the days of Haydn and Mozart, our ears have been trained to hear practically in but one direction, that is, vertically and, in consequence, we have more or less lost the art of listening to contrapuntal music, of following lines rather than chords. Even Bach we hear, in large measure, harmonically and are tempted to pay more attention to the vertical concordance, than we do to the contours, of his melodies. Yet, these perpendicular concordances do not, for the most part, have the value of chords, but are rather accidental aggregations of notes—to call them harmonies would be inaccurate—which have resulted from the conduct of the multiple and independent lines. On the other hand, however, it is true that such

¹ For instance, such radically different works as "The Firebird", "Petrouchka" and "The Sacred Rites of Spring" followed each other in quick succession. They date respectively from 1909-10, 1910-11, and 1911-13.

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concordances constitute a sort of harmonic skeleton. But it is only a skeleton and its presence should be felt rather than perceived and surely not consciously and continually observed by the listener.

In Stravinsky's music, we are not only confronted by

The image displays two systems of musical notation, likely from a score by Igor Stravinsky. Each system consists of five staves. The top staff of each system is a treble clef staff with a complex melodic line, featuring a sequence of eighth notes and some rests. The second staff is a treble clef staff with a few notes and rests, some marked with 'x'. The third staff is a treble clef staff with notes and rests, also marked with 'x'. The fourth staff is a bass clef staff with notes and rests, marked with 'x'. The fifth staff is a bass clef staff with notes and rests, marked with 'x'. The first system is marked with a '3' above the first measure. The second system is marked with a '10' above the first measure. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats) and dynamic markings.

counterpoint, but by counterpoint whose vertical concordances are new and which, being new, naturally draw our attention so forcibly to them that we lose sight of the lines which produced them and which ought to be our chief concern. One has but to glance at the measures from "The Sacred Rites of Spring", on the preceding page, to realize at once that they are essentially linear in character. In this respect, they are quite typical, for most of Stravinsky's music is pre-eminently melodic and it is interesting to note how his polyphony has passed from the relative simplicity of contrapuntal device which characterizes "Petrouchka" (1910-11),

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is marked with an '8' at the beginning, indicating an octave shift. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff with a melodic line, a middle staff with a more active line, and a bass clef staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system is marked '8va basso' and also consists of three staves, showing a similar polyphonic texture. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as 'ff'.

to the more complicated polyphony in "Sacre" (1911-13) and "The Wedding" (1917),

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The Wedding

S.
A.
T.
B.

il n'est plus gai, il n'est plus gai,
a per - du l'an-neau do - ré

8

legato sempre

Orch.

le pau(vre) Pa - la - gai
et d'un gros ru - bis or - né

only to return to the extraordinary concentration and economy of the "Piano Sonata" (1924).¹

a: - - - - -

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Above the first staff, there is a measure rest labeled 'a: - - - - -'. Below the first staff, the text 'a: in augmentation' is written. The second system also consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

To appreciate such music, it is obvious that we must establish new habits of hearing, re-acquire a new sense of the old linear values which were the pride of the Renaissance and the glory of Bach.

But there is a greater difficulty in Stravinsky's music, namely, the element of rhythm, and here the trained musician and the layman are equally embarrassed. For several centuries now, we have lived under the tyranny of the bar-line, of a "strong" beat which reoccurs at *regular* intervals with insistent monotony. Consequently, we find ourselves helpless when we are forced, as we are so often in Stravinsky's music, to admit another type of rhythm, a rhythm in which the metre is constantly changing and where we are obliged to feel accents at intervals that are no longer regular. Stravinsky's music suggests the old Greek system of rhythm which (instead of taking, as we do, a

¹Notice, in the last example, the use of the old contrapuntal device known as "augmentation".

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maximum unity, like the whole-note, and cutting it up into various small divisions, e.g. halves, quarters, eighths, etc.) took a minimum unity and multiplied it by any even or odd number, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 etc. This is precisely what Stravinsky does, for instance, in the last tableau of "The Sacred Rites of Spring":

The image displays two musical excerpts from Stravinsky's "The Sacred Rites of Spring". The top excerpt consists of three systems of music, each with a 5/16 time signature. The first system has a 3/16 time signature. The second system has a 4/16 time signature. The third system has a 3/16 time signature. The bottom excerpt also consists of three systems of music, each with a 5/16 time signature. The first system has a 3/16 time signature. The second system has a 4/16 time signature. The third system has a 3/16 time signature. The music is written for piano and features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes and rests.

Nor is the example an isolated one; we find the same procedure in a great many of his themes, from which I cite, at random, the following:¹

¹ It is illuminating to compare the metre of these themes with the metre of the first few lines of a speech in Euripides' *Hippolytus*:

The image shows two musical examples labeled 1 and 2. Example 1 is a single line of music in 2/2 time, consisting of a quarter note, a quarter note, a half note, and a quarter note. Example 2 is a single line of music in 3/2 time, consisting of a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a half note, and a quarter note.

(Continued on next page.)

The Wedding

Two staves of musical notation in treble clef. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking *f* and features a complex sequence of time signatures: 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with various rests and accents.

Sacre

Two staves of musical notation in treble clef. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking *p* and features a complex sequence of time signatures: 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with various rests and accents.

Renard

One staff of musical notation in bass clef. It begins with a dynamic marking *f* and features a complex sequence of time signatures: 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/4, 3/4. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with various rests and accents, including triplets.

Mavra

Two staves of musical notation in treble clef. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking *f* and features a complex sequence of time signatures: 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with various rests and accents.

The difficulty is doubled when, as in this passage from "The Story of the Soldier", Stravinsky superposes rhythms

Three examples of musical notation showing superposed rhythms. Each example consists of a single staff with a complex sequence of time signatures and a melody of eighth and quarter notes. Example 1: 3/8, 5/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8. Example 2: 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8. Example 3: 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8.

In both cases the principles of rhythmical structure are obviously the same. For a detailed study of the musical aspect of Greek metres, see Maurice Emmanuel's book: *Histoire de la Langue Musicale*, Paris, 1911.

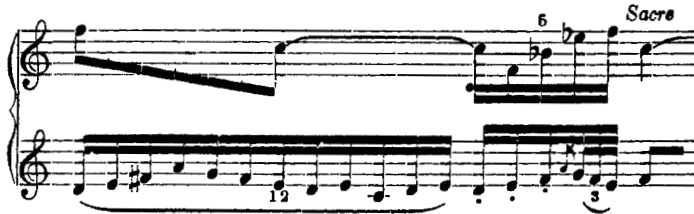
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in much the same way as the contrapuntist superposes themes:



One has only to try to play these measures to realize how ill-equipped we are to cope with the rhythmical problems¹ of Stravinsky's music. Yet we shall never fully understand it until we have mastered them, until we have acquired the physical sensation of his rhythms and made them our own.

Stravinsky's music is fundamentally tonal, that is, it gravitates around a "home" key which is usually affirmed, in no uncertain manner, by a perfect cadence. Occasionally, it is true, there are equivocal measures like these:



¹ Or even, for that matter, with those presented by the music of Bach. How many pianists, for instance, can play a Bach fugue with perfect clarity, that is, in a manner which makes quite clear the rhythmic, no less than the melodic, independence of the parts.



which, at a first glance, would seem to be polytonal. Yet in spite of such passages, I do not think that in Stravinsky's case one can properly speak of polytonality. As Boris de Schloezer has said: ¹ "There is genuine polytonality where, as in the *Symphonic Etudes* of Milhaud or in his *Sixth Quartet*, there is complete independence of the tonal planes, independence to such a degree that each voice of a bi-tonal discourse, for example, pursues and finds its own resolution and has its own cadence. This is not the case with Stravinsky, either in the *Sacre* or in the works which follow it. In Stravinsky's music there is always a strongly affirmed fundamental tonality to which melodic lines and harmonic complexes belonging to a different key temporarily join themselves. But the foreign key is either, in the end, abandoned, or else it melts, in modulating, into the fundamental tonality. . . . Beneath the complexities of a harmonic tissue where two or three different keys are woven together, one always distinguishes the plane of the principal tonality, which finally absorbs the others and affirms itself by a cadence which destroys all doubt".

The sort of harmonic perspective which M. de Schloezer describes, is to be found, for instance, in the Prelude to the second part of "The Sacred Rites of Spring". Here, the

¹In an admirable article on Stravinsky in the 1923, December number of the *Revue Musicale*. This article and the marvellous essay which Ernest Ansermet wrote on Stravinsky's music and which likewise appeared in the *Revue Musicale* must inevitably serve as the starting point for any study of Stravinsky's work.

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fundamental key, D minor, is always in the foreground, the foreign tonalities being rigorously confined to secondary planes. Similarly, the frenzied "Dance of the Earth", which concludes the first section of *Sacre* and which likewise contains melodic lines that, like the following,



suggest other keys, is, nevertheless, from the harmonic standpoint, nothing but a gigantic cadence in C major. It would be useless to multiply examples further. If any additional evidence were necessary to establish the underlying tonal basis of Stravinsky's music, it could be found abundantly in the later works, each succeeding one of which indicates an increasingly marked evolution toward an art of single and sharply defined tonalities.

Like any powerful personality, Stravinsky has absorbed and assimilated the most diverse and conflicting influences. In the early works, we find traces of "The Five"; of Glazounow. (In the *Symphony in E \flat* , 1905-07), Scriabine and Wagner (*Études*, Op. 7, 1908; and *The Firebird*), Rimsky-Korsakow (*Fireworks*, 1908; and *The Firebird*), Debussy, (*The Faun and the Shepherdess*, 1907, *The Firebird*, and in certain impressionistic, overlapping harmonies in *Petrouchka*), and Schoenberg (*Three Japanese Lyrics*, 1912).

In the compositions written between 1910 and 1917 there is a prolonged and fruitful influence of the Russian folk song, noticeable in the plagal character of the melodies—that is, their insistence on the interval of the fourth—in the diatonic structure and the rhythmical freedom of the themes and in their frequent modal qualities. Often

Stravinsky takes his themes bodily from the folk-lore of his country. For example, the following melodies from "The Sacred Rites of Spring",



are all, according to M. de Schloezer (who is Russian himself and a well qualified authority in the matter) of folk origin.

On the other hand, "the themes of *Petrouchka*", says M. de Schloezer, "are not, for the most part, of village or peasant origin; nor are they fundamentally Russian. They represent rather the music of the town, of the city folk, who have already assimilated a good bit of western musical culture, if only in the form of waltzes such as the one by Lahner which occurs in the first tableau of *Petrouchka*. The result is a strange but homogeneous and organic compound of polkas and German waltzes, churned out by a hurdy-gurdy; of gypsy romances, sung by nomad artists, and of Russian dance rhythms. To-day, in the provinces, even after the Revolution, we can distinguish the echoes of this musical life which, ten years after *Petrouchka*, has once more inspired Stravinsky in *Mavra* (1922). The themes of *Petrouchka*, then, are not, properly speaking, Stravinsky's own. . . . The dances of the drunkards, of the coachmen, of the merchant and the two gypsies—we

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Russians have known all that since childhood. It is material which belongs to everyone; but Stravinsky, in amalgamating and organizing these diverse elements, has made them his own and given them new value and significance”.

In *The Wedding* it is difficult, I confess, to trace the precise limits between the melodies which Stravinsky has created himself and those which he has borrowed from the genius of the folk. In the second tableau, the refrain on a liturgical text that the friends of the groom sing, is in reality a soldier song which in the original has no religious character whatsoever. This phrase of the groom’s



is sung in Russia at the mass for the dead. For Stravinsky, it sufficed to make a few almost imperceptible changes to modify its funereal character without destroying the grave, religious quality of the melody.

The importance of the part which his native folk-songs play in his works is only one of the many distinctly Russian aspects of Stravinsky’s music. Equally Russian is the Asiatic splendor and color, the unparalleled luxuriance of its orchestration, an art, the elements of which Stravinsky learned from Rimsky-Korsakow and in which he is unexcelled by anyone. Intensely Russian, also, is the sombre nostalgia, the sullen immobility and that inscrutable sense of fatalism which we find in compositions like “The Fire-bird”, “The Sacred Rites of Spring”, “The Wedding” and in the paradoxical tragi-gaiety of “Petrouchka”. It would be difficult to imagine a work more genial, more irresistibly gay than “Petrouchka” and, at the same time, more profoundly tragic. I cannot listen to the music without

recalling my first impressions of Russia when I visited that country shortly before the war. On reaching the frontier, we found the little station crowded with peasants, some of them alert and expectant, their eyes wide open, sparkling and full of vivacity, in short, happy, gay; others sad, but so sad that they gave you the feeling that human sorrow is, after all, an infinite thing. And in every face one could read the incomprehension of these simple folk, their helpless acceptance of life. Instinctively one realized that their happiness, like their sorrow, was unmotivated. They were simply gay or sad—nothing more. For the rest, well, "nitchevo" as the Russians say, "That has no importance". It was an unforgettable impression.

In the later works "Mavra" (1918), "Pulcinella" (1919) "Ragtime", the "Octet for Wind Instruments" (1923), the "Concerto" (1924), and the "Sonata" (1924) for piano, the Russian folk-song has given way to other influences. In "Pulcinella", for instance, Stravinsky has taken melodies by Pergolese, harmonized them in a distinctly modern style and made them over into something quite new and original. The work is a *pastiche*, if you wish, but a *pastiche* of genius. The "Octet" turns, for inspiration, to the airs of Rossini; "Mavra", an *opera-buffa*, glorifies what de Schloezer wittily calls the "Italo-Tzigano-Russian" romance. And in "Ragtime", of course, it is your American jazz rhythms that form the basis of the music.

Syncoption has always fascinated Stravinsky. There are marked traces of it in "Petrouchka", in "The Sacred Rites of Spring", and it is employed extensively in "The Wedding". But perhaps the most interesting examples of jazz rhythms are to be found not in any of these works,

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nor in "Ragtime", but in the "Piano-Concerto", for here they have been woven into a style of counterpoint which, in spite of its dissonance and modernity, suggests unmistakably and at once, the polyphony of Bach. Strange as it may seem, the fusion results in not the slightest incongruity. It is as effective as it was unexpected.

In the "Piano-Sonata", his last published work, the influence of Bach is at once subtler and deeper than ever before. The work, like the Preludes and Fugues of the great Cantor, is conceived in blocks and is distinctly architectural in character. It has no "expressive" intentions, in the romantic sense of the word. The nuances are very simple, the dynamics consisting, even in the slow movement, only of simple oppositions of *fortes* and *pianos* and an occasional *pianissimo*. On the other hand, differences in touch or attack are sharply contrasted. The left hand, for instance, plays *staccato*, and the right, *legato*, or *vice versa*. The first and last movements, at least half of which utilizes but two voices, one in each hand, may be considered as representing a development and modernization of the two-part, contrapuntal style of writing that we associate with Bach's "French and English Suites". The extraordinary life and interest of the work reside, as they do in Bach's music, in the style itself, in the vitality of lines which are perpetually in movement, are forever unfolding and renewing themselves. In the long history of music, one encounters a great many works of the "mosaic" type, that is, works which proceed by the juxtaposition and variation of short phrases, but extremely rare are compositions where the lines develop from within, grow out of themselves, as they do here, naturally, easily and with inexhaustible fecundity.

Stravinsky is a master craftsman. Each one of his works brings us, in addition to those intense joys which only the supreme works of art can give, the solution of some technical problem, of some difficulty of his "trade" which, in writing his music, he has incidentally mastered. Sometimes he sets the task for himself quite consciously and then we get tiny marvels of craftsmanship like the "Five" and the "Three Easy Pieces for Piano—Four Hands" which are marked respectively "right hand" and "left hand easy". More often, however, I imagine the task is an incidental one, which is accomplished as a matter of course, simply because the realization of his ideas demands that he accomplish it. However that may be, two things are certain: first, that Stravinsky's music has solved many and extraordinarily diverse problems; and secondly, that the man has shown marvellous versatility in adapting his personality to so great a variety of subjects.

From the historical point of view, Stravinsky's music represents a sharp reaction against the subtle and vaporous sonorities of Debussy's impressionism and a powerful impetus in the direction of a return to classic traditions. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, music has been more or less autobiographical, has dealt with the feelings or impressions of the individual. Its beauty and power have lain in its expressive qualities, in the intensity and fidelity with which it has reflected the emotional life of the composer, rather than in any objective values of form or structure.

In Stravinsky's music, however, the individual or personal note is relatively absent. Consciously or unconsciously he has sought and found again the secret of classic art, of an art whose movement and life are in the music itself,

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not in any qualities of "expression". Even when he is expressive, Stravinsky remains quite impersonal.¹

Here he was aided partly, perhaps, by his Russian heredity; for, if one stops to think of Russian opera, for instance, one realizes that the most successful episodes, even in so great a masterpiece as Boris Godounow, are rarely personal in character. The greatest scenes usually represent some large, general, collective emotion and excel rather in the more or less objective beauties of the gorgeous and the spectacular. In this respect, "Petrouchka" and "The Sacred Rites of Spring", for example, are thoroughly Russian as well as classic. They deal with the feelings of the group; they speak for the crowd, not for the individual.

For those who happen to know only the *Sacre*, it may seem strange indeed to speak of Stravinsky as a classicist, for the primitivism of *Sacre* or, if you prefer, its naturalism, is certainly not a "classical" tendency. But in this connection, one must remember the circumstances under which the work was written, and must place it in its proper historical setting, namely, against the background of impressionistic and romantic art. As M. de Schloezer has said: "It was necessary to return to nature and to forget man, or, at least, to reduce him to nothing more than an element of primitive nature, to treat him as a rock or a plant. The rudeness of *Sacre*, its disdain for everything which charms or pleases, its stinging brutalities—all that was necessary, for it was a question of killing sentiment, of destroying all subjective emotion and of making things act directly and by themselves". Furthermore, "The Sacred

¹ Generally speaking. Naturally one can find exceptions to this, as to any other classification. There are "personal" moments in Stravinsky's music just as there are "impersonal" moments in the music of the nineteenth century. But, as a large generalisation, the opposition which we have established between the romantic era and the music of Stravinsky is real and easily discernible.

Rites of Spring", is Stravinsky's only excursion into the realm of naturalistic art and occupies, for that reason, a place apart from the rest of his works.

If, as in "The Wedding", Stravinsky again approaches the world of primitive peoples, it is to raise them higher in the scale of human values, to give their humble lives new and transcendent dignity. Here, in "*Noces*", simple, peasant folk become figures of truly epic grandeur. "The Bride", "The Groom", "The Father", "The Mother" are not obscure individuals but representative types, who speak, in accents as noble as they are touching and profound, for all men and all times. Only to the very great has it been permitted, in the past, to achieve such heights of universal beauty. That Stravinsky should have done so is no small tribute to the greatness of his genius and a certain indication of the classic and enduring qualities of his art.

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