

Stravinsky, Neoclassicism and Dodecaphony

5/29/17

Igor Stravinsky (1882 - 1971)

- Nobleman
- Goes to university to study law.
- Eventually, manages to study with Rimsky-Korsakov.
- 1905 marries his first cousin, Katya Nosenko.
- *Symphony in Eb (1908)*
 - Favorable reviews.
- Sergei Diaghilev invites him to collaborate. 1910: *Zhar-ptitsa* – *The Firebird*.
 - Most Russian theme imaginable.
 - Two styles:
 - Tonal (for folklore) e.g. *Princess's game with golden apples*
 - “structured chromatics” (for magic or evil) i.e. octatonic scale – e.g. *Dawn*
 - In general, rhythmically lively, e.g. *Kaschei's dance*
- 1911 *Petrushka*
 - Love story among three puppets brought to life.
- 1913 *Rite of Spring*
- Neoprimitivism; influence of Russian Primitivism
- 1914 World War I breaks out; exile in Switzerland.
- Financial troubles; especially after revolution in Russia (1917)
- 1918 *L'histoire du soldat*. Economic motive?
- 1919 *Pulcinella*: settings of (mostly) Pergolesi for Diaghilev
- Relationship to Third Reich? Anti-semitic? Definitely a fan of Mussolini.

Life of Stravinsky, continued

- 1935-36 tours US; *Praeludium for Jazz ensemble*.
Harvard Lectures.
- 1938 Emigrates.
- Moves to **West Hollywood**.
- 1949 Invites Robert Craft to live with him in LA.
- *Three Songs from William Shakespeare (1953)*
- *The Flood (1962)*

Ballet

- Trace to Henry III, France. *Ballet de cour*
- *Ballet d'action* – plot ballet; planned sequence of “numbers” to be acted out. “The courtliest of all the courtly arts.”
- Jean-George Noverre (1727-1810), “Shakespeare of dance.”
- Not a great threat to opera; opera includes dance. Also, after French rev, **ballet’s associations with court mar its prospects in the public sphere.**
- **“the fortunes of an aristocratic art form rise and fall with that of the aristocracy to whose taste it caters” (Taruskin)**
- Taruskin surveys the history of *ballet d'action* (we don’t) but, crucially:
 - <by the end of the century or so> “*ballet d'action*, scarcely a century old, was dead.” (Taruskin vol 5 p. 138)

Russia saves ballet

- After 1848, Russia still an absolute monarchy; strong aristocracy, to which ballet can cater.
- Still a prejudice among Russian composers against the taint of dance, esp. Rimsky-Korsakov.
 - “miming is not a full-fledged art form.”
- Chaikovsky is the one leading composer who composes ballet.
- On the relationship of composer to dance:
 - “I began to write, like an opera, like a symphony, and it came out such that not one *danseur* or *danseuse* could dance to my music.” (Taruskin 141)
 - On the outlook of Chaikovsky, which is significant. Disgusted by Wagner: after seeing the Ring in 1876, “formerly, music strove to delight people; now they are tormented and exhausted.”
- Chaikovsky, *Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty*.
- *Divertissement*, “estheticism.”
- Sergei Diaghilev (1872 – 1929)
 - “the greatest impresario the world has ever seen.”

Artist vs. Balletomane

- Benois, “Colloquy on Ballet,” 1908.
- Balletomane: it’s dead, outmoded, etc
- Artist: No, it’s the Gesamtkunstwerk *par excellence!* Why? No words.
 - “A baby calling for its milk is utilitarian and boring, but a smiling baby – that one is holy, surrounded by a divine aureole, full of regal radiance...the dance is nothing but a full-length smile in which the whole body participates.” (Taruskin, p. 150)

Diaghilev Commissions Stravinsky

- Diaghilev comes to “specialize” in presenting Russian ballet to Paris audiences; needs a Russian ballet, on Russian themes, from a Russian composer.
- Four composers refuse; finally Stravinsky accepts.
- *Firebird*, 1910
 - Slavic myth of a beautiful, magical bird, whose feathers are very valuable.
 - Not authentic tale (Ivan Tsarevic wins the hand of Princess Nenaglyadnaya-Krasa), but effectively marks the thing as “Russian” for Parisian audiences.
 - Two styles
 - Folkloric (tonal) – Prince and Princess
 - *Feerique* or fantastic – Kaschey and Bird, especially in the *Dawn* scene
 - Octatonic scale; alternate minor and major thirds.
- *Petrushka*, 1911
 - A virgin dances herself to death before an idol – the Slavic sun god Yarilo.
 - “Neoprimativism.” --- “The quest for a modern style through evocations of prehistory.”
 - Genesis of *Petrushka* (Little Pete).
 - Long stretches with no accidentals!!!
 - Not so in *Second Tableau*
 - “Petrushka Chord”
 - Bitonal, yes, but important to see them as derived from the octatonic system (Rimsky Korsakov)

The Rite of Spring (1913)

- The Rite of Spring

- 3: ritual of abduction
- 7: Dance of the Earth
- Lithuanian and Latvian melodies – the most recently christianized people of Europe.
- Polychords, still basically derived from octatonic scale.
- Dorian mode a diminished octave apart
- “What is chiefly maximalized in The Rite, then, is the neonationalist ideal, the project of wringing stylistic innovation and renewed technical resources from archaic folkloristic models.” (Taruskin, p. 175)
- Harmonizing folk melodies, constructed out of minor tetrachords, with their complement from the octatonic scale: “authenticity and modernity at once.”
-

- Part 2 conclusion: The Sacrificial Dance

- Irregular meter, unpredictable.
- “passive” ostinato coexists with “active” shifting stress.
- “objectivity,” *tesserae*, hypostatization.
 - Little musical ideas that get tossed around in the manner of tiles.

- Reaction: probably had more to do with Nijinsky’s choreography.

Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* (1948)

- Another Wagner problem?

Another Shock! No sauce.

- *Pulcinella*, 1920
- *Octet for winds*, 1923
- Objectivity and pre-Romanticism
- Tradition of writing in outmoded styles: Mozart (in Bach or Handel style).
 - “Fake eighteenth-century music as soft-core nineteenth century pornography.” (Taruskin)
- Tension between modernism and romanticism.
- Irony (pierrot lunaire?) and the “ban on all pathos.”
- Critic Jacques Riviere:
 - “The great novelty of the Rite of Spring is its renunciation of “**sauce.**”” (taruskin 468)
- Stravinsky himself:
 - “music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc.”

The great war ends the long 19th century

- Optimism and faith in progress are “the great war’s first and most permanent casualties.”
- 9 million casualties?
- Irony in the arts.
- Hemingway: “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.”
- Execution vs. interpretation
 - Stravinsky: interpretation “is at the root of all errors, all the sins, all the misunderstandings that interpose themselves between the musical work and the listener and prevent a faithful transmission of its message.
 - “the most durable and tangible result of the postwar triumph of dehumanization.” (taruskin)

Back to the Octet

- Sinfonia, Tema con variazione, Finale
- Prokofiev: “Bach with smallpox.”
- Uses 18th century mannerisms on top of compositional techniques familiar from Stravinsky’s earlier work (ostinato, stable dissonance, abrupt changes).
 - “The opening trills say “eighteenth century” without actually sounding like 18th century music.” (Taruskin)
- Jokes, e.g. endings on a 6/4 chord, weird modal mixtures.
- **Finale**
 - American Dance music influence
 - cf. L’histoire du soldat. Or Prelude for Jazz Band, or **Ragtime for 11 instruments**
 - Objectivity and stylistic features (streams of notes of regular value, equality of the work nad the text, *subito p*, *sempre p*)

Objectivity maximized?

Etude for Pianola, 1917

Schoenberg vs. Stravinsky

- 1928 Sch sees Strav's Opera, Oedipus Rex, completely hates it. "The work is nothing."
- "Igor Stravinsky: Der Restaurateur."
 - Pun
- Stravinsky makes fun of the pretentious tradition of German aesthetics, of which Schoenberg is seen to be a member.
- Important to note that the two are, despite their antagonism, caught up in the same postwar climate. And also that dodecaphony is equally, in its way, neoclassicizing.

Schoenberg, Three Satires, Op. 28, No. 3

*Ja, wer trommelt denn da?
Das ist ja der kleine Modernsky!
Hat sich ein Bubizopf schneiden
lassen;
sieht ganz gut aus!
Wie echt falsches Haar!
Wie eine Perücke!
Ganz (wie sich ihn der kleine
Modernsky vorstellt),
ganz der Papa Bach!*

*But who's that drumming away there?
Why, it's little Modernsky!
He's had his hair cut in an
old-fashioned queue,
And it looks quite nice!
Like real false hair!
Like a peruke [pigtail wig]!
Just like (or so little Mo-
dernsky likes to think)
Just like Papa Bach!*

From the forward to the satires

[Those] who nibble at dissonances, and therefore want to rank as modern, but are too cautious to draw the consequences from it . . . those who figure they are in a position that permits them any shattering of tonality, if only an occasional triad—whether it occurs properly or not—would prove their loyalty to tonality . . . those who pretend to “go back to” . . . finally, all the “. . . ists,” who I can only find to be mannerists.

Schoenberg, 12-tone technique

- Recall the problem presented by atonality.
- Precedents – Josef Hauer, *Nomos*?
 - According to Egon Wellesz, these pieces “showed him the way out of his crisis.”
- *Schoenberg, Op. 23*
 - First real 12-tone piece: No. 5 (waltz)
 - The row is not a melody, but it produces every melody. Same for chords.
- *Grundgestalt*
- 12-tone; dodecaphony; composition with 12 tones related only to each other. **What matters is ordered interval content.**

Two serenades

- 1925 Stravinsky, *Serenade in A*
 - More objectivity, written-in ritard
- 1923 – Schoenberg, Op. 24
 - 1st movement “March”– cf *L’histoire du soldat*
 - Minuet
 - Variations
 - *Petrarchan Sonnet*
 - 12 tone vocal part! Free (sort of) treatment of ensemble.
 - “Rotation” around the row, relationship to text.
 - Dance
 - Lied
 - Finale

Just an example

This musical score is for a symphony orchestra and a vocal soloist. The instruments listed on the left are Kl (Klavier/Piano), Bkl (Bassklavier/Double Bass), Md (Mandoline), Gt (Gitarre/Guitar), Ges (Gesang/Voice), Gg (Geige/First Violin), Br (Bratsche/Viola), and Vol (Violoncelle/Cello). The vocal part (Ges) includes German lyrics: "mich - lich und ver - sch - ret und brül - lend, wie ein". The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *poco accel* (a little accelerate). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. Red arrows highlight specific glissando passages in the Klavier, Bassklavier, and Violoncelle parts. The score is numbered 18289 at the bottom.

Schoenberg, Suite for Piano Op. 25

- Prelude, Gavotte, Musette, Intermezzo, Minuette, Gigue.
- Where in the Waltz Op 23, he had used just one form (and briefly backwards), here he uses
 - P(0), I(0), P(6) and I(6), and their retrogrades.
- Carefully constructed significant “invariance” features of the constituting rows
- “By seeking out abstract invariance relationships like these within the row forms, it is easy to create concrete musical relationships in which some aspect of a musical configuration changes while some other aspect remains the same. **That is the essence of the “developing variation” technique Schoenberg had long insisted was implicit in Brahms’s motivic textures.**” (Taruskin, p. 690)

Light titles, heavy music

- Serenade, Piano Suite, (almost) a Foxtrot! (Op. 29, renamed Tanzschritte) – light titles.
- “the most vivid example of postwar irony to be found in all of modernist music.” (taruskin, p. 692)

Schoenberg, Op. 31, Variations for Orchestra

Op. 33

- Op. 33a and b
- No more “dance” forms
- “Combinatoriality.”