

TWENTIETH-CENTURY ANALYSIS: ESSAYS IN MINIATURE

by Lothar Klein

IGOR STRAVINSKY: *The Styles of Stravinsky*. Creation, musical or other, seems eternally destined to be labelled as either classically or romantically inspired. Classicism is easily described as "objective, abstract, disciplined, and nonemotional," while romanticism is "subjective, pictorial, ill-disciplined but emotional." Artistic sympathies further evaluate each as academic, reactionary, or revolutionary. If the trained musician abhors such half-truths, their beguiling commercial potential for today's art-conscious business world is not to be underestimated. We all know an innocent Haydn string quartet will sell better if a nubile Maria Theresa graces record jackets or if "intellectual," geometric cubes aim a pitch for *The Art of the Fugue*. This confusion, when applied to the work of a living composer, not only slanders the work itself but cheats the young, inexperienced, would-be creator of true vision. If the arts were predestined for the Procrustean bed of either classic or romantic expression, art would cease to exist, for the artist would be incapable of creation.

Lest it be thought that such distinctions are pure intellectualizing, lacking importance to the very act of creation, one must not forget the case of Richard Strauss. Caught in the changing musical crosswinds of nineteenth-century romanticism and the "modern," Strauss was nearly silenced by the 1918 collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, the changing artistic attitudes instigated by its fall, and his near failure to reconcile romantic and classical opposites. Failure to grasp the unity of artistic creation and the difficulties of its emergence in our epoch threatens our under-

standing the work of today's greatest living composer—Igor Stravinsky.

Not since Beethoven has a composer's output been so obviously and easily divided into stylistic periods. The early ballets, including *Fire Bird* (1909) and *Petrushka* (1911), climax in *The Rite of Spring* (1913). These, Stravinsky's most popular works, are generally termed nationalistic or primitive. "Primitive" refers to their overt folkloristic origin, deeply rooted in Russian myth; the appraisal has nothing to do with insufficient technique nor does it allude to a musical naïveté characteristic of a true primitive like Charles Ives. Stravinsky's primitivism is of high technical gloss, aware of musical developments, yet preferring earthy emotion. *The Rite of Spring's* scandalized reception was possibly prompted more by spectator realization of savagery as a vital human force than by any assault on musical conventions. Schoenberg's early piano pieces, opus 11, are harmonically more revolutionary than anything in *The Rite*, but their musical message coincided with the psychic malaise of pre-World War I society. Stravinsky's rhythmic *élan*, conversely, revived a musical element long tamed by European harmonic civilization. Musical romanticism depended on harmony for expressive nuance. Although romanticism is generally considered as revolt against the status quo, the introversion of Byronic romanticism had little use for barbaric rhythm. The rhythmic exuberance of Slavic countries found in Dvorak and Bartok is separate from central Europe *Weltschmerz*. It seems axiomatic that the deeper a civilization broods, the more

rhythmic life is subjugated to harmonic expression. Even in our own day, avant-garde jazz stands apart from older, happier jazz. Stravinsky seems acutely aware of the emotional properties and historical significance inherent in rhythm and harmony.

After *The Rite's* cataclysmic onslaught, Stravinsky emerged as a neoclassicist, and many musicians sighed with relief. Stravinsky's courting of past music seemed to indicate an historical and aesthetic dead end. A musical ogre had become office boy to Pergolesi, Bach, Handel, Tchaikovsky, jazz, and Grieg. The benevolently inclined thought the master had become a parodist, nostalgically confessing the superiority of the classical position. To vault over *The Rite's* peak of achievement was no doubt impossible, and the composer shrewdly chose not to enter the race of historical one-upmanship. In truth, Stravinsky was expressing his love for certain music and the values this music displayed, reiterating those of Mozart: imaginative clarity, elegant symmetry, and a sharp perspective on tradition and optimism. Stylization, the use of convention to assure communication, is present in music of this period to be sure, but its various forms are unified by one personal style. A more urbane, educated music, these "neo" works do not compete with the earlier works. *Pulcinella*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Apollon Musagète*, *Jeu de Cartes*, *The Rake's Progress*, and the *Symphony in C*, are as alive and emotional in their own self-contained way as any of Stravinsky's more popular works. Different in species, they have no point of comparison; that they imitate the works of older

composers to assert their own musical life is a false critique. No one could mistake *Oedipus Rex* for Handelian opera. Nor is the notion correct that the above works are excursions into classical times à la Prokofiev. Stravinsky's neoclassicism seeks a definition of modernity safe from the ravages of time.

One might venture to say that what transpired in Beethoven's early periods, the movement from eighteenth-century influence to the real Beethoven, is reversed in Stravinsky. The folk works, including *The Soldier's Tale* (1918), already reveal many personal traits of the essential Stravinsky, while his neoclassicism codifies those musical convictions already present in the earlier pieces. The fact is certainly true that works of this second period were more influential on Stravinsky's contemporaries than *The Rite*, which had (and could only have had) few imitators. Stravinsky's statement that music is incapable of expressing anything stirred great controversy, for it deflated the romantically popular belief that music could describe rain drops, eternal love, and Nietzsche. Music, according to Stravinsky, could only express itself. The comment, for today's ideals, is correct but it does not preclude poignant expressivity. The "Dithyramb" from Stravinsky's *Duo concertant* demonstrates this.

Stravinsky's first large-scale work completed in America was the *Symphony in C* (1940), a work summing up the composer's neo-classical thought. The epic gestures of German symphonic writing, as climaxed by Bruckner and Mahler, were always foreign to Stravinsky. The C symphony is a cool distillation of Haydn, Beethoven and, expectedly, Stravinsky. Tradition is immediately stressed in key choice, functional harmonic gravitation, regular meter, and his use of the sonata form as a model. Minute attention is paid to commonplace melodic figures and sonata structure. The symphony's opening motive, B-G-C, repeats the leading tone, bestowing greater importance on it than on either the tonic or dominant. Simple as the idea seems, tonal motion is outlined by the leading tone's vacillation between tonic and dominant. Another surprise is found in the treatment of

a second theme that, after an expected appearance in the exposition followed by a continuous two-part bridge, reappears in recapitulation flanked by two divisions of the bridge. Two pauses balance the movement into a ternary division (exposition-second theme, development, recapitulation-coda) instead of the usual exposition, development, recapitulation scheme. Such detail shows the perspicacity with which Stravinsky's rationale reshapes classical symmetry. The eighteenth-century listener was invited to compare aurally balancing sections of sonata

This article is the seventh in a series of "Essays in Miniature" featuring important musical compositions and developments of the twentieth century. The series includes analyses of works by Schoenberg, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Stockhausen, Cage, and others. The author is Assistant Professor of Theory-Composition, Department of Music, The University of Texas, Austin.

design. However, as contrasting sections moved with varying pulse, corresponding balances were not necessarily discernible. Stravinsky's regularity of pulse and circular melodic-harmonic progressions circumscribe the architectural canvas upon which the symphonic drama is to take place.

Everything about the work, its orchestration in particular, highlights the classical symphonic profile. Cleanliness of scoring and the observance of strict orchestral etiquette do not tolerate orchestral noise. Every note serves a purpose, like tightly coiled springs in precision machinery. The symphony's total impact rallied an entire generation of American composers, including Lukas Foss, Harold Shaper, and Alexei Haieff, to the neoclassical cause.

When revisiting traditional forms, Stravinsky's genius never fails to contribute the unexpected. A chorale of austere dignity crowns the *Symphony in C*. The likelihood of a sacred form grafted into the secular is a startling, impossible-to-duplicate symphonic innovation. The essence and spirit of this chorale (quite unlike Mendelssohn's *Reformation* chorale finale) enshrines classicism, not merely Stravinsky's, but the classical ethos,

with a profound air of religious evocation. Simultaneously, the chorale refers back to the composer's 1920 *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* chorale conclusion dedicated to the memory of Claude Debussy. Its presence in this symphony reaffirms the power of an earlier music in unity with a later spirit.

Style has been said to be the subject of Stravinsky's art. A definition of style is much debated, yet any dictionary offers a workable thesis, for nothing exists without a quality of style. However, a superlative style can only define itself. Critics often separate Stravinsky's styles into the Apollonian, meaning an austere reserved intellectualism, and the unbridled Dionysiac frenzy. This distinction is wholly artificial. Stravinsky himself has offered an admirable definition which maintains that style is not a state but a manner of being. Thus, if all music represents manners, one should be able to surmise a great deal about a creator's attitudes by judging his manners of preference. In his *Poetics of Music* (surely the most lucid book on music yet produced in our century, and a literary companion piece to the *Symphony in C*), Stravinsky writes: "I cannot begin to take an interest in music except in so far as it emanates from the integral man. I mean from a man armed with the resources of his senses, his psychological faculties and his intellectual equipment." One may conclude from this that the composer must actively exist in his work, living and reconstituting it. This is the view of art that inspires the romantic and classical artist equally. While the romantic embodies his work, as did Byron, the classicist's work, like that of Mozart, becomes a model for life.

As the dominant spirit permeating classicism is intelligibility driven by the intellect, the stylistic direction of Stravinsky's third period was inevitable. When he first showed interest in twelve-tone music, the impossible occurred. For decades, a rapprochement between Schoenbergian and Stravinskyan aesthetics was considered impossible. Stravinsky's third-period, twelve-tone music singles out our shortsightedness. In an age deifying the system, it also proves that music requires perennial talent. ㊦