

A2 Applied: Revision Notes

Igor Stravinsky: *Pulcinella*

Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century was a time of great upheaval in the arts. Artists, poets, writers and composers looked for ways to express themselves that reflected the rapidly changing nature of the world they lived in. For many composers, that meant turning their backs on traditional genre, form, harmony, rhythm and melody. Arnold Schoenberg's expressionist work *Ewartung* (1909), for example, communicates the emotional distress of its text through a score that employs constant change, extreme complexity and harsh dissonances. Schoenberg later developed a novel system for producing melody and harmony based on manipulating ordered rows of the 12 notes of the chromatic scale – an approach that completely destroys any traditional sense of harmony and tonality. Stravinsky also played a hugely important role in the musical revolution of the early C20, most famously with his *Rite of Spring* (1913) – a ballet score that employed violently irregular rhythms and harsh dissonances.

Neo-Classicism is a reaction partly against this violent rejection of tradition and partly against the emotional intensity of the late-Romantic music of composers such as the symphonist Gustav Mahler. Neo-Classicism is potentially a confusing term because it does not necessarily mean a return to the principles of Classical music, rather it refers to a broader interest in recycling and reworking ideas from the past in a modern context.

Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* is a very early example of Neo-Classicism and its reworking of the past is more literal than most. His re-orchestration of music attributed to the late baroque composer Pergolesi gives the impression of looking back at the seventeenth century through a distinctly twentieth century lens. Various subtle touches of instrumentation, texture, harmony and rhythm nudge this music firmly out of the Baroque/early Classical era, but virtually all the original material is left intact.

NOTE: Although the Vivo is definitely based on a cello sonata by Pergolesi, the other two movements were mis-attributed in the editions from which Stravinsky worked – the *Sinfonia* is from a Trio Sonata that was probably written by Domenico Gallo, whilst the Gavotte is from a keyboard suite entitled *Pieces Modernes* written by Carlo Ignazio Monza (Variations 1, 2 and 4 of the original).

Stravinsky and Ballet Music

The early years of Stravinsky's career were dominated by his relationship with the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, who masterminded a series of highly successful showcases of Russian artistic talent during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Diaghilev was particularly bold in his choice of composers for his ballet productions, commissioning scores from Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev, Satie and Poulenc as well as Stravinsky. By the time he began *Pulcinella* in 1919, Stravinsky had already collaborated on four previous projects for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes including the famously controversial *Rite of Spring*, the premiere of which provoked a near-riot. The elemental violence of Stravinsky's score was matched by the highly unconventional choreography of Vaslav Nijinsky.

Pulcinella

Pulcinella (1919-20) marked the beginning of a different but equally bold direction. Stravinsky re-worked a selection of music by Pergolesi at the suggestion of Diaghilev to accompany a ballet choreographed by Leonide Massine with set design and costumes by Pablo Picasso. Diaghilev expected Stravinsky to simply adapt and orchestrate the music, but the composer took a much more radical approach:

I began by composing on the Pergolesi manuscripts themselves, as though I were correcting an old work of my own ... I knew that I could not produce a 'forgery' of Pergolesi ... at best, I could repeat him in my own accent

Diaghilev apparently took offence at Stravinsky's irreverence, according to the composer, "[Diaghilev] went about for a long time with a look that suggested the Offended Eighteenth Century". However, the work was an immediate success, and the composer went on to produce various concert versions of the ballet score. The original ballet included several arias, which Stravinsky re-wrote as purely instrumental movements. The anthology extracts, which are from the suite, were already instrumental movements.

Pulcinella is a stock character of the Commedia dell'arte – a seventeenth century Italian tradition of improvised theatre. *Pulcinella* is a crafty character who often plays dumb in order to get his own way. The scenario for the ballet is as follows:

All the young girls in town love *Pulcinella*, while the young men, consumed with jealousy, seek to kill him. As soon as an opportunity of achieving their intention occurs, they disguise themselves as *Pulcinellas* with the idea of impressing their loved ones. But *Pulcinella*, craftily, has changed places with a double, who pretends to die under the blows of his enemies. *Pulcinella* himself, disguised as a magician, comes to bring his double "back to life." Just as the young men think they are finally rid of him, the real *Pulcinella* appears and arranges all their marriages. He himself weds *Pimpinella*, with the blessing of his double, *Furbo*, who in turn assumes the character of the magician

Pulcinella Features

Stravinsky broadly retains the melody, harmony and structure of works by Gallo, Monza and Pergolesi in these movements. The reworking that Stravinsky undertakes within the basic framework of the originals is broken down into three categories:

1. The way in which Stravinsky orchestrates the originals
2. Obvious changes to the music or its presentation that undermine the original by making it comical and/or grotesque
3. Subtle changes that re-cast the music in Stravinsky's 'accent' (see quotation on first page of notes).

| Orchestration and instrumental writing |
|---|
| Sinfonia |
| [Concerto Grosso writing] |
| Gavotta |
| [wide variety of instrumentations] |
| Vivo |
| [choice of solo instruments] |

| Obvious additions (grotesque, comical or otherwise destabilising) |
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| Sinfonia |
| • bb. 10-12 |
| • bb. 14-15 |
| • bb. 18 |
| • bb. 33 |
| Gavotte |
| • b. 15 |
| • bb. 44-50 |
| • bb. 51-56 |
| • bb. 70-73 |
| • Repeat |
| Vivo |
| • bb.22-24 |
| • bb. 46-50 |
| • b. 65 |
| • bb. 66-67 |

Subtle additions (Stravinsky's 'accent')

Sinfonia

- b. 2 (oboes) bb. 3-4 (violin 2)
- bb. 7-9
- bb. 37-39

Gavotte

- Ornaments
- bb. 8-9 (bassoon and oboe)
- bb. 11-13 (horn)
- bb. 67-69 (bassoon)

Vivo

- bb. 9, 11 and 13
- bb. 38-45 (flutes and trumpets)

Essay

It has been argued that Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* is more re-composition than orchestration of the original Eighteenth century pieces. Identify features of the work that demonstrate the extent to which this is true.