



# Pearson

## Igor Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring* – Introduction, The Augurs of Spring and Ritual of Abduction (for component 3: Appraising)

### Background

After the great Russian ballet impresario Diaghilev had heard some early pieces by Stravinsky in St Petersburg, he invited the young composer to write a piece for his Ballets Russes company who were then about to perform in Paris. The result was *Firebird*, which brought Stravinsky instant success (1910). In 1911 with a larger orchestra still, he wrote *Petrushka* and then in 1913 *Rite of Spring* was performed. The piece caused a scandal, partly because the audience found the music too dissonant and violent and partly because they were offended by Nijinsky's choreography.

Although the Rite derived many of its orchestration devices and some other compositional elements from the two earlier ballets and in turn from Stravinsky's teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, it is nevertheless regarded as one of the great turning points in music. Together with *Pierrot Lunaire* by Schoenberg, it can be described as the starting point of twentieth-century music.

The music rapidly became popular as an orchestral piece and it has become one of the most important works in the orchestral repertoire. It was thought that it couldn't work as a ballet. If you are ever lucky enough to go to the Royal Opera House in London and see the version with Kenneth McMillan's choreography, you will realise that the dance actually enhances the score further, and the result is an overwhelming work of art.

### Orchestration

Stravinsky used one of the largest orchestras ever assembled for his score:

- **Quintuple woodwind**
  - **Three flutes, piccolo, alto flute** (one of the flute players **doubles** on second piccolo. This is shown in the score by the words 'Fl. 3 muta in Fl. Picc 2', i.e. Flute 3 changes to piccolo 2). Piccolo music sounds an octave higher than written. The alto flute is a **transposing instrument in G**. Its music sounds a perfect fourth lower than written.
  - **Four oboes, cor anglais** (it is normal to have two oboes). A cor anglais is a transposing instrument in the key of F. Music sounds a perfect fifth lower than written.
  - **Three clarinets, clarinet in D, bass clarinet**. The clarinet in D is a high-pitched instrument, sounding a major second higher than written. The bass clarinet is in the key

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of B $\flat$ , sounding a major ninth lower than written. One of the clarinetists doubles on a second bass clarinet.

- **Four bassoons, double bassoon** (sounding an octave lower than written).
- **Extra-large brass section** (eight horns, five trumpets, three trombones, two tubas).
- **Large percussion section**, including two timpani players and parts for **tuned cymbals, tam-tam** (large orchestral gong) and **guiro**, etc.
- **Standard string section.**

The printed score uses Italian terms for the instruments, combined with French terms for the pitch, so 'Corno in Fa' is a Horn in F.

The music opens with a famous passage for **unaccompanied bassoon**, playing in a very **high register**. It uses the **tenor clef**. This is a '**C clef**'. The clef sign points to middle C. The first note in the piece is a **high C**, an octave above middle C.

String techniques include **repeated down bows** and **double-stopped chords** figure 13 (playing two strings at once). These techniques are used at the beginning of the famous 'Augurs of Spring' section. The introduction features **harmonics** in the double bass parts (fig 10), as well as more standard **pizzicato** technique Vln 2 figure 4. Strings are frequently **divided**. At one point in the introduction there are **six separate solo double bass parts (fig 10)**, while the violas play **glissando harmonics** figure 11. There is *Con sordino*, in the cello figure 10 and *Col legno* (hit with the wood of the bow) in the viola figure 24.

Brass techniques include **muted trumpet** and some very high writing for trumpet in D. Horns are used to double and reinforce some of the string chords in the Augurs section.

The upper woodwind instruments are sometimes required to use **flutter-tonguing** technique (bar 60). This effect is produced by rolling an 'r' with the tongue while blowing into the instrument. It is shown as 'flttz.' in the score in the Introduction section.

## Transpositions

- Piccolo – sounds an octave higher than written.
- Double bass and double bassoon – sound an octave lower than written.
- Alto flute in G – sounds a perfect fourth lower than written.
- Cor anglais in F (corno inglese) and Horn in F – sound a perfect fifth lower than written.
- Clarinet in D, Trumpet in D – sound a major second higher than written.
- Clarinet in B $\flat$  – sounds a major second lower than written.
- Clarinet in A – sounds minor third lower than written.
- Bass clarinet in B $\flat$  – sounds major ninth lower than written.

## Rhythm and metre

The *Rite of Spring* is above all a rhythmic work. The Augurs of Spring for instance represent a pounding pagan dance. Here are some rhythmic features:

- **Free rhythm** at the beginning (rubato). The musicians accompanying the bassoon are required to play *colla parte*, i.e. with the soloist.

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- **Triplets, quintuplets etc.** are found everywhere e.g. the first three bars.
- **Polyrhythm** can be found at the climax of the introduction, where simultaneous triplets, septuplets, straight quavers, etc. (bar 64) all sound together to illustrate the chaos of the gradual awakening of nature at the beginning of spring. At figure 41 in the Ritual of Abduction the violins, violas and cellos play in compound triple time (9/8), while the double basses play in 4/8 and 5/8 and so the groupings do not align.
- More straight **forward two against three cross-rhythms** can be found at e.g. figure 15 where triplet quavers in the solo trumpet part work against the straight pairs of quavers in the string chords.
- **Time signature changes.** Stravinsky almost constantly changes his time signatures. This can be seen right from the start, where 4/4, 3/4 and 2/4 alternate.
- **Unusual time signatures** such as 5/8, 2/8 and 4/8 are used near the end of the Ritual of Abduction.
- **Syncopation** is at the heart of this piece (Horn 4 and Contrabassoon figure 31).
- Powerful off-beat string and horn chords appear randomly at the beginning of the Augurs.

## Texture

- **Polyphony** is the overriding texture of the piece, with frequent use of simultaneous fragmentary melodies. The prime example is the climax of the Introduction.
- The texture of the whole first section gradually builds up from a **monophonic** beginning on the solo bassoon, to a **two-part texture** in a **duet** with the French horn. At the *più mosso* after figure 3 there is a **four-part texture**. At the climax, just before figure 12 there are numerous polyphonic parts in the chaos of spring's arrival.
- There is an abrupt change to **homophonic** chords for the stamping dance for the Augurs of Spring. This changes to **melody-dominated homophony** with the solo trumpet entry.
- In the complex polyphony at, e.g., figure 29, Stravinsky uses **multiple ostinato** fragments, as well as a **countermelody** in trumpets and cellos.
- **Homorhythmic** texture is used in most parts of the climaxes in the Ritual of Abduction, e.g. from figure 43.

## Melody

- Though Stravinsky wasn't keen to admit it, a number of the melodies derived from Russian and other Eastern European **folk song**. The opening bassoon melody is derived from a piece in an anthology of **Lithuanian folk songs**.
- **Ostinato** dominates the whole work. The four-note ostinato idea in the cor anglais at figure 14 occurs at numerous points in the Augurs of Spring.
- Another important aspect of Stravinsky's melody is how **fragmentary** and **repetitive** it is. Typical is the solo trumpet fragment at figure 15, which also shows other typical melodic features such as **repeated notes** and **chromaticism**.
- An important melody begins in the solo horn at figure 25. As well as being typically short, it is also surprising in its completely **diatonic** nature. Notice also the use of the **acciaccatura**

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**ornament.** This kind of ornamentation is an important feature of Russian folk song and can also be found in the opening bassoon melody.

- Stravinsky also detaches short **motifs** from longer melodies and re-orders these units. At figure 27 the alto flute plays the new diatonic tune, and the last two notes with the acciaccatura are taken and repeated, before a motif from the middle of the tune is used.

## Harmony and tonality

Unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky did not entirely reject tonality at this stage of his career, though there is never any clear sense of key and a constant use of harsh **dissonance**. There are suggestions of **bitonality** at the beginning of the Augurs of Spring, where an **E $\flat$ 7 chord** in the upper strings is played simultaneously with an **F $\flat$  major chord** in the cellos and basses. The cor anglais ostinato at figure 14 continues to outline the E $\flat$ 7 chord, while the cellos outline the F $\flat$  chord, now notated as **E major**. Meanwhile the bassoons outline chords of C major and E minor to emphasise the sense of tonal confusion.

The combination of multiple conflicting tonal elements can be heard at the height of the chaos at the end of the introduction from figure 11. In addition to the C7 broken chords in the violas, the bassoons outline both E minor and E major harmonies. There are also **chromatic scales** in some of the woodwind parts. The effect is **atonal**, even though most of this is produced by tonal means.

The folk music elements all contain **modal** style melodies. The opening bassoon melody is **diatonic** in **Aeolian** (A to A) style.

## Structure

<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The introduction can be interpreted as a musical representation of the gradual awakening of the earth after the long Russian winter.</li> <li>• There are a number of melodic ideas. First the meandering bassoon solo melody, then the cor anglais idea at figure 2 with its distinctive rising perfect fourth. Next the oboe has a distinctive phrase with rising fifths at figure 5.</li> <li>• All the time the texture gradually increases from the original monophonic beginning to the chaotic multi-part polyphony that gradually emerges. Numerous short ostinato figures are combined.</li> <li>• A new piercing, high-pitched idea is introduced on the clarinet in D shortly after figure 9. Its first four notes dominate the texture and the music builds to a climax.</li> <li>• At figure 12 all suddenly stops and we are left with the solo bassoon playing the opening melody unaccompanied. Briefly the next movement is anticipated as we hear the four-note ostinato theme in <i>pizzicato</i> violins.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>The Augurs of Spring</b> From figure 13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The famous bitonal stamping chords of the beginning of the section are reinforced by the eight horns, producing randomised syncopation.</li> <li>• The four-note ostinato theme begins in the cor anglais at figure 14 and continues sporadically for much of the whole section. See the notes on harmony and tonality for a discussion of the chords used.</li> <li>• Fragments of melody are heard in the solo trumpet then the first violins, with three against two cross-rhythm and descending chromatic scalar figures. Repeated note figures then follow in the brass with rising and falling chromatic scales in the woodwind (figure 17).</li> <li>• At figure 18 the stamping chords return, then a new conjunct, diatonic melodic idea (theme 1) starts in the bassoons at figure 19 beginning with repeated notes – accented on the off-beats. This develops into a rising and falling scale which is echoed in the solo trombone at figure 20. This is all brought to a sudden, brutal stop just before figure 22, with <i>fortissimo</i> dissonant chords and prominent timpani and bass drum.</li> <li>• At figure 22 the cor anglais ostinato resumes and at figure 25 is the main melody of the section (theme 2) – a simple diatonic folk tune in the solo horn, answered more flamboyantly by the flute.</li> <li>• The triplet repeated note idea (from figure 15) returns at figure 26, before the alto flute takes up theme 2 (figure 27), while the ostinato accompaniment continues.</li> <li>• More instruments join the texture as we move towards another climax. The new tune continues to be repeated as a further melodic idea is introduced in the trumpets, shortly after figure 28 (theme 3). This starts with four repeated crotchets and is entirely conjunct. Two pairs of trumpets play this theme, both in parallel thirds. The four trumpets together produce parallel seventh chords in second inversion.</li> <li>• There is a short-lived quieter section as new ostinato figures begin at figure 30 and we move gradually towards the <i>fortissimo tutti</i> climax at the end of the section.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ritual of Abduction</b> From figure 37</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The music continues without a break. As trumpets hold a loud chord of Eb7 (the notes of the previous cor anglais ostinato), there is a new <i>presto</i> tempo and a compound triple time signature (9/8) with a new diatonic melody in <i>mixolydian mode</i> in the woodwind. Notice the flattened seventh C natural in the D major scale. The percussion parts are prominent here. Dissonant chromatic scales in consecutive seconds are heard from figure 39.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An important new horn figure is introduced at figure 40. It is built entirely from two notes a fifth apart and sounds against a dissonant accompaniment which includes an outline of the notes of the original cor anglais ostinato. The mixolydian idea returns now up a semitone.</li><li>• At figure 41 there is a polyrhythmic effect as the bass instruments play in groups of 4+5, while the upper strings play in straight compound triple 9/8.</li><li>• A gradual <i>crescendo</i> begins at figure 42. There is a <i>tutti fortissimo</i> at figure 43 in a variety of constantly changing metres, as a new conjunct homorhythmic quaver idea is introduced.</li><li>• The horn call returns at figure 44. Loud dissonant chords interrupt at figure 45, helped by an upbeat glissando and grace notes, as well as extremes in tessitura.</li><li>• At figure 46 the quaver idea from the beginning of the section returns, now a third lower than at its first occurrence.</li><li>• Again loud chords punctuate the texture and the section ends with sustained trills on the flutes.</li></ul>
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