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STRAVINSKY IN 1946*

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“I NEVER return – I only continue.” Thus Stravinsky answers one of the many questions which the recent performance of his *Symphony in Three Movements* (1945) has raised. This performance was recognized as an event of magnitude, but it presented some baffling surprises. Were there not sounds here that recalled the spirit of the period of *Les Noces* and *Sacre* more than the classical tenor of the *Symphony in C* or *Dances Concertantes* which one had come to expect of Stravinsky?

“People always expect the wrong thing of me. They think they have pinned me down and then all of a sudden – *au revoir*.” A departure, then – but Stravinsky is very anxious for the listener to hear that he did not travel backwards into his own past, even though many passages of the new work seem to recall it. “How can anyone with open ears think that I am just reworking ideas of my earlier works? It would be like saying that Mozart rehashed in *The Magic Flute* the ideas of *The Abduction*.” Instead of stressing a return of this new work to his older idioms, it seems more relevant to listen to it under the aspects of continuance and the development of an ever new and more valid sense of formal integration. The evolution of form is the most important factor in this symphony; that is where the greatest advances over preceding works have taken place. “The form of my earlier works, *Sacre* for instance, is not very developed. What a difference between that and the first movement of this symphony. The dialectic development of form has been growing in me for years, and it is just the realization of such a form in this work that makes me feel I am very far away from my earlier days.”

It is in this dialectic form, shaped through the equilibrium of contrast

* This study developed out of an interview with Mr. Stravinsky late in June. Mr. Dahl has been associated with Stravinsky for a number of years.

and similarities, without reference to traditional sectional or developmental precepts that the composer sees the significance of his new work, much more than in the harmonic or rhythmic features which have reminded us of his earlier victories.

To have looked for another *Symphony in C* would have been equally futile. Each of Stravinsky's works has its own inherent biological principle of growth and biological point of departure which it follows from the outset ("just as asparagus doesn't grow like radishes"). The character of the specific initial thematic and orchestral material exerts a germinal force that each work must follow individually. The aim in the new symphony is completely different from the aim of the *Symphony in C*. In the latter the shaping of phrases takes place within a certain convention and the approach is rather formal, it is an interpretation of prescribed principles of construction. But the solution sought in the new work is of quite another nature: to erect a large edifice through the force of freely evolving growth alone. "It is the biggest form I ever approached," says Stravinsky, and indeed it is hard to think of another movement of such length as the first one in this work which establishes symphonic coherence without the use of structural repetitions. The newness of the form requires newness of content – and this we believe to be the reason for the startlingly different sound-world of the new symphony.

In analyzing its technical details we will receive very little help from the composer. "It is not up to me to explain and judge my music. That is not my role. I have to write it – that is all." This attitude of Stravinsky's is not just an evasion but of much deeper significance. It mirrors his basic attitude towards his composing. Our time has seen the theorizing composer to an extraordinary extent – styles are fortified by systems, techniques defended with apologia. Stravinsky, however, follows no system (which would make both *a priori* and *a posteriori* analysis easy and natural for him) but he trusts to the guidance and logic of his instinct. "When a dog is on a track which excites him it will make the saliva run in his mouth – likewise my mental saliva will be running when I feel myself on an interesting and exciting track, which thus proves to be the right track." That this procedure is carried out with the most brilliant craftsmanship of organization attests to nothing so much as to the quality of Stravinsky's instinct.

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We are on our own, then, in the attempt to describe some of the important facets of this work. And since the symphony represents a macrocosm of the results of Stravinsky's long creative life, a multitude of equally important points will have to be left out altogether.

The wonderful achievement of the first movement is the fact that, in spite of its continuous free evolution, the intentional absence of both

thematic development and striking melodic interest, it creates a break-less and tight structural whole. And, secondly, that the harmonies, not diatonic or triadic, but of continuous high chromatic tension, are forced into an underlying plan of logical organization. One can well understand the expression of both pride and relief with which the composer admits that this piece required "*un gros travail de forme.*" Never before has Stravinsky dared to create a large autonomous and disciplined form of such freedom, a form which stands on its own feet without help from words or theatrical movement. We can see scattered steps toward it in works like the *Symphonies for Wind Instruments*, *Concertino for String Quartet*, *Symphony of Psalms*, *Ode*, and particularly the *Concerto for Two Pianos* which Stravinsky himself believes to be of close relationship to the new symphony. But points of similarity, like the use of dissonances and intervals, the block construction of phrases, the bounding of melodies by an outer interval, the flatness of large spaces or planes, should not obscure the fact that the new asparagus is basically different from the earlier radishes.

The over-all plan of the first movement is one of two outer "tutti" sections framing a central "solo" part. The approximate time proportion of those three sections is 2:3:1. The third section brings a modified return of some of the motivic material of the first and second in reverse order. No "recapitulation," but rather varied references. In the center section of the movement the texture becomes entirely polyphonic. This remarkable polyphony, which would be well worth a special study (Stravinsky: ". . . j'attache beaucoup d'importance à ces pages . . .") fills the functions of a "development," as does the fugal section in the last movement. The term development here should be well differentiated from that applied to the sonata form or the thematic development of the romanticists. It signifies here an *inner* intensification of form through purely contrapuntal means, instead of through external dynamics (the section is played quite softly throughout). The movement develops to a climax through the density of construction alone, which is entirely different from traditional development. The end of this central section gets completely off the ground; all motivic references are hidden behind the kaleidoscopic but perfectly proportioned juxtapositions of free shapes.

Before discussing the harmonic progression of the first movement it is worth quoting some of the minuscular "thematic cells" which here take the place of fullgrown themes or melodies.* All of them, taken by themselves, are neutral and nondescript – simple intervals or scale fragments, whereby one is almost reminded of certain Beethoven works which also achieve so much with so little, though in quite a different way. The opening is a large gesture

* Musical illustrations from the *Symphony in Three Movements* by permission of Associated Music Publishers, the copyright owners, who will bring out the miniature score in August, 1946.

Example a) is a musical score for a 4/4 piece with a tempo of 160 (♩=80). It features three staves: WINDS, STR., and THB. CB. The music is characterized by a driving, stamped rhythm with accents, typical of the composer's style.

in unison, followed by woodwind chords harmonized in thirds and sixths in wide spacing.

One interval then gains prominence, the minor third (or major sixth). It is first pronounced by the horns (b), becomes the ostinato bass of an extended passage of great rhythmic drive (c), and introduces later the central section (d).

The passage (c), with its stamping beat and biting accents could only have been written by the composer of *Sacre*. But closer examination reveals the greater subtlety here in the phrasing of the gradual melodic ascent and in the distribution of chords (it is noteworthy in view of later discussion that the V-seven chord never coincides with C in the bass) and the proportioning of this section makes it an organic part of the whole symphonic pattern, different from the shorter, less developed ballet pattern.

Examples b), c), d), and e) are musical scores for various instruments. Example b) shows HAM. p, ma marc. and CL. + B. CL. parts. Example c) shows PIANO and VL. + VLA. parts. Example d) shows P. Ph. and P. HRNS. parts. Example e) shows CL. and VC. parts. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation, and tempo markings.

The inconspicuous diatonic motif M in example (d) is capable of becoming one of the main building stones of the above mentioned polyphonic section, and in example (e) we see the celli carry out a subtle combination of both scale and minor third motif, to which a wide curve in the clarinets is added (remarkable, how this clarinet figure with all its chromaticism, brings out the reference tone A in the bass by coinciding with its overtones!).

On the last three bars of the movement the harmony shifts to C major with an added B. This closing C major is so superbly calculated and placed that all of the harmonies during the eleven minutes which it takes us to arrive there receive their meaning from it. The very opening starts with the dominant G – see example (a) above – and the following six notes of the unison (besides pointing with the G–A \flat progression to the interval of the minor second, harmonic determinant of the whole symphony), outline a chord of basic structural importance for both the first and last movement.

The image shows a musical score for two movements. The first movement is marked with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It begins with a chord labeled 'T' (Tritone) and a '5' (Fifth). The second movement is marked with a bass clef and a key signature of two flats. It begins with a chord labeled 'T' and a 'DR.' (Dominant Seventh). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'TIMP.' (Timpani). The overall structure shows a progression from a dominant chord in the first movement to a tonic chord in the second movement.

The tritone chord (T), combination of G major and D \flat major, is certainly neither new nor original. Transposed, it was the famous *Petrouchka* chord, and one of the mainstays of the impressionists as well, and it even played a decisive role in a work of such different climate as Alban Berg's *Lulu*, where it represented the "exits" and "entrances" of the outside world. Its use in this symphony, however, shows again how Stravinsky can vitalize a seemingly threadbare chord by cleaning it of all extra-musical connotations, by ever new and fresh arrangements of its notes and, above all, by giving it a new structural meaning and organizational force. Illustration (f) outlines the basic progression of the movement from dominant T to tonic S. It is important to note that the final C major is implied throughout but always avoided – see example (c) above. Individual combinations of notes from chord T are alternately charged with dominant function in different sections which interrelate and form larger tone-center units, so that the whole movement becomes a dominant to the last chord.

Amazement over such structural cunning should not lead us to overlook the extraordinary expressive force of this movement, the sustained power of rhetoric which has been made servant of a large form (it would be almost too obvious to mention the – even for Stravinsky – unsurpassed clarity and originality of its orchestration). That these qualities are achieved within the strict and confining limitations which Stravinsky's discriminating taste imposes on his choice of material recalls the words of Valéry that Boulanger quotes: "An artist is judged by the quality of his refusals."

The chamber music of the second movement can be mentioned here just in passing. The graceful and melancholy ornamentations of flute and harp are not at all enigmatic since the form is quite simple and restrained.

In the last movement, however, we are again confronted with a structure which is not easily grasped. Here is some of the important material:

i) $J=138$
 j) $J=138$
 k) $J=138$
 d=80

The movement opens with stamping beats in luminous C major (i), as if in affirmation of the chord which closed the first movement. The following parts are organized in free sectional arrangement which at first impression seems to give the movement a somewhat episodic character. But closer hearing reveals how neatly these sections are balanced. In discussing their relationship we should remember that Stravinsky calculated his works in terms of time-units, and thus we find, in spite of shifting tempi, *più mosso* sections, etc., the astonishingly simple proportions (in minutes) of 1:2:1:1:1. A chart could clarify most easily how in these five sections motion and rest, loudness and softness, polyphony and chordal structure, repetition and non-repetition are weighed against each other and brought into equilibrium. The third section uses the same thematic material as the first, the second starting with the bassoon-duet (m), leads the arpeggio string figure (j) – scored for first violins and double basses alone! – into the strong rhythmic and chordal tutti (k). The fourth is a fugue on the theme (p), the last is a stretta-like coda, starting with (l) and driving up to a brilliant rhythmic display which is patterned after (k).

The next example shows how the theme of the fugal section (p) is

m) $J=138$
 n) $J=138$
 o) $d=80$

gradually arrived at, from the start of the second section on (m).

The composer wants this fugue theme to be understood as fulfillment and affirmation of the sections leading up to it. The clarinet figure (n) anticipates the sixth and eighth bar of this theme and the immediately preceding phrase (c) leads organically into it. The theme itself is quite unlike any other theme in music – daring in its intervals as well as in rhythmic scheme and orchestration (piano and trombone). Its wide skips of sevenths and ninths are not used for the purpose of expressive intensity (as the same intervals are used by the chromatic school) but form an unemotional black-and-white design of jagged contours. The fugal technique does not lead to any dynamic climax. As in the first movement, the intricate dissonant polyphony only increases the inner density, and thus gives a new meaning to the term development, as Stravinsky applies it to this section. “There are no mountains in this fugue, everything stays on the mezzopiano level. A flat plane, like the desert.”

Illustration (k) above illustrates how the seemingly surprising ending of the symphony in the tonality of $D\flat$ is prepared far in advance. Again the tritone chord T is the basic starting point, but this time the leading of the lowest voice ($A\flat$, $B\flat$, $D\flat$) and the stress of the $D\flat$ in the orchestration shows us a different interpretation of it. It is no longer a dominant but a pan-diatonic chord in $D\flat$ – T and U in example (g). How the final chord is arrived at in typically Stravinskian “fusion of cadence” (another phenomenon which is worth a separate study) is shown in example (h) above. The basic progression is I - II - I, with the final resolution delayed by the suspension notes of the bass. The first of these (C and E in the timpani) are a last reminder of the C major tonality, and Stravinsky himself confesses he’s “very satisfied to have written that timpani part.”

The interval tension in the whole symphony is continually high (see the last measures of example 1). Minor seconds, major sevenths, minor ninths are used throughout with great consistency and often astonishing bite. The unequivocal truthfulness of the whole design is one of the reasons for recognizing this work as one of the most directly speaking embodiments of contemporary form. Let it be said at once, this is no island music. It is here and now – and it has the power to move.

Is this language, in its “breaking away” from so many previous precepts, a new departure for Stravinsky?

He says: “I cannot answer that question. I do not have any ultimate viewpoint of composition and when I write my next symphony it will then be an expression of my will at that moment. And what that will is going to be I do not know now. I wish people would let me have the privilege of being at least a little bit unconscious. It is so nice sometimes to go blind, just with the *feeling* for the right thing!”