

6c Stravinsky The Rite of Spring

Analysis

Recommended Essay Structure

Very brief contextual introduction

Paragraph 1: Element of Music 1

a) Sentences 1-2: Describe and contextualise

Describe: using musical vocabulary identify/describe the feature relating to the element of music

Contextualise: comment '...which is typical/atypical/advanced/conservative for that period/genre/style'

b) Sentences 2-3: Effect

Comment 'The effect of this is to...' Describe the effect / composer's intended effect of this feature on the music.

c) Sentences 2-3: Comparison

Comment 'This is similar to/different from X (composer & title) composed earlier/later/during the same/Baroque/Classical/Romantic period in which...'

For each element of music, to complete the paragraph, follow steps (a)-(c) at least four times, identifying at least four features relating to that element, spending no more than 12 minutes.

Paragraph 2: Element of Music 2

Follow steps (a)-(c) at least four times, identifying at least four features relating to that element, spending no more than 12 minutes.

Paragraph 3: Element of Music 3

Follow steps (a)-(c) at least four times, identifying at least four features relating to that element, spending no more than 12 minutes.

Context

*Stravinsky was among the most influential early 20th century composers, pioneering his unique style of modernism (which included nationalism, neo-classicism and serialism alongside other 20th century experimental and impressionist styles), composing a wide range of ballets, operas, concertos, choral works, symphonies, chamber music and music theatre.

*The Rite of Spring was premiered in 1913 following Stravinsky's successful ballets 'The Firebird' (1910) and 'Petrouchka' (1911) commissioned by Diaghilev for the world famous Ballet Russes, choreographed by Nijinsky, and performed in Paris, the world's cultural capital at that time.

Sonority: Use of instruments

*By the early 20th century, the typical symphony orchestra had grown to its largest size through developments during the Romantic period, culminating in the

orchestras of Bruckner and Mahler. Stravinsky expanded on the standard orchestral forces of double woodwind and small brass section with much larger quintuple woodwind and a huge brass section of 18 players, incorporating non-standard instruments / extended instrument families including alto flute, D piccolo clarinet, contrabassoon, piccolo flute, cor anglais and bass clarinet. The effect of this was to create the widest possible range of timbres and pitches, using unfamiliar sounds at the extremes of the range of each instrument family.

*Stravinsky was not the only composer who sought wider ranges of pitch and timbre during the late romantic and early modern periods. Wagner was so keen to achieve this, he invented his own instruments such as the Wagner tuba, producing its own unique sound.

*The variety of instruments used was not the only way in which Stravinsky created revolutionary musical timbres. The ways in which he required instruments to be played also achieved this. Using a wide range of playing techniques, including extended techniques; performing at the extremes of each instrumental range; and using unusual combinations of instruments are all ways in which Stravinsky's palette of timbres is increased in the Rite of Spring.

*These features of 20th century music contrast greatly with orchestral and choral music of the Baroque period during which the orchestra we know today was still to be established. In Bach's cantata 'Ein Feste Burg', the instrumental ranges are much more limited, in part through their use to double (and mimic) the vocal lines in this work. Indeed, in Renaissance music, vocal and instrumental lines were often indistinguishable (not specified in the score).

*The range of playing techniques, some of which may be described as extended techniques, heard in Stravinsky's work is vast. Unusual woodwind techniques include flutter tonguing, extended trills, unexpected changes between staccato and legato, disjunct acciaccaturas (with large leaps between the grace note and parent note) and a wide range of other accents and articulation. The brass add to these techniques including muted and hand-stopped notes and harmonics, bells up and glissandi. The strings can be heard playing repeated down bows (especially the 'Rite' chord in 'Augurs of Spring'), harmonics and glissando harmonics, pizzicato, arco, col legno (wood of the bow), muted, strumming pizzicato, double and triple stopping, extreme divisi (e.g. 6 simultaneous double bass parts) and contrasts between solo and tutti.

*Using a wide range of extended techniques is a common feature of 20th century music. Extended string playing techniques are central to works by composers such as Ravel in Tzigane and, later in the 20th century, Saariaho.

*The extreme pitch ranges used by instruments in each family can be heard from the very start of the piece. Stravinsky uses a shocking high C played by the bassoon to open the ballet, creating a timbre perhaps never heard before in concert. Similar use of very high tessituras is heard in other instruments, most obviously the

non-standard orchestral instruments such as the piccolo flute and clarinet (which play some of the highest pitches in this work), whilst unexpectedly low woodwind timbres are achieved through use of the alto flute. The double basses, contrabassoon and bass clarinet are used not only alone but in dense low pitched chords together to create unusually dark timbres. Sometimes these extremely high and low pitches are juxtaposed within only a few bars of each other. For example, the lowest double bass, tuba, timpani and bass drum notes are followed by piercingly high piccolo flute and piccolo trumpet dissonances, which then descend through the brass and woodwind to similarly low tessituras in the middle section of 'Augurs of Spring'.

*Elgar's Cello Concerto similarly explores the extremes of instrumental range, including an ascent from the lowest to the highest notes of the solo cello within the opening bars. Composed at a similar time to the Rite of Spring, this is typical of early 20th century composers.

*In works by Mozart and Haydn, such as Haydn's Symphony 104, the Classical conventions of string dominated textures, with woodwind and brass used sparingly, mainly to double the strings, are evident. Through the Romantic period, composers (like Berlioz) broke away from these constraints, leading to 20th century works like the Rite of Spring freely sharing the most important melodic material between all sections of the orchestra, even with the most unconventional orchestral instruments found in Stravinsky's vastly expanded woodwind and brass sections. The woodwind and brass now play very much independently of the strings, and the conventional four part choruses (e.g. of violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, or 2 oboes, 2 bassoons) are virtually forgotten and replaced with unrelated combinations such as those which begin 'Augurs of Spring': Cor Anglais, 2 bassoons and cello played staccato / pizzicato, contrasted with double stopped lower strings. Other unusual combinations in atypical voicings can be found in Stravinsky's Introduction, beginning monophonic with an extremely high bassoon solo, all of the instruments featured are woodwind and brass (omitting strings entirely). The effect is to create a much more varied range of timbres than played, for example, by a quartet of string instruments.

Melody

*Typical of 20th century music, many of Stravinsky's melodies are more disjunct, more often using chromatic notes and more frequently using irregular phrase lengths than earlier Classical and Romantic music. Many of Stravinsky's melodies are complex due to the wide range of dotted, tied and triplet rhythms (often creating cross-rhythms, making unclear the sense of metre and pulse), and include unfamiliar intervals such as augmented and diminished intervals (including the tritone) resulting from chromatic notes.

*In contrast, works by classical composers such as Mozart avoid many features of Stravinsky's melody writing. In Mozart's Sonata in A for example, he follows the classical conventions of conjunct diatonic melodies, balanced phrasing and metrical rhythms. Stravinsky's fame came from breaking many of these earlier conventions.

*In his melodies, Stravinsky often avoids conventional major and minor scales, instead choosing unusual pitch combinations, some of which can be described as modal. Many of these modal melodies were inspired by Eastern European folk songs, including the opening bassoon melody from a Lithuanian anthology of folk songs, in the Aeolian mode. Stravinsky's unique sound results from layering these melodies in a variety of keys, resulting in bitonality and polytonality.

*Other 20th century approaches to dissonance created by dense contrapuntal textures include the diatonic dissonances of minimalist music: in Steve Reich's Electric Counterpoint, his many layered melodies are typically diatonic, sometimes pentatonic.

*Unlike many Classical and Romantic melodic themes which are often eight or sixteen bars in length, Stravinsky prefers to use much shorter melodies, more accurately described as melodic motifs or cells, and repeat these to create melodic ostinatos. Sometimes these ostinatos emphasise the metre, such as the 4-note motif which forms the cor anglais ostinato at the beginning of 'Augurs of Spring'. Sometimes these motifs are repeated in a non-metrical way, creating cross-rhythms and the effect of improvisation, such as the oboe solo heard halfway through the introduction, creating an interlude between tutti sections.

*In Schumann's Piano Trio in G minor movement 1, the principal themes of both the first and second subjects are organised in four or eight bar phrases, typical of the early Romantic style.

*In his melodies, Stravinsky contrasts the diatonic melodies borrowed from Eastern European folk songs with much more complex, original melodic material. This complexity results from combining chromatic, scalar movement with more angular movement through augmented and diminished intervals, both small and dramatically large intervals, in unpredictable patterns.

*Use of continuous chromatic movement such as this was much less common in earlier works such as Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique. Berlioz uses unusual unison chromatic scales only for a short period during the development section to modulate in an unconventional way.

Texture

*Stravinsky avoids many of the most common, melody dominated homophonic textures heard in earlier Romantic and Classical music, replacing these with revolutionary polyphonic and occasionally monophonic or chordal homophonic textures. Stravinsky's musical material can have both melodic qualities: using a range

of pitches and intervals, moving in conjunct arch shapes; and the qualities of an accompaniment: using angular movement, outlining the notes of both consonant and dissonant chords. For this reason no single line can easily be identified as the melody, and instead all lines accompany each other in complex polyphonic textures.

*In contrast, in Mozart's Piano Sonata in C, typical of his style, there is great clarity between the melody and accompaniment: the mainly conjunct right hand melody is accompanied by light alberti and other broken and block chord accompaniments, typical of the Classical period.

*Stravinsky creates textural and timbral contrast with dramatic antiphony: unusual combinations of instruments are contrasted with each other through abrupt antiphonal changes. For example, in the Introduction, Stravinsky contrasts a virtuosic, complex polyphonic passage for upper woodwind with a more chordal, dense, low pitched passage for lower woodwind and strings, notably 2 contrabassoon and 6 bass parts creating an unusually dense texture.

*Antiphony has been an important part of orchestral music since the early Romantic period when the woodwind and brass sections more frequently broke away from simply doubling the strings, and played their own independent part. Nonetheless, in these cases their groupings would remain conventional: the instruments would typically play in instrument families. An example is Beethoven's symphonies, such as his 7th, in which the strings and woodwind play a dialogue over a number of bars.

*Homorhythm also provides some of Stravinsky's most shocking textures, specifically the incessant reiteration of the 'rite' chord during the opening of the Augurs of Spring in a constant quaver rhythm. Although there are horn interjections, these remain within the homorhythm. Also, Stravinsky uses homorhythm to emphasise the climax and conclusion of a musical idea: in Jeu de rapt, the constant quaver motif heard in polyphony with contrasting motifs (including triplet cross rhythms) is brought to a climax through the statement of the motif finally with tutti orchestra playing the motif homorhythmically (creating homophony).

*This is similar to the use of polyphony and homophony in many Baroque works. In Handel's And the Glory of the Lord, for example, thematic motifs are introduced in imitative counterpoint, before the same motif is finally heard in homophony to mark the cadence point and conclude the phrase.

Harmony and Tonality

*Stravinsky's music within this work avoids diatonic major or minor keys, undermining the sense of tonality through many dissonant chords and chromatic notes. Nonetheless, some sense of tonality, in the form of tonal centres and modes, can be heard, meaning that complete atonality (as heard in the music of composers such as Schoenberg) is not a feature of the Rite of Spring.

*The new directions taken by composers at this time were, in particular, associated with harmony and tonality: earlier composers such as Wagner and Debussy had developed tonal music to its limit through extreme chromaticism and modality. Whilst Stravinsky developed his own unique approach to harmony and tonality, other revolutionaries rejected tonality completely. Schoenberg with his second string quartet (1908) created his first wholly atonal work, followed later by 12 tone serialist atonal works, developing the style.

*Another technique which undermines traditional tonality within Stravinsky's work is bitonality: Stravinsky simultaneously uses motifs from unrelated keys, giving no single key greatest importance. For example, the incessant repetition of two simultaneous chords: F flat major played by cellos and basses and E flat 7 played by violas and 2nd violins, periodically doubled by the horn section, establishes both as dual tonic chords almost through the movement 'Augurs of Spring', known as the 'Rite' chord. The 'Rite' chord as well as being described as a bitonal chord (establishing two keys) might also be described as a compound chord or polychord (regardless of tonality).

*Stravinsky developed his use of bitonality in other earlier works. For example, the 'Petroushka' chord, F# major and C major, became known as such through its use in Stravinsky's 1911 ballet of the same name, representing the main character like a leitmotif. Along with the Firebird, these ballets are considered a groundbreaking trio of Stravinsky's work.

*Other harmonic features of Stravinsky's work are also typical of the early 20th Century. The harmony of the Rite of Spring is almost entirely non-functional, avoiding traditional cadences and voice leading. Stravinsky instead resolves phrases to less dissonant chords: resolution is achieved through degrees of dissonance (rather than consonance as heard in Baroque, Classical and early Romantic music). Other phrases are resolved to unison or octave textures (among the few non-dissonant textures in Stravinsky's work). For example, following the dense, dissonant, polyphonic, climactic, penultimate section of the Introduction, Stravinsky creates a non-conventional cadence onto a final somewhat dissonant chord. Stravinsky enhances the sense of resolution to this dissonance through the change in texture (to chordal homophony) and rhythm (single, sustained notes in each part).

*Schoenberg described this 20th century phenomenon as 'the emancipation of dissonance'. Composers such as Debussy helped to establish the use of dissonant chords freely and non-functionally in works such as 'Pagodes', which 'resolves' to a B9add6 final, dissonant chord.

*When Stravinsky uses conventional chords, they are typically adjacent to many unrelated chords, preventing a sense of tonality from being created. For example, following the Eb7/Fb 'Rite' chord (which is outlined and sustained in the cor anglais ostinato) beginning the Augurs of Spring, the bassoon goes on to alternate C major

and E minor chords, with the cello alternating E major and C major chords in opposition. Rather than leading to a sense of these keys, instead the effect is tonal chaos.

*Stravinsky's three early ballets represent a revolution in his approach to using these conventional and unconventional chords so freely, as he develops his own, unique harmonic language. This is evident in Stravinsky's first piano sonata (1903) which, in contrast, was written in a late Romantic style, with functional harmony, and tonality enhanced with chromaticism (reflecting the harmonic style of Russian late romantic music).

Context

*Stravinsky was a Russian composer who rose to fame in Paris, following performances given by the Ballets Russes of his three ballets: the Firebird (1910), Petrushka (1911) and the Rite of Spring (1913).

*His music was revolutionary, rejecting western musical conventions of the Romantic period, and embracing new musical directions, typical of the early 20th century, a time known for a wide range of new musical movements (including serialism, atonality, neo-classicism, experimentalism and even jazz). Stravinsky is notable for composing music which uses many of these styles but also none.

*The Rite of Spring caused great controversy for its dissonant music composed by Stravinsky, and its violent choreography created by Nijinsky, brought together by the impresario Diaghilev, leading to a riot at the first performance.

Use of Performing Forces

*In this work Stravinsky uses one of the largest orchestras ever assembled, including quintuple woodwind and double brass along with a large and varied percussion section, continuing the growth of the orchestra witnessed during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The effect is to allow Stravinsky to explore the widest possible range of orchestral timbres.

*A century earlier, a composer such as Berlioz in his *Symphonie Fantastique* used a much smaller orchestra in comparison. Typical of the Romantic period, Berlioz's work already shows signs of the developments to come, including a well-established woodwind section playing prominent soli melodies (such as the *idée fixe* in this work).

*In this work Stravinsky expands the standard woodwind and brass sections with instruments which play at the extremes of their families' pitch ranges, including piccolo and alto flute, cor anglais, piccolo D and B flat bass clarinet, contrabassoon, piccolo D trumpet, tuba. Additionally, these and other instruments play in unusually high and low tessituras, often in prominent soli passages, such as the opening bassoon solo, widening the pitch range further. The effect of this is to create striking timbres and stark textures not previously heard, imitating the unconventional choreography and primitive natural sounds associated with the narrative.

*Other composers of the time such as Rachmaninov, although writing for a large orchestra, used more conventional instruments in more traditional tessituras. Unlike Stravinsky's work, his second piano concerto pairs lush string melodies with comparatively restrained, expressive woodwind melodies (such as the clarinet solo in Mvt II).

*Stravinsky frequently varies the number of instruments playing and their relationships to each other, contrasting sparse, soli passages to violent tutti, for example in mvt II. alternating tutti strings and cor anglais and bassoon soli, and in

mvt. I building complex polyphony towards a cacophonous tutti followed by dramatic reduction to solo bassoon once again. Due to the sheer number of instruments the effect of this is to create extreme dynamic contrasts.

*Contrasting soli and tutti passages is nothing new: Baroque composers such as Bach in his Brandenburg Concerto No.5, achieve many terraced dynamics by juxtaposing concertino and ripieno passages. These contrasts, however, due to a much smaller number of instruments and their limited dynamic ranges would have been much smaller in the Baroque period.

*Along with the number and range of instruments used by Stravinsky, it is his use of extended and modified instrumental techniques which most clearly shows that this work was composed in the 20th century, at a time when composers were exploring the limits of each instrument's capabilities. Techniques including flutter tonguing, col legno (with the wood of the bow), string harmonics, use of mutes, extensive pizzicato, multi-stopping, glissandos, divisi and repeated down-bows have the effect of distancing Stravinsky's work from the Romantic era and from conventional orchestral timbres.

*Whilst Stravinsky might have aimed to test the limits of each instrument's timbral range, the development of experimental music through the 20th century showed that he had not yet reached this goal, with later composers such as Saariaho in 'Petals' for solo cello and Cage in 'Three Dances for Prepared Piano' achieving yet greater variety exploiting the technologies of their time.

Rhythm and Metre

*Throughout the Rite of Spring Stravinsky uses highly complex rhythms including a wide range of tuplets (from duplets to decuplets), note lengths (from semi-breves to demi-semiquavers) and ornaments (such as trills, acciacaturas and appoggiaturas) organised into a highly dense, complex polyphonic, polyrhythmic texture which, in turn creates cross-rhythms and polyrhythms, an example of which is the climax of the introduction. Such a texture was revolutionary even in the 20th century, contrasting dramatically with recent works from the Romantic period. The effect of this highly organised complexity is, ironically, to create a sense of organic randomness reflecting the story of the creation of the earth.

*Whilst Stravinsky became arguably the most famous composer of music in this style, composers such as Charles Ives in his Wind Quintet 'Unanswered Question' was composing in a similarly rhythmically complex way. Even with fewer instruments than Stravinsky, this layered rhythmic complexity nonetheless leads to dense cross-rhythms.

Melody

*Typical of music in the early 20th century, the melodies in Rite of Spring are often disjunct (angular) and highly chromatic (to such an extent that the tonality of many passages of music becomes unclear). This effect is increased by the use of simultaneous melodies in different keys (or with different tonal centres) leading to bitonality. For example, the woodwind melodies between figures 8 and 11 in the Introduction, use highly complex, chromatic, angular lines and intervals, layered and repeated in short phrases.

*Other composers such as Shostakovich and Schoenberg found similar new directions for melodic writing in the 20th century. At the same time, some composers continued to compose melodies in a Romantic style, for example Rachmaninov, Elgar and Strauss.

*These new directions contrast with the romantic melodic writing of composers such as Tchaikovsky in his pas de deux from the Nutcracker written only 21 years earlier (in 1892).

*Additionally, Stravinsky creates (repetition and ostinato) - more particular / unique to Stravinsky

*Stravinsky's Rite of Spring includes melodies which both quote and are influenced by (are pastiches of) folk melodies, in particular folk melodies from Lithuania. Use of modes (e.g. the opening Aeolian bassoon solo), inconsistent or changing metres, heavy ornamentation, use of triplets and compound metres, solo led rubato and examples of rapid stepwise movement are all examples of the influence of folk melodies. Lithuanian folk melodies are closely associated with Paganism: a theme of this ballet. Nationalism such as this, with its interest in folk traditions, was a growing trend in the early 20th Century.

*Stravinsky was inspired by Rimsky Korsakov whose music is an early example of 20th century Russian nationalism, and who collected folk melodies which in turn influenced his own melodic writing in works such as Scheherezade.

Texture

*In the Rite of Spring, like many other elements in this work, Stravinsky uses a wide range of textures which change frequently and often suddenly, sometimes between tutti orchestra and soli instruments creating extreme contrast. For example, at figure 12 in the Introduction, the texture changes from cacophonous, dense polyphony in which almost all instruments of the orchestra play unrelated, layered, simultaneous ostinati to a lyrical, monophonic bassoon solo.

*Other 20th century composers create similar moments of impact with contrasting texture changes, such as that heard between the solo clarinet and tutti orchestra in the opening bars of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, heightened by the large size of the 20th century orchestra.

*The most distinctive moments in Stravinsky's ballet, such as the appearance of the Rite chord (Eb7 chord / Fb chord, a polychord, suggesting bitonality) at Fig. 13 is enhanced by forceful, repeated homorhythmic chords in the lower strings, varied only with accented syncopated interjecting stabs in the horns, creating this unmistakable moment in music history. These chords are made more shocking still by the sudden changes in texture between soft, 3-part polyphonic woodwind ostinati, and these dense low pitched chords, for example at Fig. 14.

*Dvorak's Symphony No.9 composed only a few years earlier in 1893 shows just how revolutionary Stravinsky's unconventional textures were: Dvorak relies heavily on the melody dominated textures of the Romantic period, typical of a Czech nationalist composer.