

- I think most people view this *Septet* as a transitional piece. When I say "transitional," I mean that it stands kind in between Stravinsky's neo-classical period, which most people say ended with *The Rake's Progress* around 1951, and his later work, which was serial. So how does a composer transition between neo-classicism and serialism, which seem perhaps like two totally different styles?
- Well Stravinsky was working on a *Cantata* right before working on the *Septet*. And before that, he had written a *Mass*. I think writing both the *Mass* and the *Cantata* inherently got Stravinsky to think more closely about counterpoint due to the polyphonic traditions of both genres.
- So it's my position that through counterpoint and contrapuntal methods, Stravinsky transitioned between neo-classicism and serialism. Scholars often say that the way composers like Schoenberg or Webern moved from atonalism to a more structured 12-tone system was through the use of inversions and retrogrades, augmentations, and diminutions on a row theme, just like those methods that Renaissance composers used to extend a cantus firmus into an entire work.
- So with traditional contrapuntal techniques already on Stravinsky's brain in the early 1950s, in February of 1952 Stravinsky happened to see a concert of Schoenberg's *Suite*, op. 29 for 3 clarinets, 3 strings, and piano. Schoenberg's piece was written as kind of a 12-tone Baroque Suite with dance movements. I don't think it's a coincidence that Stravinsky's *Septet* shares both a general instrumentation and many formal characteristics with Schoenberg's piece. So we see a debt that Stravinsky has here to Schoenberg, although for time's sake I won't explore that any further.
- Before we take a look at the first movement, I wanted to point out that this piece is in no way a tonal work. Even though the *Septet* acts as a transition between the neo-classical style and Stravinsky's later style, I think the tonal aspects of neo-classicism are basically gone. Neo-classicism manifests itself mostly through the structural aspects of the work. Instead of tonality, Stravinsky is writing in a centric system, where a central note or chord acts as a goal toward which the music seems to move
- If we look at the opening of this *Septet*, we can see that Stravinsky has written three sharps, implying some sort of quote/unquote key such as A major. But as you'll see throughout this movement, Stravinsky freely floats in and out of major and minor. It would hard to say, therefore, that we're really in a major or minor tonality. Just take a look at the first two measures. The first seven notes of the clarinet are the "theme," which I've transposed for you in Ex. 1a. The theme has both C-natural and C-sharp. So even though the theme strongly implies some sort of A chord, we can't tell if it's major or minor. This is one manifestation of "centricity:" the piece is centered around that pitch {A} but regular harmonic tonal functions are gone.
- While we're looking at the opening of this movement, notice how the theme appears in augmentation in the horn and bassoon parts. Notice also how Stravinsky is fairly free in the rhythmic values he chooses for the augmentation; the horn part doesn't do it exactly. Also notice how the bassoon has a kind of tonal response in the way it has a C# as the third note of the

second bar instead of the C natural. My point is that Stravinsky is fairly freely modifying the pitch and rhythmic content of the theme as needed. He's not locked into some strict serial procedure.

- Also take a glance down at the last measure on this first page. Notice how the opening theme comes back, but now it's displaced by a beat within the meter. It's kind of like Stravinsky's use of "non-periodic" rhythms here, in that he sort of fools us as to where the downbeat is. Do we really hear this piece in 3/4?
- As the second page of my handout tells you, most people think of this first movement as in sonata form. The main reason for this is because of the repeat of a whole section of music at rehearsal number 9. You might call the E-minor passage at Reh. #1 a "second subject," but don't try to look too closely for traditional facets of sonata form. I think the form is pretty loose, just like the way Stravinsky's uses of key and thematic transformation are loose.

[Play First Movement]

- I want to point out one very interesting thing about this first movement before we move on. Take a look at Reh. #11 and compare the music to Reh. #2. You should see that it's the exact same music just transposed down a whole step. It's like the second theme coming back now in the tonic, in Stravinsky's world, I guess, but notice how at Reh. #2, we had a key signature of A major. If we transpose A major down a whole step, I would think we would be left with a key signature of G major, i.e. one sharp. But at Reh. #11 we have no key signature. Yet the three sharps came back for the beginning of the Recapitulation at Reh. #9. So my question is, did Stravinsky conceive of this second half of the Recapitulation as in C major or did he just get fed up with key signatures and just decide to get rid of them. Perhaps in this Recapitulation we can see exactly where Stravinsky let go, because his later works, and the rest of the movements in this *Septet*, do not use a key signature.
- Before looking at the other two movements, I have to tell a funny story. Sometime after the first movement was completed but before Stravinsky had begun on the other two, Robert Craft: wrote out the series of Schoenberg's Wind Quintet, op. 26 on a sheet of music manuscript paper to explain some 12-tone row stuff to Stravinsky. Apparently, on the other side of the sheet, Stravinsky started coming up with a series of his own, using the opening of his *Septet* as a starting point.
- So again, we see yet another debt to Schoenberg by Stravinsky. Now, I haven't seen any scholar mention it, but there are actually some very striking similarities between the 12-tone row that Craft was using to educate Stravinsky and the theme that Stravinsky uses for the last two movements of this *Septet*. Take a look at my musical examples again. You'll see that an inversion of Schoenberg's row (Ex. 4b) has almost the same notes and a similar contour to the prime form of Stravinsky's collection in Ex. 2a. Of course, Stravinsky's theme as shown in Ex. 2a is not a 12-tone row. It has 16 total notes, and doesn't use every pitch class available.
- Let's leave these row forms be for now and look at the second movement Passacaglia. A Passacaglia, of course, is a piece written over a repeating bass line, much like a Ground Bass or a

Chaconne. The bass line in this second movement is the sequence of 16 notes as shown in Ex. 2a. This bass line repeats throughout the movement. I think you could also call this movement a theme and variation form also, since it's divided up into these blocks of this bass line.

- Take a look at the beginning of the movement. Compare the notes scattered throughout all the instruments to Ex. 2a. You should notice it's the theme, plainly stated. But Stravinsky has broken up the theme between instruments. Perhaps you might call this the "Mosaic" texture of Russian music. To me, it brings to mind the term "Klangfarbenmelodie," meaning tone color melody, a term that Schoenberg used to describe exactly this process of splitting up a melodic line between instruments. Schoenberg is also known for using this technique, although it occurs to some extent in lots of orchestral music from the 19th-century. Perhaps again, we can see the debt Stravinsky owes Schoenberg, therefore.
- If you look closely, you'll notice that almost every instrumental part in this second movement plays some sort of version of the 16-note theme. Take for example the upper parts after Reh. #16. You should see that the clarinet, violin, viola, all have compressed versions of theme. These themes are kind of like little canons at the minor seventh, octave, and fifth respectively. It's almost like the concept of heterophony taken to the extreme as the cello part is playing the normal version of the theme below.
- Little canons and imitative parts are everywhere in the piece. So in one sense, this movement has a serial aspect to it, especially in the way the theme keeps coming back with every variation. But you'll notice that in variations 1, 4, and 7, there are some freely-written parts. Take a look at Reh. #15 and you can see the clarinet and bassoon parts have this kind of extra 2-part counterpoint to the theme. This counterpoint helps give a really strong sense of harmony, specifically E minor. Let's take a listen to a little bit of this movement.

[Play Second Movement]

- One last thing about this Passacaglia. Turn to the last page of the movement. You'll notice at Reh. #23 that the Klangfarbenmelodie texture comes back, so the movement has a sort of arch form superimposed over this variation form. Also look at the variation right before this last one. At Reh. #22, a whole bunch of these 16-note themes appear on top of one another, some in prime form, some in inversion, some in retrograde, retrograde-inversion. It's a big climax to the movement, a *pianissimo* climax, but a climax nonetheless I think because of the way everything kind of culminates into this ultimate contrapuntal fabric. I wonder how much Stravinsky really worried about the vertical sonorities, though, or is it a purely horizontally conceived part?
- For variety's sake, let's listen to the third movement now before talking about it. You'll notice that it's much more contrapuntal than the other movements. It's basically structured like a fugue, with various entries and so forth.

[Play Third Movement]

- This last movement, the Gigue, is really where Stravinsky shows his strongest serial tendencies. Every note can be seen as deriving from the 16-note theme. Let's clarify some important

terminology first, though. If you take a look at the score for this third movement, you'll notice that above each entry of the theme is written a quote/unquote "row" for the instrument, such as the violin's row and the viola's row. Notice how that "row" is just a string of notes in ascending order. Unlike Schoenberg, the word "row" for Stravinsky (at least in this piece) means the notes out of which the theme is built, kind of like the word "scale" in tonal music. So, for example, if you compare Ex. 2a with Ex. 3a, you'll see that all 16-notes in that theme are included in the 8-note "row" of Ex. 3a. So a "row" for Stravinsky is just a bunch of notes in no particular order. It's obviously the pitch collection as much as the order that is important to Stravinsky.

- Scholars say that this last movement is in the form of a double fugue. What makes it a double fugue is that when the winds are fuguing away, there's also a fugue going on in the piano. You can see a little bit of this on page 3 of my handout. Notice how the theme is inverted for the second half of this Gigue. I don't think my handout has every single entry, but it should give you an idea of what's going on. I've used the term "Exposition" perhaps too loosely; maybe I should have said Re-entries, but you get the idea.
- Let me just point out one detail of this fugue. Notice at the beginning how the first entry in the viola is on E and the second entry in the violin is on B, a fifth away. Then the cello comes in back on the E theme at Reh. #25. Stravinsky is obviously paying homage to the way a typical fugue starts on tonic, then has a second entry on dominant, and a third back in the tonic. What's also interesting, is that his collection of notes has some interesting qualities when transposed up a fifth. Compare Examples 3a and 3b; 3b is just the 3a transposed up a fifth. You'll see how they both have the E-F#-G-G# tetrachord in common. So there are some nice instances of "invariance" between the transpositions Stravinsky uses. Just like moving from C major to G major, some of the notes stay the same, while others get altered.
- Anyway, just to finish up with this Gigue, I should point out that the countersubjects to the themes are made up of notes from the "row" but are written fairly freely. Take a look at the viola part at the beginning once the violin comes in. Every note the viola plays under the violin theme comes from the viola's "row" but is freely matched up by Stravinsky as necessary. So even though there is serialism controlling the pitches, there is a looseness, a looseness that we saw in the first movement too that lets Stravinsky not be a slave to his theme. Walsh even says that this movement is no more serial than a Bach fugue, although I think I would disagree, but I'll leave everybody to make their own choice.
- So in summary, I just want to emphasize again the transitional nature of this piece for Stravinsky. I think you can actually almost see the way Stravinsky himself transitions between these two perhaps seemingly distant worlds of neo-classicism and serialism in the piece itself as it progresses. The first movement is imitative, but fairly freely composed. The second movement has a theme that controls the entire form of the movement in a serial way, but has a lot of free part-writing, while the third movement is very strictly controlled by the theme and the notes of the theme. And so in both his compositional style during this period of his life as well as during the course of this piece, I think it is via counterpoint or at least contrapuntal methods, as well as a little inspiration from Schoenberg, that Stravinsky makes this transition.