

Les Noces:

This work strikes me as rather reminiscent of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, or perhaps I should revise my attitude to state that now I obviously know where Orff found musical inspiration to write his piece. In particular, when the chorus sings pentatonic melodies in unison, I hear the similarity very clearly. As well, Stravinsky's use of the percussion section, especially the xylophone and bells, seems to anticipate Orff's writing. The rhythmic alternation between bass drum and off-beat singing also seems to be something Orff would later appropriate.

A number of compositional traits stand out most clearly for me as worthy of mention. Foremost is the manner in which Stravinsky uses the pianos. Stravinsky's piano writing treats the instrument more like a member of the percussion family (which of course, it is) than as an instrument capable of polyphonic and multiple-voice textures. So often in *Les Noces*, the entire ensemble, including the piano, is playing in complete rhythmic coordination (often eighth notes), almost as if the whole group is one big instrument. I noticed that during some of these coordinated passages, Stravinsky has simply written strings of major chords in parallel, the ostensible goal being more to color and fill up the sound than add a separate distinct voice.

Ragtime:

I know that it has been said that Stravinsky had an infatuation with the cimbalom during this period of his life, and perhaps we can attribute this interest in the instrument to its use in *Ragtime*, but it seems to me a very appropriate choice for this work. To me, the cimbalom quite convincingly imitates the sound of the tack piano, which gives the piece an "old-timey" feel that I think works within this genre. From what the presenters have mentioned, Stravinsky seems to have protested that before writing this work, he never heard ragtime music, only having experienced it through the written score. But unless the use of the cimbalom is completely coincidental, it would seem Stravinsky had a pretty good idea of the sonority of some early jazz from this era.

On a related note, I was wondering if the dotted-eighth notes in the piece are really supposed to be played as strictly as they are in the performances I have heard. For many ragtime pieces in the era, the notation was a dotted-eighth plus a sixteenth but it was supposed to be played as a quarter plus eighth note triplet rhythm (basically the precursor of the swing rhythm). If Stravinsky was working solely from notated scores, he may have misinterpreted this basic rhythmic structure. On the other hand, maybe playing the dotted-eighth and sixteenth notes in exact time helps give this piece the odd, stilted sound that Stravinsky was obviously looking for. I just love the alternation of G and E in the bass part around Reh. #14, for example: so close to a root-fifth toggle yet so *not* close in the way it sounds!

Piano Rag:

As we mentioned in class, this *Piano Rag* seems to have fewer rag influences apparent on the surface of the music than the *Ragtime* work. I found myself wondering while listening to this piece if we were getting a little bit of a window into what Stravinsky himself sounded like while improvising on the piano. The piece, I think, successfully captures an improvisatory feel,

although I wonder if the abandonment of bar lines was completely necessary to achieve this effect. On some level, I wonder if perhaps Stravinsky would prefer to have all of his music written without bar lines, considering how often he seems to have revised the placement of bar lines in other works.

Pulcinella:

I listened to this piece because, up until a few days ago, I wasn't aware that there were voice parts in the full version; I was only familiar with the Suite version. Firstly, I must say the ninths in the Violin 2 part of bar 3 in the opening of the piece are so beautiful, and I wonder if those are in the original or if Stravinsky added them. I wouldn't expect such unprepared dissonance from the 18th century. The deep fourths in the contrabass part before Reh. # 96 also seem like another example of Stravinsky's 20th-century conception of consonance versus dissonance. Reh. #117, with the stacked open fourths in the bass and the stacked fifths in the cellos, certainly evokes a more modern harmonic texture than I would expect from a classical-era composer.

The orchestration is so full and rich in this piece. The improvements in instrument quality and, relatedly, improvements in the technical ability of performers seem to be taken full advantage of by Stravinsky in "updating" the work. Stravinsky gives the work what I image to be a broader palette of effects as would have been available when it was written, such as the use of harmonics in the strings (Reh. # 135 for example in the Tarantella), more linear and chromatic writing for the horns (and those trombone glisses at the Reh. # 170!), and a freedom from simply using the instruments in "choirs" but rather scoring for a variety of instrumental combinations. The cello pizzicato section at Reh. #s 61-62 seems like yet another example of this creative scoring, whereby Stravinsky pulls out ostinato effects to give an "other-worldly" feel. In fact, it is kind of the juxtaposition of this almost alien, 20th-century sound against the very traditional 18th-century timbres that prolong my interest through the work, I think.