

Seminars in Choral Literature
Professor Carmen Helena Téllez
Post-1900 Analysis Checklist

Part I: The general description

- Composer's name and birth/death dates

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

- Full title of composition

Svadebka, (aka Fr: Les Noces, Eng: The Wedding)

- Placement in the timeline of the composer's career, i.e. opus number and/or date of composition, publication and/or premiere; early, middle or late period as appropriate.

Extended time for the composition and several attempts, between 1914 and 1922

Premiered by Ballet Russes on June 13, 1923, choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska (reconstruction of this choreography)

- Estimated duration: ca. 23'

- Number and type of soloists (define the voice types to the best of your ability, i.e. coloratura, lyric, dramatic, early-music, etc.)

- Source of the text

Compilation of folk poems and songs (pub. 1911) by Ivan Kireyevsky (1806-1856) and possibly references from other contemporary studies of Russian folk music.

- Author of the text and his/her dates

Anonymous, traditional, folk music, roots music

- Language of the text

Original Russian, with an immediate French translation and a later English translation. English approved by Stravinsky.

- Instrumentation as stated by the composer

Solo Vocal Quartet (SMzTB) with dramatic color to balance the orchestration

Chorus (SATB)

4 Pianos

Percussion:

Side Drum with snare

Side Drum without snare

Field Drum with snare

Field Drum without snare

Bass Drum

Timpani

Cymbals

Tambourine

Triangle

Xylophone

Two Crotales

Bell

Part II: The context (You may use a short essay or just keywords and timeline charts)

- Assess the inherited traditions: historical development of the genre up to the point of composition of the work;
- influences by other composers
- contemporary cultural context (politics, economics, social forces, etc.)
- contemporary professional context (sponsors, musical organizations, professional issues)
- influence of other artists and disciplines (poets, painters, philosophers, etc). Is the work multi-disciplinary and owes to another creator?
- aesthetic or technical innovations represented in this work
- impact the work on future compositions by the same composer or other composers.
- To which stylistic stream after 1900 do you think this work belongs? You may name more than one.

Historical Development: Les Noces fits at the end of Stravinsky's early Russian period and includes the ballets Firebird (1910), Petrushka (1911) and Rite of Spring (1913). These ballets were written for Diaghilev and they all share the use of Russian folk themes, influenced by Rimsky-Korsakov's instrumentation and move from post impressionism to experimentations with a new harmonic language of polytonality and polyrhythm' in Rite of Spring.

*Show scores of any of these early ballets
Show score of Rite of Spring comment on palpable evolution*

Cultural context: Stravinsky was the composer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and was living in Switzerland. Les Noces comes out of the collaboration between Stravinsky and Diaghilev and the Ballet Russe in Paris with its rich art culture including Picasso, Cocteau and artists from the Americas and the rest of Europe

His use of Russian themes is important for this period and he traveled to Russia in 1914 to collect some research material for Les Noces. But as gradually he settled in Paris, he began to absorb the spirit of modernism.

The composition of the Ballet straddles the end of WWI, and the beginning of the Russian or Bolshevik Revolution that eventually led to Soviet Communism and the exile of the Russian aristocracy (also called White Russians). In the meantime after the war in Paris we have the emergence of several modernist movements, including cubism, surrealism, futurism, etc.

The several attempts at writing the piece may represent Stravinsky's own struggle to define his style in the midst of cataclysmic breakdown of the world he knew. To my mind, it represents the transition for Stravinsky from the Russian ballet sound directly derived from Rimsky Korsakov to the original, modernistic, abstract language that influenced the whole of 20th century music.

Two aspects to consider:

1.

Influences: Russian wedding songs but also Russian factory songs, liturgical chants for Octave services of the Orthodox Church, and attempts to evoke drunken singing and the cacophony of many people singing and talking at the same time.

2. None of it is a direct quotation although you can track the influences. These are more like evocations and abstractions This important, because in that manner the composer absorbs the source material into their own language; maintains the piece organic and unified. This will prove one of the contrasts between modernism and postmodernism.

3. *The gradual process of abstraction can be seen in the different orchestrations:*

before 1914: post-Sacre orchestra of 150 musicians (draft has not been found)

1914-15: two incomplete drafts for 2 string quartets, (one playing arco, the other in pizzicatos) and 9 winds

1915-17: First complete draft, for twenty-seven winds and brass, eight strings, harp, piano, harpsichord, and Hungarian cimbalom

1918-19: two cimbaloms, harmonium, pianola, and percussion (the sense of a tavern orchestra)

1922-23: final version for four pianos and four percussionists – only struck instruments— "perfectly homogeneous, perfectly impersonal, and perfectly mechanical"

Influence of other artists and disciplines:

Ballets Russes and Diaghilev, emergence of French modernism and Jean Cocteau, cubism and Picasso, dance and Balanchine, folk compilations of Kireyevsky and others,

Impact of the work on future compositions:

Les Noces is at the very end of Stravinsky's so-called Russian period and with an inflection during the WWI that included unusual and economical ensemble combinations (i.e. L'Histoire du Soldat, 1917)

It is a transitional and critical piece in the development of Stravinsky mature modernist language, thanks to his handling of intervallic relationships of seconds and thirds, melodies delineating the augmented fourth, and polytonality, stratification, ostinato, black-white design and abstraction, rhythmic drive, non-expressivity, but at the same time, preservation of Russian identifiers that are non-Western, and therefore make the language unique, such as modes, groups of 5, permutations, non-prosodic accents, repetitions, evocation of Orthodox chant, and bell tones.

Stylistic stream: Primitivism, *modernist nationalism.*

Part III: Sources and References

•Principal publisher(s)

Chester Music (other music by Stravinsky is with Boosey and Hawkes)

•Scholars with influential and/or current views on this composer and/or compositions, and some central concepts in their research.

Richard Taruskin, Margarita Mazo, Gretchen Horlacher, Edward T. Cone, Marianne Kileian-Gilbert, Robert Craft