

Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration

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Abstract

“The importance of the octatonic scale in Stravinsky’s music has consistently been overstated. While octatonicism is an aspect of Stravinsky’s technique, it is just one of a number of different components that jointly produce the ‘Stravinsky sound.’ The article focuses on two techniques that have often been mistaken for octatonicism: **modal uses of the non-diatonic minor scales**; and the **superimposition of elements that belong to different scalar collections.**”

Outline

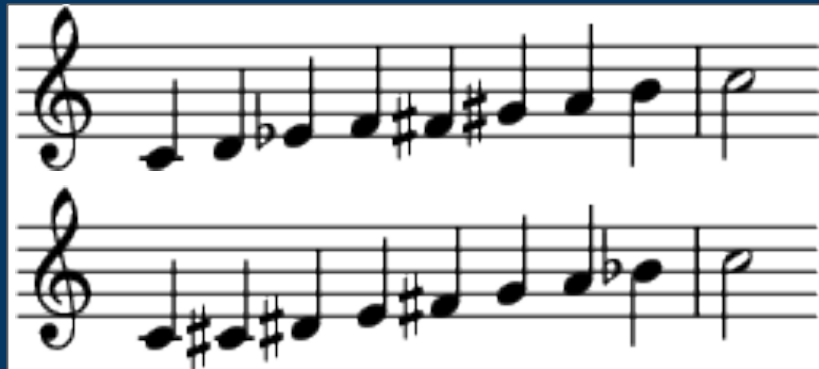
1. Scales in Stravinsky
 - a. The Four Locally Diatonic Scales
 - i. Whole-tone Scales
 - ii. Ascending Melodic Minor Scales
 - iii. Harmonic Minor
 - b. A Brief Overview of the First Two Sections of *The Rite of Spring*
2. Superimpositions
 - a. Stravinsky, Polyscalarity, and the “Petrouchka” Chord
 - b. Scales and Superimpositions
 - c. The *Symphony of Psalms*, First Movement
 - d. The *Symphony of Psalms*, Third Movement
3. Conclusion

Music Theory: Scales

- Octatonic
- Whole-tone
- Ascending Melodic Minor
- Harmonic Minor

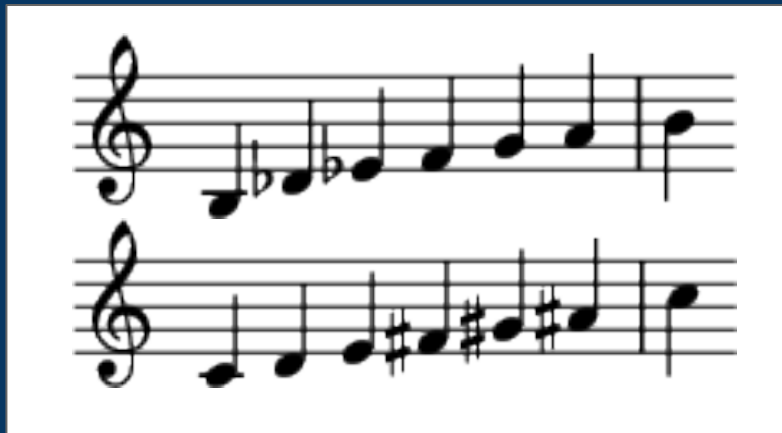
Music Theory: Scales

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Music Theory: Scales

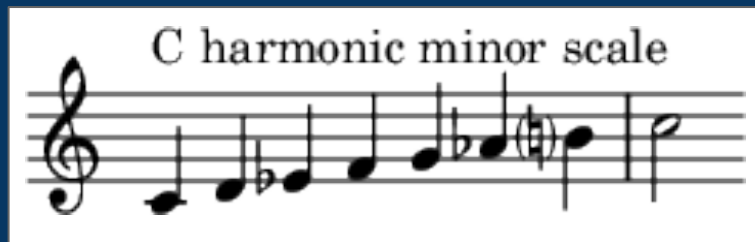
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C melodic minor scale

The image shows the C melodic minor scale written in treble clef on a five-line staff. The notes are: C4, D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, Eb4, D4, C4. Fingerings are indicated: (1) for G4 and (2) for Ab4.

Music Theory: Scales

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Modal Uses of the Melodic Minor Scale

Example 5. The melodic minor scale in *Petrouchka*

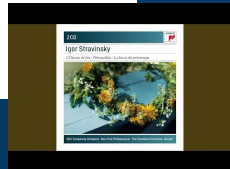
(a) reh. 35

8^{va}

Fl., Vln.

(various insts.)

G mm A mm B mm c mm



Modal Uses of the Melodic Minor Scale

Example 6. The melodic minor scale in *The Rite of Spring*

(a) reh. 32

Fl., Cl.
Ob., Str.
Hn.
Vc., Bsn.

C mm

Detailed description: This musical score illustrates the melodic minor scale in C minor across four staves. The top staff is for Flute and Clarinet (Fl., Cl.), showing a melodic line with eighth-note patterns. The second staff is for Oboe and Strings (Ob., Str.), featuring block chords. The third staff is for Horn (Hn.), also with block chords. The bottom staff is for Violoncello and Bassoon (Vc., Bsn.), showing a bass line with eighth-note patterns. A bracket at the bottom indicates the key signature as C minor (C mm).

The Rite of Spring
Le Sacre du Printemps
First Part
ADORATION OF THE EARTH
Première Partie
L'ADORATION DE LA TERRE

INTRODUCTION
Lento *ad lib* tempo rubato
colla parte

Clarinetto 1
in La
colla parte

Clarinetto basso 2
in Sib
solo ad lib

Fagotto 1
colla parte

Corno 2 in Fa
colla parte

IGOR STRAVINSKY
Revised 1947
New edition 1987

Detailed description: This is the title page of the score for 'The Rite of Spring' by Igor Stravinsky. It includes the title in multiple languages, the specific part 'First Part: Adoration of the Earth', and performance instructions for the introduction. It also lists the instruments for which parts are provided: Clarinet 1 in La, Clarinet Bass 2 in B-flat, Bassoon 1, and Horn 2 in F.

Modal Use of the Harmonic Minor Scale

(b) reh. 4

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for D clarinet (D clar.), the second for Oboe (Ob.), and the third and fourth for String and Clarinet (Str., Cl.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The D clarinet part features a melodic line with triplets and sextuplets. The Oboe part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The String and Clarinet part provides a harmonic accompaniment with sustained notes and chords.

G# harmonic minor (incomplete)

The Rite of Spring
by Igor Stravinsky
First Part
ADORATION OF THE EARTH
Piano Part
COMPOSITION BY IGOR STRAVINSKY

INTRODUCTION
Tempo: *Andante*
Key: *G major*

Violins I
Violins II
Violas
Cellos
Double Basses

Review

“Any proper subset of the chromatic scale can be decomposed into octatonic and diatonic components. It is particularly tempting to analyze the non-diatonic minor scales in this way. For both scales share six notes with a diatonic collection and six notes with an octatonic collection, as Example 8 shows. Both scales can also be understood as combining the octatonic scale’s signature 4-3 [0134] tetrachord with a diatonic scale fragment, as in Example 9. Thus, the non-diatonic minor scales naturally tend to evaporate under the scrutiny of the analyst predisposed to interpret music in terms of diatonic and octatonic fragments.”

Review

Example 8. Minor scales as composed of octatonic and diatonic components

(a) C melodic minor

stems up: C major



stems down: B-C octatonic

(b) C harmonic minor

stems up: E \flat major



stems down: B-C octatonic

Example 9. Minor scales as composed of octatonic and diatonic scale-fragments

(a) C melodic minor

diatonic



0134

(b) C harmonic minor

diatonic



0134

Review

“When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem starts to look like a nail: if all you have are the octatonic and diatonic collections, then many sets will seem to be clearly octatonic, if only because they are clearly *not* diatonic.”

Questions?