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The evolution of style in the neoclassical works of Stravinsky

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The Evolution of Style in the Neoclassical Works of Stravinsky

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my parents, for their continued support over the years.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the guidance of my teacher and program director, Dr. Robert McCashin, and members of my committee, Dr. Mary Jean Speare and Dr. Vicki Curry.
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Abstract

The compositional output of Igor Stravinsky is roughly divided into three periods: Russian, Neoclassical, and Serial. In his neoclassical period of composition, Stravinsky developed highly refined methods of formal construction, harmonic management, and use of counterpoint. Careful analysis of several neoclassical and transitional works serves to demonstrate Stravinsky’s innovative methods of voice leading, economy of pitch class set material, and ingenuity in redefining Classical era forms. Stravinsky’s Russian ballets are stylistically focused on practical and stage-oriented formal structures, stratified counterpoint, and thematic content originating in folk materials. As he began writing more concert music, the extraction of these stylistic elements posed structural problems. By reinventing formal structures, harmonic relationships, and voice-leading procedures of the Classical era, Stravinsky constructed his neoclassical style of writing.
Introduction

The compositional output of composer Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) is generally divided into three stylistic periods. The first, often called Russian period, extended into the late 1910s and early 1920s and included such works as *L'oiseau de feu* (The Firebird, 1910), *Petrushka* (1911), *Le sacre du printemps* (The Rite of Spring, 1913) *Histoire du Soldat* (The Soldier’s Tale, 1918), and *Les Noces* (The Wedding, 1917). These works are superficially categorized by their literary and thematic relationship with Russian mythology, custom, and culture. The second, often designated as the neoclassical period, often includes *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* (Symphonies of Wind Instruments) and the ballet (and associated Suite for orchestra) *Pulcinella* (1922). These works are arguably transitional in nature. Works that certainly fall within the neoclassical designation include the *Octet* (1923), *Oedipus Rex* (1927), *Apollon musagète* (1928), the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), the *Concerto in E-flat,* “Dumbarton Oaks” (1938), the *Symphony in C* (1940), *Danses Concertantes* (1942), and the *Symphony in Three Movements* (1945). The neoclassical period is considered complete after the composition of the opera *The Rake’s Progress* (1951). Upon hearing performances of Anton Webern’s *Quartet,* op. 22 in early 1952, Stravinsky developed interest in serial methods of composition, and used a sort of row in a portion of his *Cantata* (1952).¹ His third period of composition, referred to as the serial period, is stylistically influenced by the twelve-tone system of Schoenberg and Webern. *Canticum Sacrum* (1955), *Agon* (1957), and the *Requiem Canticles* (1966) were written in this period.

An analysis of the evolution of Stravinsky’s compositional processes and techniques reveals an organic process of development linking the three periods into a logical and coherent body of works. This study focuses on the following compositions: *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Les Noces*, the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*, *Pulcinella*, the *Octet*, the *Symphony of Psalms*, the *Concerto in E-flat*, “Dumbarton Oaks,” the *Symphony in C*, and *Danses Concertantes*. These compositions represent late Russian period ballets, transitional works, and major concert pieces within the neoclassical period. By using these works, elements of the Russian style of writing can be ascertained and contrasted with the neoclassical style. By examining the transitional works, the two contrasting stylistic periods are connected and understood as a natural evolution of techniques. Stravinsky’s transition to a neoclassical style was achieved by a deliberate reinvention of classical forms as well as an expansion and development of internal harmonic and thematic relationships.

It should be noted that distinctions between the Russian period of output and that of the neoclassical period could be described by both analytical and literary terms. More importantly, Stravinsky’s transition to the neoclassical style was generated by both changing interests in literary and cultural sources as well as a development of compositional techniques. As this study is primarily analytical in nature, Stravinsky’s shifted interests in literary and cultural source material will not be discussed.
Russian Period

Certain stylistic traits of Stravinsky’s Russian period compositions must be established before fruitful discussion of his transition to and development of a neoclassical style may ensue. Three dominant stylistic features of the early ballets include the use of practical formal structures (stage and story based, as opposed to abstract classical forms), layering of ostinati as a style of counterpoint, and the use of folk material for thematic content. In the Russian period works, such as Le sacre du printemps, the predominant functions of form and counterpoint were dictated by the needs of external elements such as relation to literary sources, pre-established storylines, and staging requirements. The large-scale formal structure of Le sacre du printemps was functionally set in tableau form, and different areas started and finished often abruptly in order to change scene. For example, “The Augurs of Spring” section of Le sacre du printemps is permeated by the four-note motive, D-flat, B-flat, E-flat, and B-flat, that immediately precedes the section (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Le sacre du printemps, one mm. before Rehearsal 13.²

The tempo for the section is marked Tempo guisto, and remains unchanged for the entire section. The next section, beginning at Rehearsal 37 and marked Presto, is titled “Ritual of Abduction.” The transition to a new section is sudden and immediate, and Stravinsky

ushers in new material for the new scene. This structure is at least superficially motivated by the procession of a story as opposed to an intrinsic formal device.

The style of counterpoint in Stravinsky’s earliest works is best described as stratified; layers of ostinati, frequently metrically opposed to one another, are stacked in independent layers. Rimsky-Korsakov and his contemporaries (“The Five”) likely influenced Stravinsky in this regard, as layering of ostinati is idiomatic to some Russian music of the late Romantic era. For example, in the “Coronation Scene” of Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*, multiple repetitive layers of writing create a harmonic tapestry (see Fig. 2).
In this example, three distinct layers are created in the first two bars: the winds, the brass/percussion/bass, and the strings/piano. Stravinsky uses this technique in the Russian works quite frequently, though frequently with internal metric opposition and a more developed harmonic palette. Examining Le sacre du printemps, a classical example of such stratification of counterpoint exists towards the end of the “Introduction” (see Fig. 3).

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In this particular example, one layer is formed by the flute/piccolo parts, another by the treble G flute, oboes, and second clarinet, another by the bassoon, another by the bassoons, horns, and lowest viola and bass parts, and yet others by the string section. The thematic content is provided by the piccolo clarinet and piccolo trumpet parts. There is no imitation, but there is interaction, such as the trading of glissandi in the violas, or the

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4 Igor Stravinsky, Rite of Spring, 10.
alternation between articulations in the third/fourth horn parts and the lowest viola and bass parts. This counterpoint is a hallmark of Stravinsky’s early style.

Stravinsky largely disowned the idea that he embraced folk music as a source for his early works. Accordmg to Richard Taruskin, the outward attempts to create distance between his work and folk material, particularly regarding *Le sacre du printemps*, is likely a result of political and cultural pressures perceived by those associated with the Ballets Russes. Despite Stravinsky’s attempts to deny the folk elements in *Le sacre du printemps*, the recent availability of his sketchbook unequivocally demonstrates the use of folk material. Through evaluation of the sketchbook, Taruskin demonstrates connections to folk elements at several points in the music. For example, the “Spring Rounds” theme in the clarinet parts at Rehearsal 48 is derived from melodic material found in Rimsky-Korsakov’s 1877 collection of folk themes. Taruskin examines several examples that leave little doubt of the importance of folk material in *Le sacre du printemps*.

Stravinsky’s Russian period style is well established in *Le sacre du printemps*. The three most striking elements of his composition, the creation of form based on practical performance requirements, the use of stratified counterpoint, and the development of folk melodies to form thematic material, undergo transformations and reinventions in the Neoclassical period. Transformations were not immediate, and a number of compositions display a changing approach to these three elements.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid, 512.
8 Ibid, 516.
Les Noces

One of the final Russian period ballets, *Les Noces*, contains techniques of thematic construction that later develop into a neoclassical style. Stravinsky began a first draft of this work in 1914, completing it in 1917. He then abandoned it for nearly four years in favor of other projects. Further changes, re-orchestrations, and revisions were undertaken between 1921 and 1923, with a first performance on 13 June 1923, conducted by Ernest Ansermet in Paris. The setting and subject matter involves a Russian peasant wedding.

On first glance, Stravinsky’s changing aesthetic is noticeable by his interesting style of instrumentation. Early versions of *Les Noces* utilized varying folk instruments such as a cimbalom (a Hungarian folk instrument; for Stravinsky it had Russian connotations due to its use in *Renard* as a substitute for a gusli, a Russian folk instrument), reflecting the focus on Russian materials in the first period of composition. The revised score, calling for four pianos and a battery of pitched and unpitched percussion instruments, reflects an increased interest in the use of piano. Stravinsky’s stylistic preference for the instrument manifests in several subsequent Neoclassical

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12 Stravinsky, *Autobiography*, 115
works, including the *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments* (1924), *Piano Sonata* (1924), *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), and the *Concerto for Two Pianos* (1935).

Much like *Le sacre du printemps*, *Les Noces* contains the use of Russian folk material to generate thematic content. Stravinsky’s interest in Russian and Georgian folk harmony occurred at the same time as much of his work on *Les Noces*.\(^{13}\) Examples include the lament that opens the first scene and a melody in scene four that is based on a song of Russian factory workers.\(^{14}\) While the use of folk material is certainly stylistic in the Russian period, Stravinsky’s distillation of the song material to a transformable pitch class set, reusable in various permutations, is highly developed as a technique of thematic construction for the first time in with *Les Noces*.

The pitch class set in the prime form of \((025)\) is the basis of much of *Les Noces*.\(^{15}\) For example, the opening thematic statement, voiced by the soprano and based on this structure, is utilized through much of the work (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4: *Les Noces*, opening four mm., Soprano Solo.\(^{16}\) Pitch class set \([11,2,4]\) in Normal Form.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\begin{music}
\middlehline
C & D & E & F & G & \text{\textbf{A}} & \text{\textbf{B}} & \text{\textbf{C}} \\
\middlehline
\end{music}}
\end{align*}
\]

New material voiced at Rehearsal 9 is derived from the same set (see Fig. 5).

\(^{13}\) Taruskin, “Russian Folk Melodies,” 508.
\(^{14}\) Comegno, 31.
Figure 5: *Les Noces*, two mm. at Rehearsal 9, Soprano.\(^{17}\) Pitch class set \([1,4,6]\) in Normal Form.

Stravinsky’s economy of pitch class sets in voice leading and harmony becomes increasingly developed in later neoclassical works.

The formal structure of *Les Noces* is episodic in a similar manner to previous compositions such as *Petrushka* and *Le sacre du printemps*. This mosaic of structural content is responsible for the strikingly abrupt juxtapositions of thematic material. The abrupt changes in material largely correspond with theatrical shifts on the stage, and so Stravinsky’s practice of generating such a formal style could be considered functional and practical rather than musical, at least superficially.\(^{18}\) Stravinsky extracts this formal process for his concert works of the transitional period, developing a mosaic structure of composition.

*Symphonies d’instruments à vent*

The *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* is a particularly important transitional work, and despite current thought that the neoclassical period began with *Pulcinella* and the *Octet*, the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* was actually the first of Stravinsky’s work to receive the description of a new “neoclassical” style of writing, written in *La Revue*


contemporaine by musicologist Boris de Schloezer in 1923.\textsuperscript{19} Completed in 1920 and revised multiple times, the work was premiered by Serge Koussevitzky in London on 10 June 1921. The work was conceived after the news of the death of Claude Debussy, to whom Stravinsky felt a sincere personal attachment.\textsuperscript{20} The Chorale that completes the work was composed for a publication to honor Debussy, though Stravinsky expanded the small Chorale to become the basis for the entire Symphonies.\textsuperscript{21} The premiere was not well received, though Stravinsky explains the poor reception as an unfortunate result of ill-chosen performance considerations.\textsuperscript{22}

The work has been the subject of an enormous volume of analytical commentary. Symphonies d'instruments à vent, like Les Noces, utilizes a mosaic structure with alternating thematic/harmonic materials (see Appendix). Edward Cone’s analysis poses the concept of a compositional method of “stratification, interlock, and synthesis.”\textsuperscript{23} Cone describes the separation of constituent parts as “stratification,” resulting in the seemingly abrupt transitions from section to section. Observing the fragmented nature of the thematic area presentations, Cone notes that a thematic line is presented through each portion of the presented material. For example, through bar 51, the A material is presented three times and the B material four times. In each presentation, a portion of a musical line is presented, and discontinued at the point of interruption by another block of material. In Cone’s analysis, this forms what can be described as “polyphonic strands

\textsuperscript{20} Stravinsky, Autobiography, 90.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 89.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 95.
\textsuperscript{23} Cone, “Progress of a Method,” 19.
of melody...counterpointed one against another.” Cone mentions another stylistic feature of thematic presentation in the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*, which he calls “divergence,” described as the “division of an original single layer into two or more.” He offers an example of the oboe line at bar 19, which in context appears to be a continuation of the first motive, but is in reality an insertion of material that will not appear again until bar 197, where the development of that “D” material can continue.

Cone’s analysis offers thorough explanation of a process of synthesis in the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*, where material presented is presented, developed, often reconstituted, and combined to a final point of arrival.

Joseph Straus offers further insight into the formal construction by introducing the concept of “pattern completion” with regard to both voice leading and larger scale formal processes. According to Straus, Stravinsky utilizes tetrachords in his thematic constructions that, when presented, offer points of transition. Straus notes that the tetrachord (0135) is a “normative set,” which he refers to as “Tetrachord A.” An example of the presentation of this tetrachord and the process of pattern completion occurs in bars 11-13 of the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* (see Fig. 6).

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24 Cone, “The Progress of a Method,” 19.
Figure 6: *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*, mm. 7-14. “Tetrachord A” is presented from the anacrusis of mm. 12 through mm. 13 in first oboe as pitch class set [3,5,7,8] in normal form.

This technique of pattern completion in voice leading is used frequently in Stravinsky’s neoclassical works to introduce new material, regardless of large-scale formal construction.

Problems exist with both of these (chiefly Cone’s) analyses, as they do not necessarily agree with Stravinsky’s own description of the construction of the work. In his *Autobiography*, he describes the Chorale as having been the initial point of composition from which the rest of the work was derived.\(^{29}\) Moreover, when considering this observation with a cursory mosaic analysis, it is apparent that the work was composed in an opposite order from that which is described by Cone. While this does not necessarily negate either of these analyses, as Stravinsky likely conceived the work in both directions, it does beg for a different approach.

Stravinsky does manage to allude to his intentions with *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* in his Autobiography by describing it as an “austere ritual” comprised of “short litanies between different groups of homogeneous instruments.”\(^{30}\) Only Richard Taruskin evidently made the connection between the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* and the Russian Orthodox Office of the Dead, the *panikhida*.\(^{31}\) As Taruskin points out, not only are the general structural aspects of both the *panikhida* and the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* quite similar, but most of the minute details of the composition are derived from the service. For example, Taruskin notes that the *panikhida* “begins with Psalm 118, intoned by the reader…followed by the first of many litanies in which the

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\(^{30}\) Ibid, 95.

\(^{31}\) Taruskin, “Review,” 1619.
reader’s prayers are answered by choral responses.” Taruskin equates the apparently disconnected thematic areas of the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* with the series of litanies, calls, and responses of the *panikhída*. Even the slow, quiet Chorale at the end of the composition, corresponds with a concluding part of the service, the *Véchnaya pámyat*.

Taruskin’s observations regarding Stravinsky’s connection with the Russian Orthodox service is essential to understanding how exactly the structural and compositional style of *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* fits into the models and genres of his output. The *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* is as much a Russian period work as any of the early ballets because of the impact the Russian cultural, literary, and religious form has on the formal design of the work. All of the ballets, as was earlier described by Cone, were structured with practical connections and concerns; such is also the case with the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* and its connection to the Orthodox service. The work differs from the earlier ballets in two crucial ways. First, Stravinsky himself perceived this work as an important one in his own stylistic transition. Second, although Stravinsky made passing reference to the formal connection between this work and the service, and Taruskin perceived and expounded on the idea, there is no overt connection with the composition and any external source material as there is with the Russian ballets. *Les Noces* was conceived as music for a staged ballet on the theme of a Russian peasant wedding, not as pure concert music. Because of these differences, the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent* should be classified as a transitional work, though to call it a neoclassical work would probably be incorrect.

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32 Ibid.
It should be noted that the analyses of Cone and Straus, though perhaps missing the larger picture as illustrated by Taruskin, are both quite valid. The structural elements expounded by both analysts not only exist, but also are particularly valid in works that come after the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*. After writing *Pulcinella*, Stravinsky returns to many of these methods, particularly synthesis of different thematic and harmonic materials, and pattern completion as a procedure to organize voice leading in many different works.

*Pulcinella*

The ballet *Pulcinella* was something of a diversion for Stravinsky from his stylistic developments, but proved to have a profound impact on what was to come. Composed in 1919-1920, the ballet *Pulcinella* was conducted by Ansermet in Paris on 15 May 1920. The subsequent Suite for chamber orchestra was completed in 1922 and premiered by Pierre Monteux in Boston on 22 December 1922. Regarding the ballet, Diaghilev considered this an opportunity to bring Stravinsky back to the Paris stage.\(^3^4\) Diaghilev traveled to Naples to collect some of Pergolesi’s unfinished sketches, with which Stravinsky identified.\(^3^5\)

Structurally, the work is quite classical in style. Stravinsky made little in the way of alteration to phrase structure, which remains quite straightforward in many places. The “Sinfonia” (Overture) opens with a classic eight-bar phrase structure moving to the


dominant key of D Major. The movement utilizes common classical contrast of tonic and dominant key areas throughout, and employs a rounded binary form. Unlike many previous Russian period works, fragmentation of thematic material is rarely present in *Pulcinella*, and classically motivated formal structures dominate the work.

In contrast to the basic formal construction, the harmonic coloring and re-orchestration of Pergolesi’s material is quite novel. The “Serenata” (II) in particular utilizes effects seen in several of Stravinsky’s earlier works such as *Feu d’artifice* and the *L’oiseau di feu*. For example, the *saltando* figures in the strings are late romantic to modern era effects (see Fig. 7).

Figure 7: *Pulcinella Suite for Small Orchestra*, II, mm. 4, violins.\(^{36}\)

Stravinsky also requires flute and string harmonics frequently in the movement, particularly beginning at bar 10.

Basic imitative counterpoint is used occasionally in *Pulcinella*. This is a stylistic shift for Stravinsky, who generally avoided imitation in counterpoint prior to the neoclassical period. For example, the woodwind lines stagger the entrances by one bar in a passage in the finale (see Fig. 8).

While not terribly significant in itself, the use of canon in the transition works and the Octet provide a point of departure from the Russian period style of contrapuntal writing and a mark developing interest in imitative counterpoint.

*Pulcinella* is an anomaly in Stravinsky’s creative output due to the extensive borrowing of Pergolesi’s material, though it marks the renewed interest in older forms. Taruskin argues that Stravinsky’s neoclassical style maintains no necessary connection with antiquated forms and subjects (“stylistic retrospection” as he calls it), as he notes that the designation of the “neoclassical” label came because of commentary on the “denuded, stripped-down style” of the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*. As Stravinsky notes, he had the utmost respect for formal constructs of the past, and made a connection with *Pulcinella* and budding interest in those forms. While a connection with the classical past is not central to defining Stravinsky’s neoclassical style, it is difficult to dismiss the effect *Pulcinella* had on his interest in classical era forms.

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Stravinsky, in his effort to manage form and counterpoint without a mosaic or tableau approach, turned to a classical sonata form. In 1923, he completed work on his Octet, scored for flute, clarinet, bassoons, trumpets in C and A-flat, trombone, and bass trombone. The first movement of the work is in a very identifiable sonata structure, marking Stravinsky’s turn to older styles of formal structure. While he had used a sonata form previously in his Symphony in E-flat, op. 1, it was a student work and not at all stylistically relevant to the works that followed it. Moreover, the sonata form which Stravinsky employs has little in common with the historic use, particularly where the juxtaposition of tonic and dominant harmonic fields are concerned.

The first movement, beginning with a slow introduction marked *Lento*, treats the tonic area of E-flat elusively, preferring to establish the dominant area of B-flat by the fourth bar. The sequential material established in the flute particularly starting in bar 19 and extending through bar 31 allows a particularly crucial thematic set to emerge by bar 32 (see Fig. 9).

Figure 9: *Octet*, mm. 32, flute.\(^{40}\) Pitch class set [8,10,1] in Normal Form.

\[\text{\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{octet.png}}\]

The prime form of this material is the pitch class set (025), which is the single normative unit that serves to generate important material for major thematic areas. This type of economy of thematic material will become a hallmark of Stravinsky’s neoclassical works.

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The first theme arrives in the tonic of E-flat Major at bar 42, indicated with a faster tempo marking of *Allegro moderato* (see Fig. 10).

Figure 10: *Octet*, I, mm. 38-54.\(^4\)\(^1\) The theme (presented at bar 42) is \([10,0,3]\) in the Normal Form.

All aspects of the beginning of this theme are generated from the normative prime pitch class set of \((025)\). The theme is presented as a seven-bar phrase, which is developed in canon starting in bar 49. This particular contrapuntal feature is a rather important stylistic development, as Stravinsky’s counterpoint through the Russian period is almost exclusively stratified and non-imitative.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, 3.
Beginning at bar 57, Stravinsky treats the thematic material in the second trumpet line sequentially, a very standard transitional feature in a sonata form. The execution of the sequence, however, is less standard. Beginning at bar 57, the harmonization is on F-sharp/D-flat, followed by a whole-step descent to a harmonization on E in bar 60, finally completing the sequence in the new harmonic field based on D in bar 63. Although no expression of cadence has yet occurred suggesting a typical modulation, Stravinsky strengthens the D harmonic area through voice leading in several instruments, particularly the first trumpet. After arriving on a D in bar 63, the first trumpet repeats a figure with one pitch alteration each time: A (bar 64), G (bar 65-66), and F-sharp (bar 67-68). A cadence can be inferred from the motion in the first trombone in bar 68, ending on a sustained D in bar 69.

The second theme is presented in bar 71 (see Fig. 11).

Figure 11: Octet, I, mm. 71-73, Trumpet in C part.42

Stravinsky continues in the harmonic field based on D in this section, contrary to the standard practice of harmonizing a second theme area in the dominant key. The development extends from bar 95 through bar 127. The recapitulation is reversed from the standard classical era sonata practice due to the representation of the second theme before that of the first theme. In addition, at bar 128, the second theme is stated in the key of E as opposed to the tonic at the outset of the movement, E-flat. After the statement of the second theme in the recapitulation, there is an imitative section based on a secondary theme associated with theme one beginning in the bassoon in bar 138. By

42 Ibid, 5.
bar 145, Stravinsky constructs two opposing methods to achieve the key of E-flat for the restatement of the first theme. The flute reaches a high G-sharp and outlines in descending to the E-flat in bar 151. The second trumpet utilizes a descending semitone pattern to arrive at the B-flat (enharmonically) at bar 150, which permits the first trumpet to continue with an arpeggiation outlining a dominant-tonic cadence to E-flat. The first theme material concludes the movement.

As Straus points out, Stravinsky reinvents the sonata form in a manner that discards both traditional tonic-dominant relationships and the necessity for specific ordering of thematic content according to structural norms. By using specific voice-leading techniques, the style of modulation and use of key areas are changed. The appearance of “chromatic-neighbor” key areas is not restricted to the Octet, and appears again in the Concerto in E-flat, “Dumbarton Oaks.” The use of a system other than a tonic-dominant polarity in the sonata-form structure is of particular significance, as it represents Stravinsky’s reinvention of not only sonata form harmonic relationships, but of harmonic polarity in classical formal structures as a whole. More importantly, Stravinsky’s earlier desire to create synthesis in his forms is further developed by his adoption and reinvention of sonata form, a structural style of writing chiefly concerned with synthesis of polarized elements. Stravinsky’s economy of material, and the extent to which he utilizes the (025) set to generate themes is a technique that continues to develop through the neoclassical period. The presence of several examples of imitative counterpoint also foreshadows an increasing interest in imitation as a whole.

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44 Ibid, 161.
45 Ibid.
Stravinsky’s interest in counterpoint, particularly of an imitative nature, coalesced as he wrote his *Symphony of Psalms*. The *Symphony of Psalms* was completed in 1930 after a commission by Serge Koussevitzky for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, though the premier was performed in Brussels on 13 December 1930 with Ansermet conducting.

The Second Movement of the Symphony is in the form of a double fugue, and the opening subject is articulated by the first oboe in C Minor (see Fig. 12).

Figure 12: *Symphony of Psalms*, II, mm. 1-3, first oboe.  

The subject lasts five bars, and through a chromatic expansion in bar five, modulates to the dominant before being answered by the first flute. This process is continued in a similar manner until the second flute and second oboe have also entered with their versions of the subject. The episode that extends from bar 23 through bar 28 serves to modulate the harmonic field to the area of E-flat Minor by using a chromatic ascending figure in the voice leading between three flutes. Beginning in bar 24, the third flute expresses the pitches C, D-flat, and D consecutively, carried in bar 25 by the second flute with an E-flat. The third flute continues the pattern in the second half of the bar with an E and F, after which the first flute plays the G-flat in bar 26. By the second half of bar 26, the first flute (doubled by the piccolo) plays an ascending passage starting on the G and reaching the E-flat by the end of bar 27. The E-flat sonority is expressed as a

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dominant function leading to an A-flat harmonic area by the end of bar 27, as is expressed by the fourth flute. As the fourth flute part prepares an A-flat cadence, the addition of a G-flat in bar 28 allows for a transition to the key of E-flat Minor.

The counter subject in the first exposition as seen in bar 18, outlined in the third flute, becomes the source material for the second fugal subject at bar 29, presented in the Soprano part, demonstrating an economy of material. The first subject provides the counter subject, played in conjunction with the second fugue subject in bar 29 by the cello and bass lines. After the exposition of the second fugue subject, Stravinsky begins a stretto passage at bar 52 with the vocal second subject material. A freely contrapuntal section follows, though a particular rhythmic motive is introduced in the first trombone in bar 66 using thematic material related to the first subject. In bar 69, the first horn outlines a dominant structure leading to the key of G.

After a break in bar 69, the material introduced at 71 is a synthesis of the first subject, presented with the rhythmic figure introduced by the trombone several bars earlier in the instrumental parts, and a variation of the second fugal subject in the vocal line. This is a strong example of synthesis of material (see Fig. 13).
The voice leading in the soprano part begins a chromatic descending motive after the presentation of the thematic material beginning in bar 77 with an F-sharp. The pattern includes an F in bar 80, F-flat in bar 83, and E-flat in bar 84, directing the final sonority to E-flat, where Stravinsky ends the movement. The overwhelming use of imitative counterpoint in the *Symphony of Psalms* displays Stravinsky’s vigorous application of his new contrapuntal technique, and his counterpoint continues to reach greater depths of complexity in subsequent works, such as the *Concerto in E-flat*, “Dumbarton Oaks.”

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Concerto in E-flat, “Dumbarton Oaks”

Completed in 1938, the Concerto in E-flat, “Dumbarton Oaks,” was written for a commission by Robert Bliss, owner of the Dumbarton Oaks estate. The work was given its premier in Washington D.C. on 8 May 1938 with Nadia Boulanger conducting. At the request of Bliss, Stravinsky consulted J.S. Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 for stylistic reference. Scored for flute, clarinet, bassoon, three violins, three violas, two cells, and two basses, the work is structured in three continuous movements, Tempo giusto, Allegretto, and Con Moto. The work as a whole is densely contrapuntal, and shows remarkable economy of material.

The first movement is largely in the key of E-flat Major. The trichord that becomes the basis of the entire movement is heard in the flute in bar one (see Fig. 14).

Figure 14: Concerto in E-flat, “Dumbarton Oaks,” mm. 1, flute. The pitch class set is [10,2,3] in Normal Form.

This pitch class set, (015) in its prime form, acts as source material for the entire movement, and its relationship with the tetrachord (0135) offers changes in formal areas through Straus’ “pattern completion” principle in the voice leading. The organization of

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themes and key areas may loosely be considered sonata form, though the recapitulation is incomplete.

The first theme area is writing in violin part in bar one, with the main set of (015) played by the flute. A long transition begins at bar four as the thematic material is destabilized through fragmentation. By bar 12, the harmonic field is weakened, resulting in allusions to a C Minor key area, though never confirmed through cadence. Finally, in bar 21, the thematic material directly based on the operating set (015) becomes the dominant thematic expression of the first theme area as articulated by the violins.

The first theme material becomes the source of a modulation to the second theme key area. Stravinsky’s modulatory voice-leading procedure is evident beginning in bar 23, where the already established D to E-flat expression (violins in bars 21-22) is raised to an E to F in the viola, followed by an F-sharp to G in the violins. This continues in the violin part in bar 28 with a G to A-flat, followed by an A-flat to A in bar 29. The B-flat is finally reached in the top viola part in bar 31, becoming the tonic of the new temporary key area. The bridge theme in B-flat is articulated in the flute beginning in bar 24, again on the (015) normative set. This key area is left unstable by the ostinato in the cello/bass line, repeating the F to reinforce the temporary nature of this theme and key area. The clarinet takes the (015) structure in bar 37.

The second theme and key area occurs at bar 39 as articulated by the first horn (see Fig. 15).
The manner of arrival into this key of D Major merits close attention. As the preceding (015) set is played by the clarinet, and horn enters on an A. If the A is included in the set, the result, in prime form, is an (0135) tetrachord. This tetrachord is significant for a number of reasons, but the structural implications are made evident as the entire movement progresses. The second theme is initially based on the (015) trichord as it is expressed in the first three pitches, though it develops independently afterward. The use of a chromatic neighbor key for a second theme is a stylistic trait already seen in the Octet. As the second theme is restated, we find a repeated reiteration of the (015) trichord in the violin part in bars 55-56 (and again in bars 58-59). As the second theme area closes, the repeated structure in the violin part receives an added E-flat, completing the (0135) tetrachord and marking a new section of the work in bar 62.

The theme one material from the opening of the movement is utilized with an unstable harmonic field, ultimately implying a transition to C Minor in bar 70. The modulation is delayed by a chromatic passage favoring the diminished set [8,11,2], which stretches through bar 77. This transitional passage could be considered a bridge to the development, though past this point the structure of the movement is at best debatably in sonata form.

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The following passage is a C Minor fugato section beginning in the viola part. The set is based again on the (015) trichord, and the fugal subject spans six bars (counting the two anacrusis pitches as a separate bar, and noting that the first G is voiced in the cello preceding the viola entrance). The answer is in the key of F Minor as articulated by the violin part in bar 83. A small episodic phrase extension serves to connect the voices and return to the key to C Minor for the entrance of the subject again in the cello part. This episode lasts four bars, and achieves the return in the violin part by voicing a chromatic scale from C to G in the lower pitches, functioning as a dominant and allowing the cello part to enter with the subject in the tonic. The fugato becomes freely contrapuntal with the entrance of the bassoon in bar 106. A stretto begins after two false entrances of the subject in E-flat Minor in the horns, located in bars 116-119. In bar 119, the violins enter with the complete subject. The retransition to the first theme material occurs in bars 127-129.

Bars 130 to 138 form a bridge, based on the (015) material, bringing back the theme one material from the opening of the movement in bar 139. This restatement is short lived, as the closing material for the movement begins in bar 144, again based on the (015) theme from the outset of the movement. The Coda begins at bar 153, and the movement closes with a transitional passage connecting the first and second movements. It is highly likely that this connection is Stravinsky’s commentary on the small chord section Bach uses to connect the two movements of his Brandenburg Concerto No. 3.

While the *Concerto in E-flat*, “Dumbarton Oaks” may not be as structurally satisfying as the *Octet* or the *Symphony of Psalms*, the use of imitative counterpoint, economy of thematic material, techniques of pattern completion to generate form, and
middle ground voice leading to establish harmonic fields are all refined and utilized significantly in the work. Stravinsky refined and combined these techniques into more functional and satisfying forms as he wrote the *Symphony in C*.

*Symphony in C*

The *Symphony in C*, also commissioned by the Bliss family, premiered in Chicago on 7 November 1940 with Stravinsky conducting. Alongside the *Symphonies for Wind Instruments*, the *Symphony in C* has amassed a great quantity of analysis and scholarly critique. Aside from *Pulcinella*, the *Symphony in C* is perhaps the most formally conventional work Stravinsky wrote in the neoclassical period, at least superficially; however, the use of traditional tonic-dominant polarity found in sonata form is completely lacking. Instead, Stravinsky establishes a similar functional polarity with two tonal areas: C and E. This use of tonal centers a third apart is not new, as has been seen in the Symphony of Psalms, though the implications of a redesign of the formal relationships in a sonata structure are far beyond Stravinsky’s earlier innovations.

The entire first movement functions with a normative pitch structure of (0135). The movement begins with a 25 bar introduction, composed of the subset (015), outlining the material that will form the first theme area. This is heard primarily through the repeated pitch B in the string parts (see Fig. 16).

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52 Straus, "Sonata Form in Stravinsky," 151.
The repetition of the leading tone emphasizes the immediate ambiguity of the C Major harmonic area, as there is no sense of tonic or dominant. The first theme enters in bar 26 as articulated by the oboe (see Fig. 17).

While the theme prioritizes the pitch C, the accompaniment consists of the pitches E and G with no reference to a tonic of C Major. Without ever making a firm commitment to either the C or the E tonal centers, the first transitional passage (according to Cone, “Bridge A”\textsuperscript{55}) arrives centered on the pitch class D. The second transitional passage (“Bridge B”), beginning at bar 74, centers quite firmly on D through driving repetition.

The recapitulation at bar 225 contains what appears to be a structural irregularity. The “Bridge B” transition material occurs after (rather than leading up to) the second theme at bar 293, and functions as a transition to the coda beginning in bar 310.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{55} Cone, “The Uses of Convention,” 293.
According to Straus, despite the transposition of the second theme to the tonic, the resolution required of traditional sonata form has not occurred.\textsuperscript{56} The coda manages to deal with the element of resolution, though not traditionally; rather, Stravinsky combines the elements of opposing tonalities into simultaneous chord structures. Again, we see Stravinsky creating a synthesis of elements, which is a defining stylistic trait of the neoclassical works.

The fourth movement is structured as a set of variations on themes, rhythmic, and harmonic structures of the first movement. Labeled \textit{Largo} at the opening, the movement begins with a slow introduction. The normative set, (0135), is firmly established with the pitches E, F, G, and A in the bassoon parts (see Fig. 18).

Figure 18: \textit{Symphony in C}, IV, mm. 1-3.\textsuperscript{57} Bassoon set [4,5,7,9] in Normal Form.

The harmony consists of the pitches F, G, and B, providing a harmonic field referencing the dominant of C Major. The sense of a dominant harmony continues at bar 15, marked \textit{Tempo giusto}. The introductory motive is written for the viola, cello, and first and third horns, and is composed of a tetrachord, which in its prime form, is (0135). This harmonically unsettled motive continues its development through bar 39. The true first theme that follows, as articulated by the first violins, is a variation on the original theme of the first movement (see Fig. 19).

\textsuperscript{56} Straus, “Sonata Form in Stravinsky,” 154.
The presentation of this theme is in C Major, though the bass is again on E and G, offering the same tonal ambiguity as is present in the first movement.

In bar 51, the harmonic area is in G, and a second theme is played by the first trumpet and bassoon, highlighting the three note rhythmic figure that dominates both the first and last movements. A transition area, more firmly in G due to the repetition of the tonic pitch (reminiscent of “Bridge B” of the first movement), begins at bar 66. The key area moves temporarily to E Major in bar 78, as the clarinet articulates a short theme based on the normative subset (015). The tonic area descends to E-flat Major through a chromatic passage articulated in the second horn in bar 81, where the first bassoon articulates the theme introduced in bar 51. The theme is modulated and varied until bar 97. The polytonal transition passage that begins at bar 97 uses a whole tone tetrachord.
from D-flat to G juxtaposed with a motive in B minor (cello and second violin) as the second theme faces further fragmentation until its abandonment at bar 112. Now in F Major, the low strings and bassoons pick up a variation of the first theme, which cycles through bar 127. A short slow interlude interrupts the progress of the movement at bar 128, with a function and harmonic implications identical to those of the slow introduction at the outset of the movement. While voiced differently, the harmony is comprised of the same pitches (B, F, G), as is the motive in the bassoons.

At bar 136, a C Minor section leads to a pseudo-fugato passage beginning at bar 143. Though there is no literal imitation, the section is nevertheless contrapuntal, and several passages are similar enough to give the illusion of a fugato. In bar 162, the clarinets articulate a theme based on the introductory motive at bar 15. While almost the entire harmonic structure outlines a dominant function in D-flat Major, the pitch F in the bass undermines the harmony, implying an F Minor modality (see Fig. 20).

Figure 20: *Symphony in C*, IV, mm. 162-167.\(^{59}\)

Similarly, at bar 169, as the horns pick up the theme in the dominant of G-flat Major, the B-flat in the bass implies a B-flat Minor modality. Finally, at bar 176, the theme is reiterated in the violins and cellos in C Major, though still with the pitch A articulated in

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 80.
the bass. The constant undermining of tonality makes any resolution of dominant to tonic not only impossible, but also irrelevant.

Stravinsky finally allows for a synthesis of ideas, and in doing so, reveals his purpose and methods. The repeated pitch B, which formed the motive that opened the first movement, makes a return at bar 179. The harmony is composed of an E Minor triad with the added pitches F and A. This is immediately linked to the opening theme of the *Tempo giusto* in the violin and cello parts, offering a synthesis of the material that generated the entire symphony (see Fig. 21).

Figure 21: *Symphony in C*, IV, mm. 180-185.\(^6^0\)

A final section of the symphony, *Poco meno mosso* offers a slow harmonic presentation of the first movement-opening motive. The closing chorale, beginning at bar 212, is quite reminiscent of the chorale that concluded the *Symphonies d’instruments à

\(^{60}\) Ibid, 82.
vent. The Chorale offers a homophonic presentation of the harmonic material from the entire symphony. Stravinsky refuses to offer a resolution to the polarity he generated between the harmonic areas of C and E, but rather offers both conclusions, first on C in bar 229, followed by on E in the final three bars. The act of synthesis is extremely powerful in the final sections of the *Symphony in C*, combining all elements of the composition.

*Danses Concertantes*

Stravinsky’s return to a dance form after generating a new and complex compositional approach provides an interesting opportunity to evaluate Stravinsky’s own take on his neoclassical style. Commissioned by Werner Janssen for the Janssen Symphony Orchestra in Los Angeles, the *Danses Concertantes* was premiered on 8 February 1941 with Stravinsky conducting. Originally subtitled, “Concerto for Small Orchestra,” Stravinsky envisioned the work as a purely concert work, associated only abstractly with dance.61

The first movement, *Marche-Introduction*, is written in the style of an overture. Beginning with a small introduction, the key of B-flat major is strongly established through repetition of the tonic in the low strings and bassoon. The main theme of the movement enters at bar 12 in the upper strings. The theme is based on the descending scale segment, B-flat, A, G, and F, which in its prime form is the tetrachord (0135), the structure that dominates much of Stravinsky’s writing from 1938-1942 (see Fig. 22).

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Figure 22: *Danses Concertantes*, I, violin 1, mm. 11-15. Main theme consists of pitch class set [5,7,9,10] in Normal Form.

![Musical notation](image)

The inclusion of the pitch C in bar 12 is effectively an upper-neighbor tone and not part of the actual theme, which is confirmed by its absence in bar 27 when the theme is played by the trumpet in the neighboring key of A-flat Major. While in A-flat Major, the theme is fragmented by interruptions from the rest of the ensemble at bars 31 and 34, eventually disrupting the tonality altogether in bars 35 to 36.

At bar 38, a secondary theme is introduced, though it is arguably a development of the rhythmic motive presented in the introduction to the movement. The harmonic area primarily expresses the key of G-Major, though Stravinsky introduces a clash with the D-sharp in the bass, trombone, and bassoon parts which conflicts with the rest of the harmony. This harmonic disparity is extended at the next section, beginning at bar 48. The distinctly bitonal section expresses G Major in the low strings and trombone parts. The horns and bassoon primarily express an E Major harmony, though there is even internal conflict with this unstable area, particularly with the use of the pitch D in the bassoon part and E-sharp in the horn part. When these parts are not expressing E Major, they are ascending or descending on parallel chords composed of two intervals, a fourth and a third. The focus of this unstable bitonality is the semitone clash of a G/G-sharp. The following section proceeds without segue in the key of F Major at bar 61. The theme

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is derived from the original theme in an inverted form of the initial theme as first expressed by a solo violin in bar 64. The first theme returns in bar 83, and the movement concludes with a B-flat Major chord in the wind/brass section.

The second movement is structured much like a Sonata-Rondo form. The “A” section extends from the opening to bar 8, and is tonally ambiguous. The harmonic structure could imply tonal areas centering on C, E, or G, similar to the ambiguity of the Symphony in C (see Fig. 23).

Figure 23: Danses Concertantes, II, opening theme, strings, mm. 1-4.\textsuperscript{63}

The “B” area is in C Minor, and the theme is based on the subset (015). The return of the “A” material at bar 24 is again in the tonic. A transition passage focusing on the tonal center D rounds out the exposition, which concludes in bar 45.

Through the addition of the pitch B-flat in the first horn at bar 45, the harmony becomes a dominant to E-flat Major, the first key area of the “C” section, marking a development area. Labeled \textit{Meno Mosso}, the thematic material is derived from E-flat Major scale segments as articulated by two solo violins. By raising the E-flat to an E, a brief two bar transition in C Major at bar 55 leads to an area in G Major starting at bar 57.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 17.
The material at bar 57 is derived from the flute accompaniment in the beginning of the development. This section focuses on the key areas G Major, C Minor, and D Major.

The recapitulation begins at bar 99 with the restatement of “A” material. A further variation of “A” material begins at bar 106, extending until bar 132 with the restatement of “B” material, now in the (tonic) key of C Major. A final statement of the “A” material beginning at bar 146 concludes the movement. The final chord structure in bar 157 contains both C Major and G Major triads, displaying the juxtaposition and synthesis of tonalities that embody the entire movement.

Stravinsky’s technique of adopting older forms such as the sonata rondo form and redefining tonal polarities reaches a climax in the Danses Concertantes, particularly in the “Pas d’Action.” The three works in this four year span, the Concerto in E-flat, “Dumbarton Oaks,” the Symphony in C, and Danses Concertantes all show remarkable developments of formal structuring, use of counterpoint, economy of pitch class sets, and creation of new tonal relationships relative to the classical forms.

Conclusion

Stravinsky’s neoclassical period of composition is defined broadly by several elements, primarily a focus on structural development based on classical formal models, the use of imitative counterpoint, and the developing function of synthesis in place of resolution. He developed and extended techniques with which to accomplish these ends, such as the reinvention of harmonic relationships and polarities within the sonata form,
new methods of voice leading to achieve convincing modulations, and a remarkable economy of pitch class set material with which to form thematic content.

Stravinsky’s Russian style of composition embodied stylistic traits that focused on layering of ostinati, large-scale tableau forms, small-scale mosaic forms, and the use of folk material not limited to songs and instruments. Through examination of *Le sacre du printemps* and *Les Noces*, two Russian period ballets, these traits are readily identifiable. *Les Noces* contains an economy of pitch class set material as well as instrumentation in the revisions that demonstrate Stravinsky’s transition to a new neoclassical style of composition. In the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*, Stravinsky constructs an abstract form based on the mosaic structure that served a practical purpose in the ballets. To achieve coherence in this work, he develops material that is synthesized in subsequent sections, substituting synthesis for resolution in the traditional classical sense. The voice-leading techniques applied to these different sections constitute a style of pitch class set pattern completion that allows for continuity within otherwise strikingly disjunct sections. The stylistic challenges that Stravinsky faced, and the solutions devised in each situation, informed the neoclassical method of composition that he adopted.

*Pulcinella* marked a turning point in Stravinsky’s compositional aesthetic, as the exposure to Pergolesi’s music allowed him to explore classical forms and traditions. Stravinsky utilized modern orchestration techniques to make this music his own, though the phrase structure was generally left unaltered. The inclusion of canon in the Finale marked the beginning of his interest in imitative counterpoint. By the time he wrote the *Octet*, his compositional methods were decidedly neoclassical, focused on classical era forms, such as sonata-allegro, and imitation as opposed to stratification in counterpoint.
The *Symphony of Psalms* was conceived to be a “work of great contrapuntal development.”\(^\text{64}\) The second movement is structured as a double fugue using the main key areas of C Minor and E-flat Minor, illustrating both Stravinsky’s desire to express ideas using complex classical models with redefined harmonic relationships, particularly by polarizing key areas a third apart. The *Concerto in E-flat*, “Dumbarton Oaks,” shows further development of counterpoint, and connects contrasting structural areas with pattern completion techniques. The *Symphony in C*, while less contrapuntal than “Dumbarton Oaks,” reestablishes sonata form harmonic relationships by polarizing key areas a third apart, a technique initially practiced in the *Symphony of Psalms*. The *Danses Concertantes* brings many of these techniques together into short dance movements. The first movement uses the same basic pitch class set to create thematic material as both the “Dumbarton Oaks” and the *Symphony in C*, displaying Stravinsky’s overwhelming desire to conserve pitch class content. The second movement is constructed around a sonata rondo structure, but the initial statement contains all the harmonic ambiguity as the *Symphony in C*. The subsequent episodes are developments of that ambiguity and pitch class set material.

Stravinsky’s method of composition in the neoclassical period demonstrated not only a renewed interest in classical era forms, but also a new outlook on the expressive possibility of those forms. By synthesizing techniques invented during the Russian period of composition with these classical forms, Stravinsky is able to invent an entirely new style of music, yet retain a sense of familiarity with older styles through the adoption of older formal structures. With his complex and economical treatments of small sets of

pitch classes and redefinitions of tonal relationships, it should come as no surprise that Stravinsky felt compelled to adopt serialism in his final period of composition.
### Appendix

**Symphonies d'instruments à vent Mosaic Form Analysis**

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