

# THE EXAMINATION OF IGOR STRAVINSKY'S OCTET FOR WIND INSTRUMENTS

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**Abstract** - Stravinsky, who is a creator of revolutionary and innovative music, is the pioneer of the Neoclassicism movement, which has an important place in 20th century music. The rhythmic, melodic and harmonic innovations in his music have influenced European music culture. Throughout his life, he has been a composer, pianist, orchestra conductor and music writer. Among his works, Octet for Wind Instruments has helped to start the compositional style known as Neoclassicism. The work consists of three parts. It is a work that the composer produced on the diatonic and octatonic scale. In this work, it is aimed to contribute to the interpretation of the Stravinsky's work "Octet for Wind Instruments", which pioneered the beginning of the Neoclassicism movement.

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**Keywords:** Igor Stravinsky, Octet, Wind Instruments, Neoclassicism.

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## I. IGOR STRAVINSKY

Igor Stravinski, composer, orchestra conductor, pianist and music writer, is one of the most important musicians of 20th century music. He has always acted with the idea of creating new and recomposed many unique works. He is one of the pioneers of the neoclassicist movement.

Igor Stravinsky was born on 17 June 1882 in Oranienbaum on the Gulf of Finland. He started his first piano lessons at the age of nine. In a short time, he learned to read notes and improvisation. When his family did not allow him to choose music as a profession, he was sent to St. Petersburg University. However, he left his education. Stravinski influenced Rimsky-Korsakov with his piano sonata, and he worked harmony and counterpoint with the composer between 1907 and 1909.

The life of the composer can be examined in three main parts as the Russian Period until 1920, the Neo Classical Period between 1920 and 1950, and the Serial Music Period after 1950.

Many of his ideas were based on popular themes from Russian folk songs. Often times, Stravinsky used the popular melodies, but more often than not, he made up his own and modeled them after the rhythmic and modal patterns of Russian folklore (Aguilar, 2006,p.12).

## II. NEOCLASSICISM

At the beginning of the 20th century, many European composers escaped from the complicated methods of music at that time, they headed to new inventions, and returned to the balanced structure of classicism. The "Neoclassicism movement", which is shaped by this thought, basically aims to create the new by re-evaluating old forms and genres. This movement,

which comprises the first half of the 20th century, represents an important period in Stravinsky's creativity. During the period of 1920-1950, Stravinsky produced many important works in which the old and the new were synthesized by adhering to the traditions of the classic (Uzar, 2011, p.42). In this period, music tended to return to traditional forms and writing techniques.

## III. OCTET FOR WIND INSTRUMENTS

Stravinsky composed the works "Symphonies of Wind Instruments" in 1920 and "Octet for Wind Instruments" in 1923 for the wind instruments. Although "Symphonies of Wind Instruments" has Russian impacts, "Octet for Wind Instruments" reflects the neo-classical perception. It is noticed that string instruments are not used in both works.

There are two versions of the octet that he wrote for Wind Instruments. Stravinsky revised many of his works, including the Octet. The reasons for his revisions weren't entirely musical; as the United States and the Soviet Union had failed to sign the Berne Copyright Convention, all of Stravinsky's pre-1931 compositions were in the public domain in the United States. Thus, he revised many of his pre-1931 works to regain the copyright on them (White,1979,p.107).

Stravinsky started composing the Octet for Wind Instruments in Biarritz, France, in late 1922 and finished the work in Paris on May 20, 1923. It was first published by Edition Russe de Musique in 1924, and later by Boosey and Hawkes. The score is dedicated to Stravinsky's second wife, Vera de Bosset. The manuscript now lies in the Stiftung Rychenberg, in Winterthur, Switzerland (White,1979,p.308). The Octet for Wind Instruments was premiered at the Paris Opera House on October

18, 1923, at a Koussevitsky Concert. Stravinsky himself was the conductor (Wood,2007,p.17).

Stravinsky gave information about the work in his article "Some Ideas About My Octet" published in the magazine "The Arts" in January 1924.

Wind instruments seem to me to be more apt to render a certain rigidity of the form I had in mind than other instruments—the string instruments, for example, which are less cold and more vague. The suppleness of the string instruments can lend itself to more subtle nuances and can serve better the individual sensibility of the executant in works built on an 'emotive' basis. My Octet is not an 'emotive' work but a musical composition based on objective elements which are sufficient in themselves (White,1979,p.574).

Stravinsky gave information about the work in meetings with his biographer friend Robert Craft:

The Octet began with a dream in which I saw myself in a small room surrounded by a small group of instrumentalists playing some very attractive music. I did not recognize the music, though I strained to hear it, and I could not recall any feature of it the next day, but I do remember my curiosity—in the dream—to know how many the musicians were. I remember too that after I had counted them to the number eight, I looked again and saw that they were playing bassoons, trombones, trumpets, a flute and a clarinet. I awoke from this little concert in a state of great delight and anticipation and the next morning began to compose the Octet, which I had had no thought of the day before, though for some time I had wanted to write an ensemble piece—not incidental music like *Histoire du Soldat*, but an instrumental sonata (Stravinsky and Craft,1968,p.39).

Stravinsky's Octet is widely considered to be the first work of any composer to completely embody the ideal of the neoclassical movement. It is a clear departure from the overly emotional compositions of the Romantic era through its return to Classical forms, the obvious use of counterpoint, a smaller and clearer sense of orchestration, use of ostinato, exploration of disjunct intervals in melodies and complex rhythms (Wood,2007,p.12).

This work, as described by Kenneth Thompson, author of *A Dictionary of Twentieth Century Composers 1911-1971*, was the first of a series of "abstract" instrumental compositions which evidence a heightened preoccupation by Stravinsky with the architecture of music, formal symmetry, balance and contrast (Thompson,1973,p.2183).

Before composing the work, Stravinsky gave concerts in Europe, North and South America. Stravinsky has

been deeply influenced by the structure of jazz music—developing in these places—that brings harmony and improvisation to the forefront. The use of jazz music items in the final chapter of the work can be an example of this (Büyükedes,2013,p.42).

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

The Octet is a highly contrapuntal work that utilizes a tremendous variety of compositional techniques. Stravinsky makes use of direct imitation and a very notable fugue section, extensive employment of ostinato, and repetition and alternation of thematic material and melodic fragments. All of this is key, in this highly sophisticated work, to the effective unification of form (Lubaroff,2001,p.46).

In the discussion Stravinsky went on to describe the compositional process: the first movement was written, then the waltz (Variation C) of the second movement. The theme of the second movement was then based on the waltz. He then wrote Variation A, which is repeated within the movement as a prelude to the other variations. The last variation is the fugato, and the theme is presented in alternating pairs of like or same instruments. The third and final movement was written to contrast the harmonic tension built up in the final measures of the previous movement. Stravinsky points to Bach's two-part inventions and the final movement of his own Piano Sonata as influences while writing the final movement. Stravinsky expounded on the "terseness" and "lucidity" of Bach's music, both characteristics of neoclassicism (Stravinsky and Craft,1968,p.40).

The Octet is set in three movements: "Sinfonia," "Tema con Variazioni," and "Finale." One flute, one B-flat clarinet, two bassoons, one trumpet in C, one trumpet in A, one tenor trombone, and one bass trombone take place in the work.

The first section is called Sinfonia and is in sonata form. It consists of Introduction, exposition, development and recapitulation parts. It is written in 3/4 time, and it is marked *lento* at eighth note = 76.

The introduction, which prepares the main theme, consists of three sentences. It is in slow tempo and choral structure. The "B" section is much longer than the "A" sections. The exposition introduces two themes sonata form. The first theme is in the tonic and the second theme in the dominant. In the first two measures of A, all instruments are displayed as unison. In the second sentence, the eighth notes, which give rhythmic movement, draws attention. The third sentence of A turns into a transition by adding sixteenth notes to accompany notes. B consists of three sentences. The first sentence of B creates contradiction to A and the reduction of the number of instruments draws attention. In the second sentence, it

is seen that the number of instruments is increased. In the third sentence of B, all the instruments play together and the codastarts.

The development part consists of 8 sections. Like the classical sonata model, the development here is tonally unstable. It is often freely chromatic and dissonant and implies multiple tonal centers, including C, G, E and B-flat. Also, as in its classical inspiration, this development section introduces new material (Wood,2007,p.56).

The second part is written in the form of variation and is called "Tema con Variazioni". It is a form that Stravinsky first used in his works. The chapter consists of one theme and five variations. It is written in 5/8 at eighth note = 64.

Structure of the section:

Theme  
Variation A  
Variation B  
Variation A  
Variation C  
Variation D  
Variation A  
Variation E

While writing this chapter, Stravinsky stated that he was inspired by the waltz structure in variation C.

I derived the theme of the second movement from the waltz, which is to say that only after I had written the waltz did I discover it as a good subject for variations. I then wrote the "ribbons of scales" variation as a prelude to each of the other variations (Stravinsky and Craft,1968,p.71).

The theme is displayed in slow tempo. Variation A gives the theme rhythmic vitality. The theme in B variation changes rhythmically. After the variation A is displayed again, the variation C, which has a cheerful and energetic character and resembles waltz, begins. After variation D, which has a serious structure, variation A is displayed again. The section ends with the variation E in the fugue structure.

The Finale section consists of variations of themes in the other sections. It is one of the most prominent examples of neoclassical style. The musical lines are written very much in such a way that there are no dramatic key alterations and the music sounds diatonic (Aguilar, 2006, p.30). It consists of five-part rondo with a coda. It is an example to contrapuntal writing. It is written in 2/4 at quarter note = 116.

Stravinsky's Octet for Wind Instruments presents many challenges for the conductor. However, of all the complexities involved one of the more critical issues is that of Stravinsky's rhythmic ideas as they

apply to thematic material. After the conductor has achieved a more intellectual understanding of the Octet through historical research, score analysis, as well as historically significant recordings, the conductor must draw from extensive knowledge and experience in order to inspire the musicians for a more successful performance of the Octet. The goal for any conductor should include making informed decisions regarding Stravinsky's metric ideas so that they can appear more simplistic (Aguilar,2006,p.43).

## CONCLUSION

Igor Stravinsky is a composer who has an important place in 20th century music with rhythmic, melodic and harmonic innovations. In this period, as in other branches of art, the idea of overcoming the usual patterns and rules in music and creating new ideas are at the forefront.

Stravinsky has composed his work for four woodwind instruments and four brass instruments. The work is made up of melodies that technical-musical skills and virtuoso are at the forefront. Form is central to the designation of the Octet as the pivotal work in the composer's progression to neoclassicism. The first movement will be shown to clearly imply classical sonata form. The second movement, a theme and variations with a ritornello, is notable simply in that it marks the first time in an original composition that Stravinsky included a theme and variations. Finally, the third movement, which is in a rondo form with an abrupt coda, is reflective of his look back to the greatest of all Baroque masters (Lubaroff,2001,p.47).

The neo-classicist understanding is felt intensely in the work. Stravinsky was inspired by the section titles from the names commonly used in the classical period such as Sinfonia, Tema con Variazioni and Finale. Not using of string instruments, which were used extensively during the romantic period, draws attention. Using elements bringing improvisation to forefront points out that the composer has been influenced by jazz music.

Stravinsky's first Neo-Classical works can remind auditors of well known classical period compositions. This shows the point that the composer wants to reach and his success in this context.

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