

Edexcel A level: Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*

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by Jonathan James

INTRODUCTION

Fired up from his runaway success with the Ballets Russes's production of *The Firebird*, the young Stravinsky had a startling vision for his next work:

'I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: wise elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring.'

What followed was one of the 20th century's most celebrated musical scandals. Stravinsky assaulted bourgeois ears with his 'modern primevalism', music that was abrasively new and yet atavistic, somehow linked to a distant past. Conductor Leonard Bernstein famously called it 'prehistoric jazz'.

But there is so much more to *The Rite of Spring* than the famous riot at its premiere. One of the main challenges of getting students from Level 2 to Level 3 thinking comes with expanding their wider listening and ability to reference comparative works. This resource therefore focuses initially on the context for Stravinsky's breakthrough, situating it among other musical innovations at the turn of the century. Stravinsky's early career and writing style are then explored, before looking at the story of how the iconoclastic ballet came about, as well as discussing its legacy.

A full analysis is given at the end of the first three dances featured in Edexcel's new A level set works. Ideas for creative responses to Stravinsky's work are also offered, together with ways of demonstrating key principles in the classroom.

GETTING FROM LEVEL 2 TO LEVEL 3

AO4: 'Use analytical and appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.'

A student once described the step up from GCSE to A level as 'going from swimming in a pool to swimming in the sea'. It must feel like that initially, when the framework of knowledge suddenly opens out onto a far wider horizons, and the level of discussion deepens to a point where your feet aren't touching the bottom any more. In answering the questions both on unfamiliar extracts and on the set works, students are required to illustrate not just what is happening in the music, but also how and why.

Tip: online software such as Kahoot can make testing vocabulary fun.

In practice, this means students will need to:

- use more specific vocabulary and terminology when describing musical processes.
- display a thorough knowledge of form and structure before identifying the smaller details.
- be able to analyse harmonic progressions and spot unusual chords.
- show a far greater contextual understanding than before, giving comparisons when discussing features of the work being analysed.
- write a controlled argument that evidences higher cognitive skills than before: eg discussion rather than identification.

Out of the above, the most daunting may well be the contextual understanding, because it requires an investment of time and enthusiasm to listen and read beyond the works at hand. And yet it is precisely this wider knowledge that will get the higher grades, as the model answers given by Edexcel for this area of assessment demonstrate.

THINKING LIKE A COMPOSER

At this level, students need to approach the set works as if they were the composer. Before turning the page, what would they have written? Can they explain the rationale of the music, the reasons behind the choices? Why does Stravinsky love discord? Why did he put the dances in the order they are? Could they come up with very own *Rite* chord?

Wider reading and viewing

Stravinsky was one of the most interviewed composers of the 20th century, and he was never shy of courting the press. There are many interesting news articles and clips online where he gives insights into his own works. This YouTube interview shows him talking about his choice of chords and his relish of all those relentless accents, for example.

Michael Oliver's biography for Phaidon (*Igor Stravinsky*) gives a very readable overview of his life, as does Francis Routh's account in the ever reliable Master Musicians series (*Stravinsky*, published by Dent and Sons). For extra insights and useful anecdotes, Robert Craft's conversations are a treasure trove (*Stravinsky in Conversation with Robert Craft*, Pelican), as are the *Encounters with Stravinsky* recorded by Paul Horgan (Bodley Head Press).

For a broader discussion of the artistic climate of the time, see the previous *Music Teacher* resource *Ways into Modernism* (July 2016).

CONTEXT

There are several important angles from which to contextualise *The Rite of Spring*. First, it needs to be understood within the musical context of the turn of the century, comparing its innovations with the new directions other composers and artists were taking. Then it needs to be situated within the composer's early 'Russian style' and his previous works, in particular the two preceding ballets, *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. This in turn leads to how *The Rite* reflects the composer's general approach to composing. Diaghilev's involvement and the riot at the premiere need to be covered, as well as looking at the work's considerable legacy.

Tremblings at the turn of the century

The Rite was an eruption in Western classical music, a truly seismic shift in thinking, but there were already signs of the ground trembling and crumbling beneath the feet. Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* had already shocked the world with its fluid harmonies and dream-like logic. That work astonished the Parisian public in 1894, a full nine years before *The Rite* reached the same stage. Satie had also started loosening the edges with his *Pièces froides* of 1897, and his later surreal miniatures and ballets (for example, *Parade*, 1916) were like the avant-garde provocations of Dada.

Even before then, in the 1880s, Liszt, who was then in his 70s and both depressed and sodden with absinthe, sketched his 'Harmonies of the Future', coming up with cryptic works such as *Bagatelle sans tonalité* and *Nuages gris* which seemed to nod towards the whole-tone experiments of Debussy. A decade later in Germany, Mahler, Strauss and Schonberg were straining at the same leash, trying to emancipate their music beyond the traditional confines of functional harmony.

Stravinsky's own shorthand for *The Rite of Spring* was 'Sacre', an abbreviation of the original's French title, *Le sacre du printemps*. We'll call it *The Rite* from here on in.

These works and others referred to in this resource can all be found on this Spotify playlist.

In Russia, Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* (1905) was a daringly ambitious piece for a massive orchestra, spiced with exotic colours and 'aromatic' sounds. Across the Atlantic, Charles Ives had already begun his eccentric musical collages, splicing together marching bands, church hymns and contemporary classical sounds in his early symphonies, before making his own step outside of tonality with *The Unanswered Question* of 1906.

The birth pangs of modernism were being felt from the 1880s onwards in the world of the arts and ideas, from painting and sculpture through to literature, theatre and philosophy. People were challenging the previously accepted parameters of art and questioning its purpose. In that sense, the ground had been well prepared for Stravinsky's own rebellions. Had he written *The Rite* 20 years earlier, it might have fallen on completely deaf ears. It was a case of the right piece at the right time.

This whole area is ripe for cross-disciplinary exploration. Can students find paintings, poems and pieces of music that are roughly contemporaneous and that seem to match each other in idea and purpose?

The 'Russian style' and all that glitters

Although at the time of *The Rite* Stravinsky had already emigrated to Paris and was enjoying the vibrant cultural scene there, he brought much of his home country's music with him, particularly for his first three ballets. And that had been part of the Diaghilev's mission when he commissioned those ballets: to show off the sides to Russian music and dance that most appealed to a Western audience, in an ambassadorial way. Parisian high society was already enamoured with chinoiserie in its antique furniture and fascinated with writings about the Orient. Diaghilev tapped into this, bringing works that emphasised the more oriental qualities of Russian folklore.

Rimsky Korsakov wrote Russia's first symphonic tone poem, *Sadko*, in 1867.

Stravinsky had his first formal composing tuition from Rimsky-Korsakov, a master in colourful storytelling.

Rimsky-Korsakov, in turn, reflected the direct storytelling style of the 'Kuchka' or 'Mighty Five' group of composers brought together under the mentorship of Balakirev. This group, which later included Tchaikovsky, was drawn to music with a bold, clear narrative, often played out on a large stage. Many worked to a 'blockbuster' recipe of sweeping string melodies, brash brass and exciting dancing rhythms. The key ingredient was to include Russian folklore and traditional music. Where possible, their work would draw on folksong and dance, either by quoting it directly or imitating its shape and flow.

Although more European in his taste, Tchaikovsky also embodied this principle in his work. His symphonies are seasoned with quotations from childhood lullabies or ditties heard in the street. And the finales to those symphonies are often propelled by Cossack-like dances and a rustic, vigorous energy. His Second Symphony (*Little Russian*) is a good example, with a Ukrainian song quoted right at the start and a finale packed with dances you could stamp your Cossack boots to.

'PRELEST'

If Tchaikovsky had been a painter, he would have used lustrous oils and silver highlights. So much in his music glistens and gleams. And this sparkling quality was something that he shared with his compatriots, in particular Rimsky-Korsakov. The Russians call this seductive, glittering effect 'Prelest'. In practice, it meant including liberal doses of glockenspiel, tambourine, triangle and harp in the score, along with thrilling writing for the brass section. Audiences loved it (and continue to do so), and Diaghilev was keen to profit on its broad appeal.

This exuberant style is the one that Stravinsky would have grown up hearing in the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, and some of his earlier works reflect that penchant for 'Prelest'. His short orchestral pieces *Scherzo fantastique* (1908) and *Fireworks* (1908) both sparkle in a particularly Russian way. They also, however, show the influence of Scriabin's mysticism and Debussy's experiments with colour.

Stravinsky showed an appetite for learning from all around him, and his cosmopolitan tastes remained with him throughout his life. In the early 1900s he was also a regular attendee at the 'Evenings of Contemporary Music' in St Petersburg and Moscow, and would have been introduced to important new trends that way. His lesser-known cantata *Le roi des étoiles* (1911) uses weird harmonies that may have been inspired by such meetings.

Stravinsky's early works from between 1906 and *The Rite* in 1913 are said to belong to his 'Russian Period', inasmuch as they overtly draw on Russian folksong and dance and are coloured with the lavish Russian orchestral palette. There is nothing slavish in this adherence to style, though, and the last two ballets of that period, *Petrushka* and *The Rite*, use Russian features as a platform for bold new thinking.

Stravinsky consciously went through similar phases throughout his creative life – French, Swiss, American – dissecting the sounds of the world around him to come up with a language that both paid homage to those worlds and that viewed them from an ironic distance. This 'stylism' is a constant feature in his composing career.

SMALL GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Ask small groups to research and present on the following key features to the 'Russian style':

- Examples of 'Prelest' in Russian orchestration
- Use of folksong and/or dance
- Extravagant musical storytelling

Peers could evaluate the presentation on the use of correct terminology, suggesting improvements where possible.

How did Stravinsky compose?

From just a glance at one of the pages from *The Rite*'s formidable orchestral score, you can imagine Stravinsky could play three games of chess at once while solving a giant cryptic crossword in two languages. He seems to balance an incredible amount of detail in each bar. The score has a calligraphic quality and is a thing of beauty. These are clues to how Stravinsky composed, reflecting an incredible mathematical precision and a very ordered mind.

Stravinsky's working environment was the paragon of order. Ramuz, his collaborator on *The Soldier's Tale*, reports how various inks and gadgets were laid out like surgical instruments on his desk, ready to do battle. He had even invented a special roller to ink on extra staves where necessary. On a separate board were pinned navigation charts and notes to guide his work on the main manuscript.

Once settled in California later in life, Stravinsky chose the room furthest away from the kitchen in order to avoid any cooking smells that would distract him. He installed double doors, both corked, in order to insulate him against domestic noises. He needed a hermetic seal from the outside world in order to enter his own private world, unadulterated and uncontaminated.

This *modus operandi* gives lie to the apparently subconscious process that Stravinsky insisted guided the composition of *The Rite*. He famously wrote:

'I am the vessel through which *Le sacre* passed.'

The image here is one of mystical inspiration and an unchecked flow of ideas straight onto the manuscript. It's the Romantic ideal of the creator in rapture. And yet, looking at the end result and the fastidiousness, for example, of the rhythms and how they are so neatly controlled, you have to wonder how spontaneous the process actually was. This is a work that feels fresh on every hearing, but that relies on all the cogs and wheels of the musical processes to be well oiled first.

Stravinsky's first ballets and the story behind *The Rite*

Stravinsky did not go to conservatoire to study music. Instead he received private tuition from Rimsky-Korsakov, who became a father figure to him when his own father died. This was enough to give the precociously talented composer confidence to take on orchestral works such as *Fireworks*, as already mentioned. The orchestra seemed to be a natural milieu for him.

Can students describe their working environment, and how it affects them? What would they change to make it into a composer's paradise?

Notice how the composer was the last one to be engaged in this process, unusually.

Diaghilev commented to the press after *The Firebird*: 'Mark him well, he is on the eve of celebrity.'

Diaghilev heard the raw talent in *Fireworks* and approached Stravinsky to write the score to *The Firebird* in 1910. The young composer, aged just 26, had the audacity to refuse the commission initially. He was uncertain, apparently, whether he wanted to write the sort of descriptive music that would be required. Undeterred (and generally always someone who got his own way), Diaghilev returned with the rest of his creative team, including the choreographer Michel Fokine and set designer Léon Bakst, to persuade Stravinsky otherwise – which they did.

The Firebird made Stravinsky into an overnight success. He had captured the fairy-tale in his music with such verve and imagination. The ogres were genuinely threatening, the Firebird mercurial, and the Prince and Princess given the most Romantic melody since Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. He proved he had a unique flair for writing for the medium, despite earlier misgivings.

Play the students to the 'Infernal Dance' from *The Firebird* in its orchestral version here. Then compare it to watching the ballet version, complete with choreography and costume. You could then ask them:

- Which did you find more powerful? Why?
- Does the dance enhance or detract from the experience?
- Can you hear how the mixed metre and heavy accents of this dance look ahead, in a small way, to the music of *The Rite*?

ONE-HIT WONDER?

What's harder than getting your first breakthrough as an unknown composer? Following up on that success – as directors of any film sequel will tell you. The expectations are higher than before, and the scrutiny is set to maximum from critics and audience alike. Could the young prodigy be more than a fly-by-night?

Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov, his friend, called *The Firebird* 'Russian vodka with French perfume'.

Petrushka followed a year later and proved any naysayers wrong. It established Stravinsky as a truly innovative composer, and one capable of working in collaboration with others to achieve greatness. It remains the Ballets Russes's most popular production, over 100 years on. And it is here that Stravinsky's Russian style really comes to maturity. While *The Firebird* had Russian colours, it was also deeply influenced by French music.

In *Petrushka*, Stravinsky got rid of that Gallic perfume and created a work that is Russian to the core. Critically, he was also responsible for the concept and shape of the libretto, so was able to make his distinctive mark on the ballet right from the start.

Stravinsky had acknowledged that the orchestral forces for *The Firebird* were 'wastefully large'.

It's in this second ballet that we see the genius of *The Rite* really taking root:

- Rhythm is treated with ingenious flexibility.
- Discords are mainly constructed from bitonal thinking.
- The orchestra is handled with more economy and control.
- The music captures the internal, psychological drama of its characters as well delivering thrilling set-pieces with the crowd scenes.

The Rite and the riot

Much has been written about the *succès de scandale* of *The Rite*'s premiere in 1913, and researching this makes a nice entry project to the work. There are several factors worth bearing in mind when discussing both the background to the event and issues around its reception:

- Stravinsky himself had come up with the idea of a virgin dancing herself to death, urged on by savage elders in a pagan rite. Even to modern ears, this makes for a shocking storyline. Imagine that being sold to the public now, in the context of a ballet. It would be PR gold.
- The audience was primed for a fight after Nijinsky's erotic choreography to Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* in 1912. The fact that the young upstart was back just months later with a new choreography was in itself beyond the pale for many.
- Nijinsky was also known to be Diaghilev's lover at the time, aged just 23. The apparent nepotism behind his selection as choreographer also predisposed the audience against him.

- People had heard rumours of the Ballets Russes needing over 200 rehearsals to try and get the complex rhythms of Stravinsky's score into their bodies. This was unheard of and seen as ridiculously extravagant.
- Roerich's set design was deliberate crude and simple, painted in Fauvist bold colours.
- The choreography, in its attempt to capture a pagan, primeval world, deliberately negated principles of French classical ballet. With sharp elbows, in-turned feet and 'knock-kneed lolitas', everything was in opposition to classical first position. This was as far from *Giselle* or *Coppélia* as you could get.

So, there was plenty of potential for provocation even before the production had its first night. On the fateful evening itself, the instrumental introduction (figures 1-12) went without a hitch, despite the eerily high bassoon solo and musical material that composer and conductor Pierre Boulez called 'a modernist manifesto'.

It was when the curtain went up on a pagan crowd celebrating the arrival of spring with tribal stamping, hunched and aggressive, that the audience members themselves turned tribal. First came the whistling and booing – pretty standard fare for a French theatre at the turn of the century. Then came the insults as two sides, reactionary and progressive, faced each other off. Paul Horgan's account of the event in his book *Encounters with Stravinsky* relates the experience of an aristocrat, Van Vechten, who had pride of place in one of the theatre's boxes:

'A young man occupied the place behind me. The intense excitement under which he was labouring, thanks to the potent force of the music, betrayed itself presently when he began to beat rhythmically on the top of my head with his fists. My emotion was so great that I did not feel the blows for some time. The blows were perfectly synchronised with the beat of the music.'

At least this was a response to the music itself. For many, including the dancers on stage, the orchestra was drowned out by the ruckus in the auditorium. Distraught, Stravinsky ran backstage to see what could be rescued, only to see Nijinsky stamping out the beat with a staff and yelling numbers to the bewildered dancers as the orchestra continued.

The real hero of this first night was Pierre Monteux, the conductor, who carried on regardless, not dropping a single beat. Stravinsky later commented that he was 'as nerveless as a crocodile'. The professionalism on display here is impressive, particularly given that Monteux had his own doubts about the score. 'When Stravinsky first played the score to me,' he wrote years later, 'I was convinced he was raving mad!'

There is a version of the ballet that Stravinsky made for two pianos as well as for solo piano (demanding an astonishing feat by any brave soloist). Compare both of these to the orchestral version and discuss the differences that the orchestration makes.

After arrests had been made and the theatre had been emptied, Diaghilev and his creative team took a recuperative walk along the Seine. Stravinsky recounts that Diaghilev, the inveterate publicist, was 'delighted', saying the uproar was 'just what I wanted'. Sure enough, when the production was repeated weeks later to a more understanding, accepting audience, it was hailed a complete success and Stravinsky was carried through the streets of Paris on the shoulders of people who recognised the sheer genius what they had just experienced.

The legacy of *The Rite*

The last piece of contextualization here is to look at how Stravinsky's musical vision affected future composers.

First, not even Stravinsky was able to match the level of daring innovation apparent in every dance of *The Rite* – sometimes in the form of a brutal assault of an entire orchestra united in homorhythms, sometimes in the colour of a single solo line. It is utterly unique, a one-off even for him.

The treatment of rhythm as a guiding force, as we shall see in the next analysis, was the main game-changer. Whereas other composers, such as Schoenberg and Berg, would decide to make harmony their final frontier, Stravinsky picked up where Beethoven had left off with his rhythm-driven symphonies (Nos 5 to 7 in particular).

Listen to the joyful final movement of the *Turangalila-Symphonie*. It's like the mirror opposite of *The Rite's* 'Sacrificial Dance'.

Avant-garde composers such as Varèse and Boulez would later be inspired to push this thinking into ever more complex spheres. A lot of Messiaen's work is also about the emancipation of rhythm and the perception of time, and his *Turangalila-Symphonie* is perhaps the closest successor to *The Rite* in terms of orchestration and rhythmic organisation of some of the sections, even though the two are very different pieces.

Perhaps most significantly, the success of *The Rite* gave Stravinsky permission to take further risks with his writing throughout his career, and emboldened others to do the same. The Rubicon had been crossed.

ANALYSING *THE RITE OF SPRING*

The Rite is in two parts, each starting ominously quietly before building to a frenzied peak in their respective final dances.

The first part, 'The Adoration of the Earth', starts with the tentative green shoots of spring and culminates with 'The Dance of the Earth', where the earth is splitting open, vomiting lava (if the tam-tam player is creative enough) and a pagan society is united in bloodlust for the forthcoming sacrifice.

The second part, 'The Sacrifice', starts in eerie stillness then gains more and more momentum. It finishes with the notorious 'Sacrificial Dance', where the chosen virgin dances herself to point of exhaustion and death. In each act, there is a short moment of tense quiet, a held breath in the score, before the final dances erupt. Stravinsky was a great dramatist.

Watch the celebrated Pina Bausch choreography of the 'Sacrificial Dance' and discuss how the gestures and movements reflect the brutality of the score. It has to be seen to be believed!

Joffrey Ballet's reconstruction of the original Nijinsky version is also available for comparison.

Each section or dance in *The Rite* focuses on different rhythmic and harmonic ideas. In the Introduction, Stravinsky represents nature slowly awakening as spring takes hold. In a work that is principally about rhythm, this awakening takes the form of the birth of pulse and pace as the music moves from freedom (an *ad lib* bassoon solo) to metre (pulsing quavers).

The first dance, 'The Augurs of Spring' is about sticking to a machine-like pulse and strict 2/4 throughout (apart from two rogue bars of 3/4). The tension is mainly supplied by relentless repetitions of the same chord and unexpected off-beat stabs in the brass. You never know when those brutal stabs will come, and that is part of the thrill. After the fluidity of spring awakening, this dance is driven by the tribal rhythms of the pagan society and seems to be about their imposing of patterns and structure on the world around them. The harmony is characterised by aggregate chords, where one tonality is piled on another – E flat on F flat to begin with in the famous *Rite* chord.

The following 'Ritual of Abduction' flows in compound time to provide hunting music. The harmonic idea here is still governed by bitonality, with each section generally revolving around aggregate chords. The main rhythmic principle is to explore an additive approach, building ideas that expand and contract using combinations of twos and threes. It helps give a sense of breathlessness, wrong-footing the listener by taking away a strong down-beat.

This dance also showcases the edge-of-seat orchestral ensemble that will be required in the final dances to each act, as every player is brought together in unison rhythms. Even today, orchestral players are on a knife-edge in certain notorious sections. One slip and all the power of the music is deflected (and your career possibly in question!).

These same principles – additive rhythms, aggregate chords – will be put through different exciting permutations in the rest of the score. Stravinsky also innovates with his choice of instrumentation and orchestral colours – the opening falsetto bassoon being a classic example – but it is pace and pulse that are used as the main narrative devices. As Stravinsky put it:

'Where there is rhythm there is music, just as where there is pulse there is life.'

In-depth analysis

This analysis of *The Rite* uses the Boosey & Hawkes score as reprinted in the Edexcel anthology.

INTRODUCTION

1-9	<p>A deliberately strained sound, high in the bassoon's register, maybe imitating a Lithuanian <i>duda</i> pipe. It sounds like an ancient chant.</p> <p>Another image is that of the first, tentative cracks in the thick Russian ice as the spring thaw sets in.</p> <p>Notice the jazzy C sharp/C natural clash as the horn enters, immediately setting up a discord. Each instrument is oblivious of each other's tonality, but they share a rhythmic trope: triplets sloping away from a held note.</p> <p>The frequent pauses and apparent random entry of new lines add to the sense of freedom and the absence of any pulse.</p>
9-19	<p>The cor anglais's chant-like motif comes in response to the bassoon. Whereas the bassoon idea is based on a falling 3rd, the cor anglais features a prominent perfect 4th. The ambit of the chant is slowly widening.</p> <p>From bar 14, a sense of pulse begins to emerge as the material flows more consistently in 3s.</p>
20-24	<p>The oboe chirps on a single note, with a flutter of the wings in the strings, played pizzicato.</p> <p>A high piccolo clarinet gives its version of the opening motif, this time featuring a diminished 5th (written G sharp to D, but sounding a tone higher).</p> <p>The sextuplet pulse now quickens to 8s with the demisemiquavers at figure 5. Momentum is building subtly.</p>
25-32	<p>The oboe's motif features a perfect 5th, so we've gone from 3rds to 5ths with each related chant-like entry.</p> <p>Mirroring that expansion, the gap in register has widened in the orchestra. The flutes bring in the highest notes yet as they imitate birdsong at figure 5, while deep below the bass clarinet impersonates a 'ribbit' of a primal frog at figure 6.</p>
33-37	<p>A slight lull as four flutes and a cor anglais circle each other, the violins trilling ominously below (a feature that will be used in the transition to the next dance).</p>
39-51	<p>The pulse picks up audibly now as triplet rhythms are shared out between bass instruments. The confident thud of the cello offbeat pizzicatos deceive the ear into thinking they're strong beats.</p> <p>Bassoon and piccolo clarinet trade snatches of the chant in contrasting registers.</p>
52-56	<p>The oboe's motif has more stridency, almost a sense of alarm, stretching an octave this time.</p> <p>The piccolo clarinet responds in kind, also with a motif that features an octave stretch. It's as if two brightly coloured birds are calling to each other across the forest.</p> <p>Beneath, the alto flute has merged from 8s into 10s as the flow continues to pick up.</p>
57-65	<p>The triplet movement from figure 7 is now reinstated and a large textural build-up ensues, with more flamboyant gestures and effects, including flutter-tonguing and artificial harmonics in the strings (a trick Stravinsky first used in <i>The Firebird</i>).</p>
66-end	<p>An abrupt halt to the momentum as the bassoon calls out with its opening chant again, this time down a semitone to suit the new target chord of E flat 7.</p> <p>The strings prefigure the next movement with their semiquaver motif. Pulse has been born.</p> <p>A last scurrying away of an animal in bar 72? Six cello soloists whisper a ghostly discord before the new, decisive bitonal harmony is set.</p> <p>Clarinets and muted horns hover quietly while the violins insist on their motif below.</p>

AUGURS OF SPRING

76-92	<p>Notice the 'tempo rubato' of the Introduction has now become 'tempo giusto', a strict 2/4 that will remain consistent throughout (apart from two rogue bars). Whereas the natural world of earlier is full of fluctuating rhythms and expanding motifs, the world of human tribes and ritual is immediately defined by metre and restricted, tight motifs.</p> <p>The iconic composite chord in the strings and horns is given its brutal edge by clashing semitones, E flat 7 against F flat (or an E major triad) beneath.</p> <p>The barbarism of this passage must have added fuel to the riot at the premiere! For an extra visceral effect, the strings are asked to hack out their double-stopped chords with repeated down bows. It's a deliberately ugly sound.</p> <p>Horns help to stamp out the apparently random accents. This is offset by the almost clockwork response at figure 14.</p>
93-109	<p>Oboes and horns give out a crude fanfare, itself based rhythmically on similarly shaped motifs from the Introduction.</p> <p>This encourages a new three-against-two conflict from bar 96 that will be picked up by the violas.</p> <p>The violas introduce a C major triad into the mix – another clash.</p> <p>The brass are stubbornly on the offbeat in bars 101 to 105.</p> <p>Woodwind get more and more frenzied above, but again there is much repetition of small units here compared to the Introduction. It feels almost piston-like, representing the tribe as heartless machines.</p>
110-161	<p>The opening stamping returns. The bitonality set from the start has remained in place throughout the dance so far. It's all about the rhythm.</p> <p>An aggressive chant is shouted out by the bassoons at figure 19, based on the 'fanfare' material from before (figure 15).</p> <p>Other voices join the fray, sometimes feeling like an interruption, eg the oboes at bar 137.</p> <p>Stabbed chords and a surprise thump from the timpani seem to bring the dance to a halt in bars 145 to 146.</p> <p>It's a false ending. At figure 22 the piccolos help emulate a primitive scream and the dance starts to build momentum again, the main motif in the cor anglais sounding all the more threatening with the trills beneath.</p> <p>Several effects lend extra bite: eg the grace-note sweeps in violin 1, the glassy spiccato harmonics in the viola, and the tremolos in the bassoons.</p>
162-169	<p>Another wonderful bitonal harmony here to set up the folk tune in the horn at figure 25: F6 with the E flat 7 still stubbornly overhead. With just F6 in the accompaniment the folk tune would sound noble and happy, but the bitonal clash undermines it, keeping the tone dark.</p> <p>The flute response uses open 4ths and 5ths, in keeping with the 'primitive' language.</p>
174-193	<p>Previous motifs are wrought together as the texture builds again, but the overall dynamic is held around <i>mf</i> so as not to build too quickly. The end is not yet in sight.</p>
194-215	<p>The quartet of trumpets plays a new folk idea, harmonised in parallel motion. The smooth voicing recalls jazz 'drop-down' chords.</p> <p>The deep groans in the eight horns when they come in bar 203 work so well because of their extreme voicing, spread from low written B flat to top A flat.</p> <p>Despite the busy texture, the music feels essentially in stasis, turning in circles. Aside from the melodic ideas, this could be proto-minimalist.</p>
216-247	<p>Now the final build-up begins. <i>Petrushka</i>-like parallel 7th chords in the horns at figure 32 help add new colour.</p> <p>In a disciplined way on the page, but apparently chaotic to the ear, the full orchestra drives the dance with ever increasing accents headlong into the third section.</p>

RITUAL OF ABDUCTION

248-255	<p>Another bitonal composite chord, this time C against E flat 7, that due to the greater distance between the chords feels all the more strident. The hunt has begun and the music is propelled in compound time.</p> <p>The timps unsettle the 9/8 flow with their off-beat rhythms, grouped in 2s.</p>
256-264	<p>Additive rhythms now complete the primitive effect, a 2+2+2+3 division of 9 to start with at figure 39.</p> <p>The horns clearly give a hunting call using 5ths and snarled <i>bouché</i> accents.</p> <p>The flutes and piccolo have played the part of the prey since the start, rushing away from the threat beneath.</p>
265-276	<p>The predominant harmony is now based on B flat over C (bar 265), then E flat 7 over A7 (bar 267). The violins introduce F sharp 7 at figure 42, piling on the tension against A sharp diminished in the violas (bar 272): one aggregate chord after the other, all involving bruising semitonal clashes.</p>
277-284	<p>The bitonal language is picked up by the horns, blasting away in G minor against an F sharp tonality above.</p> <p>This is the first tutti unison homorhythm in this dance, and the effect of the sudden focus is thrilling. Every instrument is united in the hunt.</p> <p>The mixed meter adds to the thrill, disorientating the listener by defying any obvious downbeat.</p>
285-	<p>The horns give their hunting call again, a 4th higher this time in D against F7 harmony beneath (so their high Ds clash with the E flats of the strings).</p> <p>From figure 46 the timpani and bottom strings punctuate the dance, each time with a 3/8 bar. The sudden sparseness – a drum thump against a brief skirmish from seven wind players – is surprising and exciting.</p> <p>This material prefigures the even more complex mixed metre of the ballet's final 'Sacrificial Dance', which uses the same halting 'thump-and-skirmish' pattern.</p> <p>D major clashes with F minor in the final chords as the tribe stamps to a halt. An eerie trill hangs in the flutes, a device that has also been used to link the two preceding movements.</p> <p>All is still as the Sages prepare to make their solemn entrance.</p>

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