

onward, or to the overtly personal dramatic narrative that the symphony came to represent to much of the nineteenth century musical population. The somewhat contradictory title of the work reflects Stravinsky's self-proclaimed intent to achieve a kind of perfect balance between voices and instruments, neither one asserting any kind of superiority over the other. In a certain manner of speaking, we can relate this duality of expression to the same duality of sentiment indicated in the work's dedication -- here is a potent realization of the idea, certainly dear to the composer's heart after the reaffirmation of his Orthodox faith in the 1920s, that man and the divine occupy two distinct areas of one and the same sphere as far as art is concerned. The three Latin psalms used in the symphony (Psalms 38, 49, and 150) are treated in a largely homophonic manner that both sharply contrasts with and, in an ineffable sense that lends a great deal to the sublime spiritual tone of the symphony, solemnly reinforces the more heavily contrapuntal texture of the instruments. On a technical level, Stravinsky sets that spiritual tone by omitting altogether some of the elements of the orchestra that we most closely associate with individual warmth and expression -- the rich upper strings, the clarinets -- and by recommending that the soprano and alto parts of the chorus be performed by a boys' choir.

The three movements are played without any pause. The first movement rides along on steady 16th note and eighth note figurations, on top of which the largely semitone-inflected voices offer their sober, slower-moving thoughts. The second movement is cast as a double fugue, the first for just the orchestra, the second joining all the forces together for Psalm 39. More kinetic in nature is the final movement, which contains the entirety of Psalm 150. Around the central, vibrantly energetic activity are two pillars -- one introductory, one conclusive -- of more serene, worshipful music. The second of these pillars is fashioned into an extensive coda that ends with an unusually spaced C major chord that, however difficult it might be to tune and balance (the first oboe, for instance, is given the E an octave plus a tenth above middle C), seems somehow to contain within it a reflection of the Symphony's ideal of superhuman clarity.



Les noces has an important place in Stravinsky's ballet output: it is a pivotal work, marking the end of his Russian period, and also the beginning of his Neo-Classical period. Les noces comes after the three main Russian-period ballets -- The Firebird, Petroushka, and The Rite of Spring -- and is the obvious result of Stravinsky's years of involvement with Russian folk music idioms. While Les noces has fewer direct borrowings from the folk tradition than its predecessors, it is, as musicologist Richard Taruskin has noted, the work that is perhaps most Russian: Stravinsky, so familiar with Russian folk music by the second decade of the century, was able to create his own generic folk melodies without reference to source materials. The ballet is one of Stravinsky's hybrids, a "dance cantata" that combines dance with instrumental music and solo and choral singing. There is not really a plot to the ballet; instead, it is a series of scenes depicting the ritualized preparations for a Russian peasant wedding. Stravinsky himself wrote the text, drawing on Russian popular texts and songs for his words. The piece is constructed in two parts, with four scenes. Part one consists of scene one, "At the Bride's House," scene two, "At the Bridegroom's House," and scene three, "The Bride's Departure." Part two contains the final and most elaborate scene, "The Wedding Feast." In each scene, simple melodies set texts describing the bride's anxiety, her commiserations with her bridesmaids, the parents' sorrow at the loss of their children, and the groom's anticipation of the wedding night.

Stravinsky began composing Les noces in 1914, and completed the short (piano) score in 1917, but took another four years to decide on the instrumentation. His original plans called for a huge orchestra, but he soon abandoned this impractical idea. He then intended to have a divided orchestra, along with folk instruments, that would perform on stage with the dancers. This plan too was abandoned. Stravinsky then began scoring the work for "mechanical" orchestra, including pianolas and cimbaloms; however, the impracticality of this scoring also became evident as Stravinsky realized the difficulties in coordinating mechanized and non-mechanized instruments, and in finding good cimbalom players. The final instrumentation consists of full percussion and four pianos.

The pianos provide the pitched material, but are also blended with the copious amounts of percussion, resulting in Stravinsky's desired percussive, mechanical sound.

The music of Les noces is deceptively simple; Stravinsky often limits melodies to just three or four notes. Les noces also exemplifies Stravinsky's virtuosic manipulation of small melodic fragments or cells. These cells, or "popevki," are fragments of folk tunes -- in many cases folk fragments invented by the composer -- that are repeated, overlapped, juxtaposed, inverted, and reordered throughout the work, resulting in a seamless texture. Rhythms are simple, and the text setting is syllabic, but metric irregularity and shifting barlines create tension and subvert expectation pervasively. In all, Les noces is the apogee of Stravinsky's "Russian" period, representing his sublimation of the folk traditions that had interested him for years. Its austerity and mechanical character are forward looking, pointing towards forthcoming works in Stravinsky's "new," scaled-down Neo-Classical aesthetic.

Before the later stages of his career, when he began positively pouring out sacred music, settings of religious texts in Igor Stravinsky's catalog of works are relatively few and far between. There are, of course, the Pater Noster of 1926 and the Credo of 1932, but the only really sizable work in an explicitly religious vein that appeared before the Mass of 1947 is the famous Symphony of Psalms for chorus and orchestra that Stravinsky composed in 1930, to fulfill a commission offered to the composer by Serge Koussevitzky during the final days of 1929. The score of the Symphony is thus very appropriately prefaced by a dual dedication that reads, "this Symphony was composed for the glory of God and dedicated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra on the occasion of its 50th anniversary."

Like the Symphonies of Wind Instruments composed ten years earlier, the Symphony of Psalms forces us to step back and reevaluate our musical terminology. Here, symphony is used in more or less its original sense, meaning that which "sounds" or "sounds together," and without any reference to either the traditional multi-movement formal design that dominates orchestral music from Haydn's day

STRAVINSKY

Les Noces & Symphony Of Psalms Ansermet L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande

Choir – Le Choeur De Radio-Lausanne, Le Choeur Des Jeunes de Lausanne

Chorus Master – André Charlete

Les Noces 24:55

1 I. "La Tresse"

2 II. "Chez Le Marié"

3 III. "Le Départ De La Mariée; Part 2"

4 IV. "Le Repas De Noces"

2 Symphony Of Psalms 21:15

Producer: James Walker Engineer: Roy Wallace

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