

Pulcinella Suite: Sinfonia, Gavotta and Vivo - Igor Stravinsky

Background Information and Performance Circumstances



The Russian composer, Stravinsky wrote the ballet *Pulcinella* just after the end of the First World War. He had made a name for himself in Paris just before the war with his three great early ballets *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913). The first two pieces were enormously popular, though the third work caused a near riot at its first performance, when members of the audience started objecting loudly to what they regarded as the harsh modern style of the music. All these compositions required a massive symphony orchestra, particularly the *Rite*.

The war put a stop to these large scale performances and Stravinsky moved to the safety of Switzerland. At the end of the war, a return to Paris ballet productions became possible, though

circumstances were such that the lavish earlier type of production with massive instrumental demands was no longer appropriate. The director of the *Ballets Russes* dance company, Serge Diaghilev asked the composer to make arrangements of some pieces from the middle of the 18th Century by the Italian composer Pergolesi. He had discovered them in a Naples library. The original pieces were written for various solo instruments and small ensembles. It was later discovered that many of the pieces were not in fact by Pergolesi after all. Only the *Vivo* in this selection is by him - from the last movement of a 'cello sonata. The *Sinfonia* is from a Trio Sonata by the Venetian composer Gallo, while the *Gavotta* is from a keyboard piece by Monza. The ballet score to *Pulcinella* was first performed in 1920. This suite (or selection) of pieces was completed in 1922. It contains just eight of the original twenty movements. The original ballet score had parts for three solo singers but these were omitted in the orchestral suite.

Though the ballet was designed, of course, for the theatre, the orchestral suite was written for the concert hall. It was first performed at a concert given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Boston, USA in 1922, conducted by Pierre Monteux, who had championed Stravinsky's music in France before emigrating to America.

Neo-Classicism

The music is regarded as one of the first great masterpieces of *Neo-Classical* style. It was in fact pre-dated by Prokofiev's '*Classical*' *Symphony*, completed in 1917. Whereas Prokofiev used the style of the late 18th Century as his model, Stravinsky, Hindemith and other composers writing in this idiom were just as likely to use the works of Baroque composers as the starting point for their compositions, as was the case with *Pulcinella*. In fact J.S. Bach was the most influential of these earlier composers. There was a very influential *Back to Bach* movement in the mid 20th Century. *Neo-Classicism* represented a reaction against what was perceived as the overblown length, exaggerated emotions and apparent formlessness of much of the music of the late 19th Century.

- Movements in this new style were often short - this suited the episodic nature of ballet requirements.
- Structures were based on typical 18th Century *ritornello*, sonata form, variation, *rondo* and simple binary and ternary forms.
- Harmonies were based on early originals but were often 'spiced up' with added note discords.
- Rhythms often reflected the influence of jazz, especially its syncopated style. Most *Neo-Classical* pieces were newly composed.
- Pieces used a much wider variety of instrumentation and instrumental techniques than would be found in 18th Century music.

Pulcinella was relatively unusual in being based extremely closely on actual 18th Century pieces, with their melodies, structures and even most of their basic harmonies intact.

Performing Forces and their Handling

- The original 18th Century pieces Stravinsky used for these three excerpts from the suite had a maximum of four players (see the *Background information* section).
- Stravinsky wrote the suite for a chamber orchestra of 32 players, roughly equivalent to the type of orchestra Haydn might have used in the late 18th Century,
- There are, however a number of features that 18th Century composers would not have made use of in a piece of this type:
 - A solo trombone in the *Vivo* would not have been used in an 18th Century piece.
 - A separate solo string group was a feature of many Baroque pieces in *Concerto Grosso* style (e.g. the concertos of Corelli), but Corelli would have used two violins and a 'cello, together with harpsichord or organ *continuo*. Stravinsky uses five solo string players instead and there is no keyboard part.
 - The double bass part in 18th Century music was usually virtually the same as the 'cello part (see Anthology no. 1 - Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto no. 4*). In Stravinsky's piece the two double bass parts are often very different from the 'cello music, especially in the *Vivo* where the double bass has a *virtuoso* solo part.

- Stravinsky adds many articulations like slurs and staccatos, as well as frequent **bowing marks**. These were all much less frequently found in 18th Century music.

Sinfonia

- The *Sinfonia* uses **standard double woodwind**, but **no clarinets**.
- There are a number of *tutti* orchestral sections, e.g. the first 4 bars.
- In *tutti* music the solo quintet **doubles** the orchestral strings.
- Occasionally Stravinsky **leaves out a bass line** altogether, e.g. bars 29-30.
- There are a number of passages for **solo wind**, either accompanied by strings (e.g. bars 7-9) or on their own (e.g. bars 33-4).
- **Double and triple stopping** is used in violin music (violin 2, bars 1-4). The indication *non div.* in the orchestral second violins at the beginning indicates that this technique is to be used, rather than dividing the notes between the violinists in the group to make the notes more straightforward to play.
- Sometimes this multiple stopping involves **open strings** (bar 3, Violin 2).
- **Consecutive down bows** are a distinctive feature of the violin 2 music in particular (bars 17-18).
- In general all the music lies comfortably **within the standard ranges** of the instruments, though the solo 'cello part is **occasionally quite high** (top A, bar 6).

Gavotta

- This movement uses **solo instruments throughout**.
- In the *gavotta* itself there are **only wind instruments** (the whole wind section from the *sinfonia* with the addition of two flutes).
- The first bassoon has a relatively *virtuoso* part, starting on top A and having some very un-18th Century *glissandi* (bars 15-17). A *glissando* is obtained by sliding rapidly from one note to another.
- The first variation begins with the unusual *timbre* of an **oboe accompanied by a horn**.
- The instrumentation is stranger still at the double bar, when **trumpet and trombone** are called on to join in the **accompaniment**. These two instruments tend traditionally to be reserved for loud orchestral climaxes or, in the case of the trumpet solo melodies.
- Variation 2 is more **technically demanding**, especially for the solo flute and 1st bassoon.

Vivo

- This is the first of these extracts to use the **full orchestra**, including flutes, trumpet and trombone (all omitted in the more refined *sinfonia*).
- The full *tutti* is only heard on two very brief occasions, though, to give a sudden sense of surprise, emphasised by the **loud dynamics** (bars 33 and 37).
- A further surprise is that the movement ends with a very **small group of players** (just trombone, 'cellos and basses).
- The light-hearted style and use of solo trombone and double bass give the impression of a circus piece.

- One of the most distinctive characteristics of this music is the use of *glissando* in the trombone and double bass parts.
- The **double bass** music is sometimes **unnaturally high** (bars 24-5).
- The indication *du talon* in the lower strings, bar 12 indicates that the music should be played at the **heel** of the bow. This gives added 'bite' to the sound.

Texture

- One of the most prominent textural characteristics in the *Sinfonia* and the *Vivo* is the rapid **alternation** between loud *tutti* sections and quieter, **mainly solo** passages.
- The main texture in the *Sinfonia* is **melody dominated homophony**.
- The most straightforward version of this texture can be heard at bars 37-9 where a solo violin melody is accompanied by simple chords in the other strings with repeated note quavers in the orchestra (omitting Violin 1), sustained notes in the solo strings, and with double stopping in the solo viola part.
- The texture at the beginning is also treble dominated homophony but with a much fuller orchestration.
- The viola parts occasionally **double** the violin tune here, but down an **octave**.
- Occasionally we get a glimpse of the **trio sonata origins** of the piece as at bar 12 with two violins playing in **3rds** above a quaver bass line. The situation is complicated a little by the added horn line.
- There are occasional more **polyphonic** sections. You could also use the term 'contrapuntal'. The meaning is almost identical, though the word 'counterpoint' tends to refer more to the actual technique of combining separate lines of music to produce a polyphonic effect.
- Bar 7 is a good example of polyphony, with the oboe melody **imitated freely** by the 1st bassoon at the **distance of half a bar**, while a separate **counter-melody** is played by the solo 'cello. The other parts have a much simpler accompaniment role.
- There is **three part texture** in bars 29-30.
- The texture at the beginning of the *gavotta* seems like melody dominated homophony in a way, but although the oboe has the main tune, the other parts have such interesting lines that it might be more appropriate to call it **four part texture** here.
- There are moments of **homorhythm** - all parts playing the same rhythm - as at bar 23.
- There are quite frequent **broken chord** textures in the accompaniment, e.g. bar 50 of Variation 1.
- At the beginning of Variation 2 the solo bassoon plays an elaborate contorted version of an *Alberti bass* accompaniment, sometimes stretched over very **large intervals**. *Alberti bass* is a type of accompaniment associated mainly with keyboard music. In its simplest form it outlines a three note broken chord in the bass, moving from lowest to highest to middle to highest note. Yes - it seems to have been first used to any great extent by the Italian composer Domenico Alberti!

- In the *Vivo* the double bass solo often **doubles** the trombone part, as at the beginning, though double bass music sounds an **octave lower** than it is written, so the doubling is 'at the octave'.
- There is **heterophony** at bar 38 of the *Vivo*. The flutes play the double bass tune at the same time, with a more elaborate version, three octaves higher than the sounding pitch of the double bass.

Structure

Sinfonia

The movement is in **rounded binary form** with an imagined double bar at the end of bar 15. The second half begins with the same theme as at the beginning of the piece but now in the dominant. As is standard in this form, the main theme returns in the tonic at the end. That's what makes it 'rounded'. There are **no repeats**. Compare Bach's *Sarabande* p.249 for a standard Baroque version of this structure.

1 st half - bars 1-15	2 nd half - bars 16 to the end	
Section A bars 1-15. 1) 6 bar main theme in G major tonic for <i>tutti</i> then strings only. 2) 3 bar sequential idea on oboe with bassoon counterpoint modulating to the dominant (D). 3) Repeated note and cadence section in D lasting for 3 bars and a quaver - then repeated in altered form.	Section B bars 16-32 1) Theme 1 in dominant for 5 bars. 2) Bars 21-23 - new rising modulating sequence based on music of bar 10. 3) Bars 24-26 - new version of Theme 2 now played by solo 'cello'. 4) 2 bar cadence figure in B minor 5) 2 bar descending sequence, repeated with more instruments.	Section A1 bars 33-end 1) Starts with the main theme in the tonic G but as a surprise beginning with 2 bars of just bassoons and horns. The original 6 bars in total are reduced to 4 here. 2) 3 bar descending sequence in tonic. 3) 4 bars of cadence phrases taken from the end of the A section, now in the tonic.

Gavotta with two variations

- *Gavotta* is the Italian name for the French dance *Gavotte*.
- The overall structure is of a **theme and variations**.
- With its $\frac{6}{8}$ **compound time signature**, the first variation is nearer the style of a **gigue** than that of a *gavotta*, which is traditionally in common time (see section on rhythm and metre).
- The music is in straightforward **binary form**.
- In the theme and first variation the first half is repeated, but not the second.
- The first half **modulates** to the **dominant**. The second half modulates through related keys to return to the tonic, but there is **no repetition** of the main theme in the second half.

- The variations follow the same structure, although the second variation **compresses two bars of the gavotte into a single bar**, so the first section of 10 bars lasts only 5 bars.
- The second variation also **repeats the second half**, though in a rather unusual way. The repeat actually starts half way through bar 80 (the beginning of the first time bar). The second phrase begins before the first has finished, overlapping with the last two notes (bar 82).

Vivo

- Like the *Sinfonia* this movement is again in **rounded binary form**.
- The first half **modulates to the dominant (C)**, but only just before the double bar. These two bars could also be described as a secondary dominant progression as the music is simply strengthening the dominant chord C for a return to the tonic tune (see notes on tonality).
- The second half **begins unexpectedly in the tonic key**. The first three bars here were added by Stravinsky to Pergolesi's original as a kind of joke.
- The second half proper is actually delayed to bar 25, where the theme reappears in the **dominant**.
- A **modulating sequence** then takes the music through G major back to the tonic (F).
- The main theme then returns in the tonic key with the widely spaced heterophony mentioned under 'texture'.
- A mock mournful version of the tune in the **tonic minor (Fm)** appears at bar 46.
- The main tune returns with unaccompanied double bass in the tonic key (bar 53).
- A new **comic cadence phrase** with an inversion of the original *glissando* idea completes the movement.

Tonality

- Stravinsky took the traditional tonality of the originals and spiced it up with frequent **added note dissonances**.
- Despite the dissonance we can always hear the **underlying tonality**. The *Sinfonia* begins in a clear **G major** and **modulates to the dominant** early in the first section (from bar 4), as does the Baroque original.
- Other **closely related keys** follow in the second half (from bar 16) before ending in the **tonic key**.
- There is a **modulating sequence** in bars 21-3 which takes the music up from **G major (tonic), through A major to B minor**.
- There is a **circle of fifths** from bars 7 to 9.
- **Added notes** are apparent right from the start. In bar 3 the simple G major chord of the original is clouded by the A in the second violins.
- **Perfect cadences** are traditionally used to **reinforce a key** and Stravinsky retains many of the original cadences intact, for instance the simple D major perfect cadence of bar 15.

- On other occasions the effect of the **cadence** is completely **altered**. The second beat of bar 2 should be a dominant 7th (D-F#-A-C). Instead the G which has been repeated by oboe 2 and 2nd violin for the whole of the first two bars, clashes against the F# of the dominant chord, completely changing the effect of the cadence.
- One of the most interesting altered cadences is at the end of the *Vivo*, when the cadence is transformed into a kind of III-I. Only the G remains of the dominant chord, and there is no third in the mediant chord.

Harmony

- The underlying harmonies are often very **simple, mainly root and first inversion chords**, reflecting the origins of the piece.
- If we look at the beginning of the second half of Variation 1 of the Gavotta (bars 43-6) we can see that the oboe outlines simple **tonic and subdominant chords** (D and G). The bassoons always play notes that fit these chords.
- On the other hand the brass continuously **repeat** a tonic chord. This is fine in the first bar, but in the second (bar 44) this tonic chord produces a **powerful discord**, with the F# in the trombone clashing with the G in the oboe and bassoon 2.
- Much the same happens at the beginning of the Sinfonia (see notes on tonality).
- **Cadences** do exist but often **dissonant notes are added** or the **chords are changed** from what we would normally expect (see tonality notes).
- Sometimes the harmonies are quite **bare**. At the beginning of the Vivo you might expect alternating tonic and dominant chords in F. Instead the accompanying instruments just play the **root notes of the chord in unison and octaves**. It is left to the solo parts to fill in a few of the other chordal notes.
- **2nd inversion chords** are occasionally found, e.g. at the end of the Sinfonia where the cadence chords are Ic-V-I, for once without added notes.
- **Suspensions** are occasionally found. In the solo 'cello part in the Sinfonia, bars 7-9, the long held notes end in a suspension which **resolves ornamentally**.
- **Retardations** (upward resolving suspensions) occur sometimes. The second bar of the Gavotta begins with a C# retardation in the oboe part.
- The harmonies here also illustrate Stravinsky's use of **7th chords**, including here the dissonant G major 7th chord at the beginning of bar 7.

Melody

- Stravinsky's melody lines tend to follow the 18th Century originals particularly closely.
- Simple **balanced phrase** structure is often apparent, as in the opening four bars of the Sinfonia with its pair of balanced phrases, each lasting two bars.
- **Sequences** are common, as in the one bar phrase in the oboe at bar 7, which is repeated in **descending sequence**.
- A **rising sequence** can be found at bars 21-3 in the Violin 1 parts.
- **Ornamentation** is common as it was in the 18th Century.

- Stravinsky sometimes **exaggerates** ornamentation to make the music sound even more 18th Century in character. The exaggeration of stylistic effects was a common feature of neo-classical style. An example can be found in the frequent **trills** in bars 7-9.
- Other ornamentation includes **grace notes**, e.g. bar 5, beat 2. This kind of group of grace notes is often called **gruppetti** (literally 'little groups').
- There is a **turn** in bar 20 of the Gavotta.
- There is a **written out turn** at the beginning of the Gavotta (bar 1 oboe).
- More complex versions of written out ornamentation can be found in the second variation of the Gavotta.
- There are frequent **quintuplet** turns here.
- The ornamental style of this variation also includes rapid **scalic** passages.
- Sometimes the melody line **outlines broken chords** as in Variation 1 in the oboe part, bars 43-5.
- **Repeated notes** often feature in the melodies (e.g. Sinfonia bar 5, Violin 1).
- Sometimes Stravinsky takes a **short motif** and **repeats** it more than in the original. In bars 10-11 of the Sinfonia the two beat motif in the second violin is repeated an extra time.
- Phrases often feature passages in **conjunct** style (stepwise melodic movement) followed by a **large leap**, e.g. bar 1 of the Sinfonia, where a downward leap of a **perfect 5th** interrupts conjunct movement.

Rhythm and Metre

- **Dotted note rhythms** are an important feature of the main Sinfonia tune, and especially in the sequence section, bars 7-9.
- Stravinsky frequently adds **rests** which weren't present in the original.
- Often these might occur where an 18th Century player would have made a natural break in the phrase, e.g. the semiquaver rests in the oboe part, bars 7-8. Note also the **tied notes** in the bassoon and solo 'cello parts here.
- **Syncopation** is an important feature of Stravinsky's style in general. It was also often found in Baroque music. It is immediately apparent in the leap in the melody of bar 1 of the Sinfonia.
- In Rite of Spring Stravinsky seems at times to be changing the time signature almost every bar. In Pulcinella matters are not so extreme. Nevertheless, there are occasional **time signature changes**, sometimes as in bar 11 where he **adds an extra beat** to the original melodic idea. This results in a change to **duple**, $\frac{2}{4}$ and then **triple**, $\frac{3}{4}$ time signatures.
- As well as the simple time signatures found elsewhere in this selection, Variation 1 is in **compound** $\frac{6}{8}$ time signature.
- Variation 2 contains the kind of rhythmic groupings which would never have been written by 18th Century composers, though Baroque players may well have played ornaments using that kind of rhythm.
- These include frequent **quintuplets** and rapid scales in groups of 11 or 12 to a **single crotchet beat**.

- The Vivo uses **demisemi-quavers** in the double bass, while the trombone has glissandi.
- The short length of notes is sometimes emphasised by the performance directions, e.g. *staccatiss. e secco* (very detached and dry) - bar 46 Vivo.
- There is a dramatic **pause** just before the end of the Vivo.