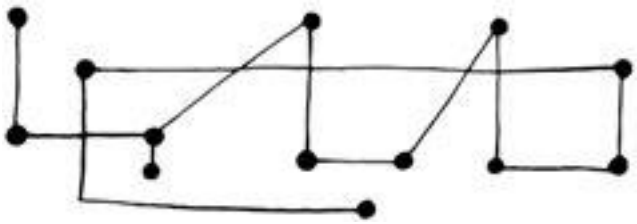




# STRAVINSKY: THE PROGRESS OF A METHOD

EDWARD T. CONE

## I

FOR MANY years it was fashionable to accuse Stravinsky, like Picasso, of artistic inconstancy: of embracing a series of manners instead of achieving a personal style. Today it is becoming increasingly clear that Stravinsky, like Picasso, has been remarkably consistent in his stylistic development. Each apparently divergent phase has been the superficial manifestation of an interest that has eventually led to an enlargement and a new consolidation of the artist's technical resources.

This does not mean that all questions concerning Stravinsky's methods are now settled. Some of his most persistent characteristics are still puzzling, and as a result it is hard to explain why some of his greatest successes really work. But they do work, and this essay will try to throw some light on how they work by examining one of these characteristics: the apparent discontinuities that so often interrupt the musical flow.

From *Le Sacre du Printemps* onward, Stravinsky's textures have been subject to sudden breaks affecting almost every musical dimension: instrumental and registral, rhythmic and dynamic, harmonic and modal, linear and motivic. (Almost every one of these can be found, for example, in the first dozen measures of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments.*) Such shifts would be noticeable in any context, but they are especially so because of other peculiarities of Stravinsky's style. A change of chord after a long-continued static harmony comes as a shock; so does a melodic leap interjected into a predominantly conjunct line; so too a new temporal context after a metrically persistent rhythm.

It could be argued that such points of interruption in scores like *Le Sacre* and *Les Noces* are meant to be analogous to corresponding actions on the stage, and hence that their origin is primarily extramusical and practical. Even so, none of the stage works exhibits so consistent and musically functional use of the device as the "abstract"

*Symphonies*—which would indicate that, whatever its origin, the method was musically important to him. That he has never relinquished it suggests that it is musically necessary.

On examination, the point of interruption proves to be only the most immediately obvious characteristic of a basic Stravinskyan technique comprising three phases, which I call stratification, interlock, and synthesis. By stratification I mean the separation in musical space of ideas—or better, of musical areas—juxtaposed in time; the interruption is the mark of this separation. The resultant layers of sound may be differentiated by glaring contrast, as at rehearsal Nos. 1 and 2 of the *Symphonies*, where changes of instrumentation, register, harmony, and rhythm, reinforce one another. The effect may be much more subtle, as at No. 6, where instrumentation overlaps and there is no change of register. (All references, in this as in other works, are to the revised scores because of their more general availability.) In almost every case, however, there is at least one element of connection between successive levels. In the first example cited the interval of the fourth, F-B♭, is the foundation common to the two areas despite their striking difference in sound.

Since the musical ideas thus presented are usually incomplete and often apparently fragmentary, stratification sets up a tension between successive time segments. When the action in one area is suspended, the listener looks forward to its eventual resumption and completion; meanwhile action in another has begun, which in turn will demand fulfillment after its own suspension. The delayed satisfaction of these expectations occasions the second phase of the technique: the interlock. To take the simplest possible case, consider two ideas presented in alternation: A-1, B-1, A-2, B-2, A-3, B-3. Now one musical line will run through A-1, A-2, A-3; another will correspondingly unite the appearances of B. Although heard in alternation, each line continues to exert its influence even when silent. As a result, the effect is analogous to that of polyphonic strands of melody: the successive time-segments are as it were counterpointed one against the other. The alternation of the first two contrasting areas of the *Symphonies* is an elementary example of this kind, but much more complicated alternations of three or more layers are common. (See fold-out.) (The device is not without precedent, as a glance at the successive partial statements of the ritornello in the first movement of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto will show. In this connection Stravinsky's own predilection for the Baroque concerto style is illuminating.)

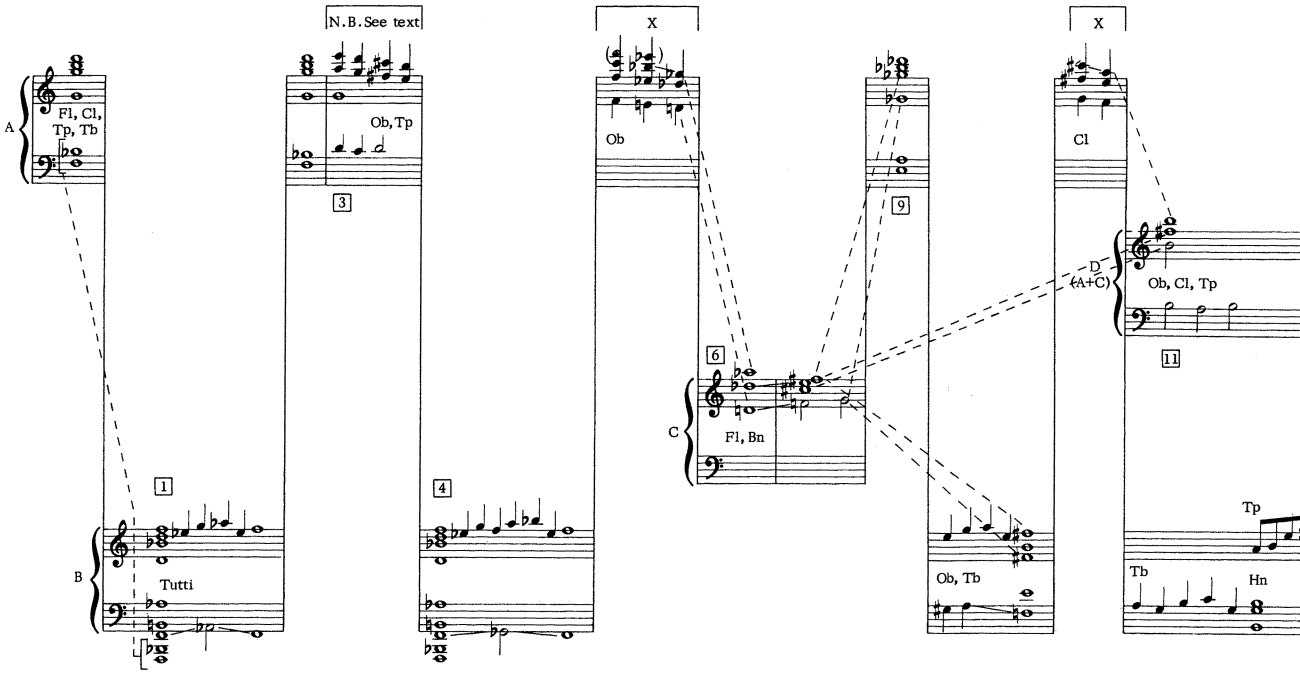
The most interesting phase of the process, the synthesis, is the one most likely to be overlooked. Some sort of unification is the necessary

goal toward which the entire composition points, for without it there is no cogency in the association of the component areas. But it is seldom as explicit as the original stratification, and it almost invariably involves the reduction and transformation of one or more components, and often the assimilation by one of all the others. The diverse elements are brought into closer and closer relation with one another, all ideally being accounted for in the final resolution. But the process is by no means confined to the end of a movement; sometimes it is at work from the beginning. It can take many forms: rhythmic, contrapuntal, harmonic. A small-scale example referring to a limited section begins at No. 46 of the *Symphonies*. The material, first presented on levels separated by register and instrumentation, moves gradually into a *tutti* in which all strata are simultaneously stated.

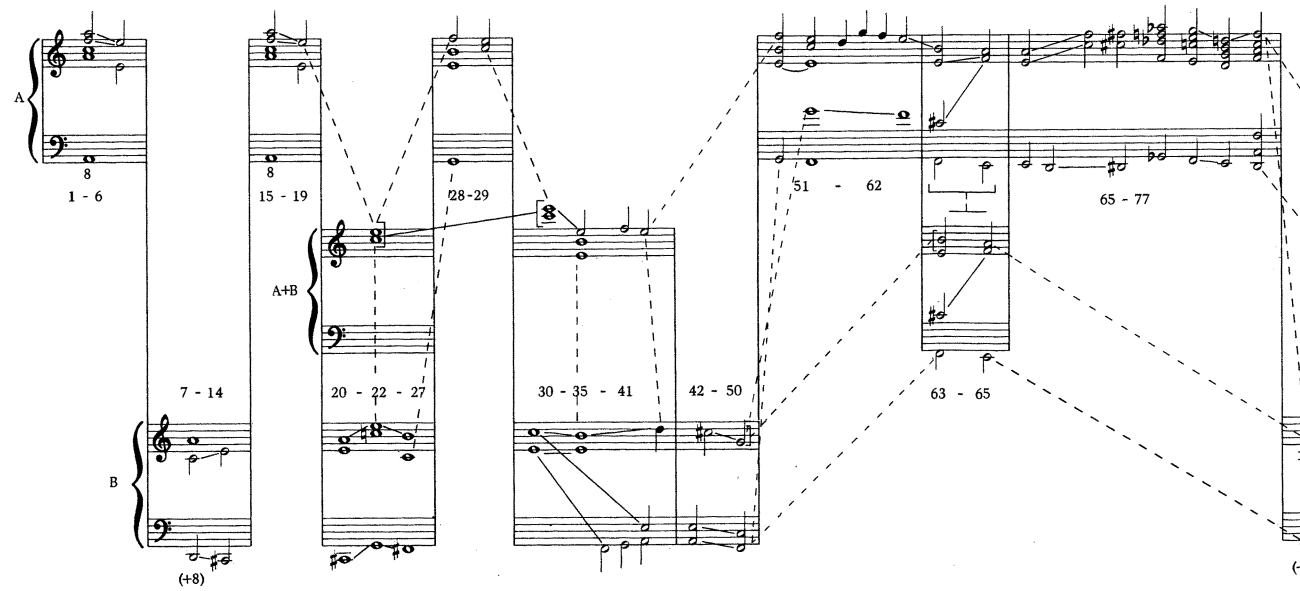
A description of the technique would be incomplete without mention of two devices the composer uses for mitigating the starkness of the opposition between strata. One is the use of a bridge, such as the two measures just before No. 6 of the *Symphonies*. This motive, linking the preceding statement at No. 3 with the new area of No. 6, effects the gentler stratification previously noted. It is not a transition in the conventional sense, but an area with a life of its own, as its future development shows. Although acting as a bridge in the immediate context, it reaches forward to its next appearance in the interlocking pattern.

The other means at Stravinsky's disposal is what I call divergence: the division of an original single layer into two or more. When the chorale, so long suspended through the course of the *Symphonies*, succeeds in achieving its full expanse, it engenders a divergence (initiated by the horns after No. 66, carried on later at No. 68 by the oboes). A more subtle example is the one introduced by the oboes at No. 3. Here it sounds like a continuation of the first motive, but it proves to be the source of the entire large area beginning at No. 46.

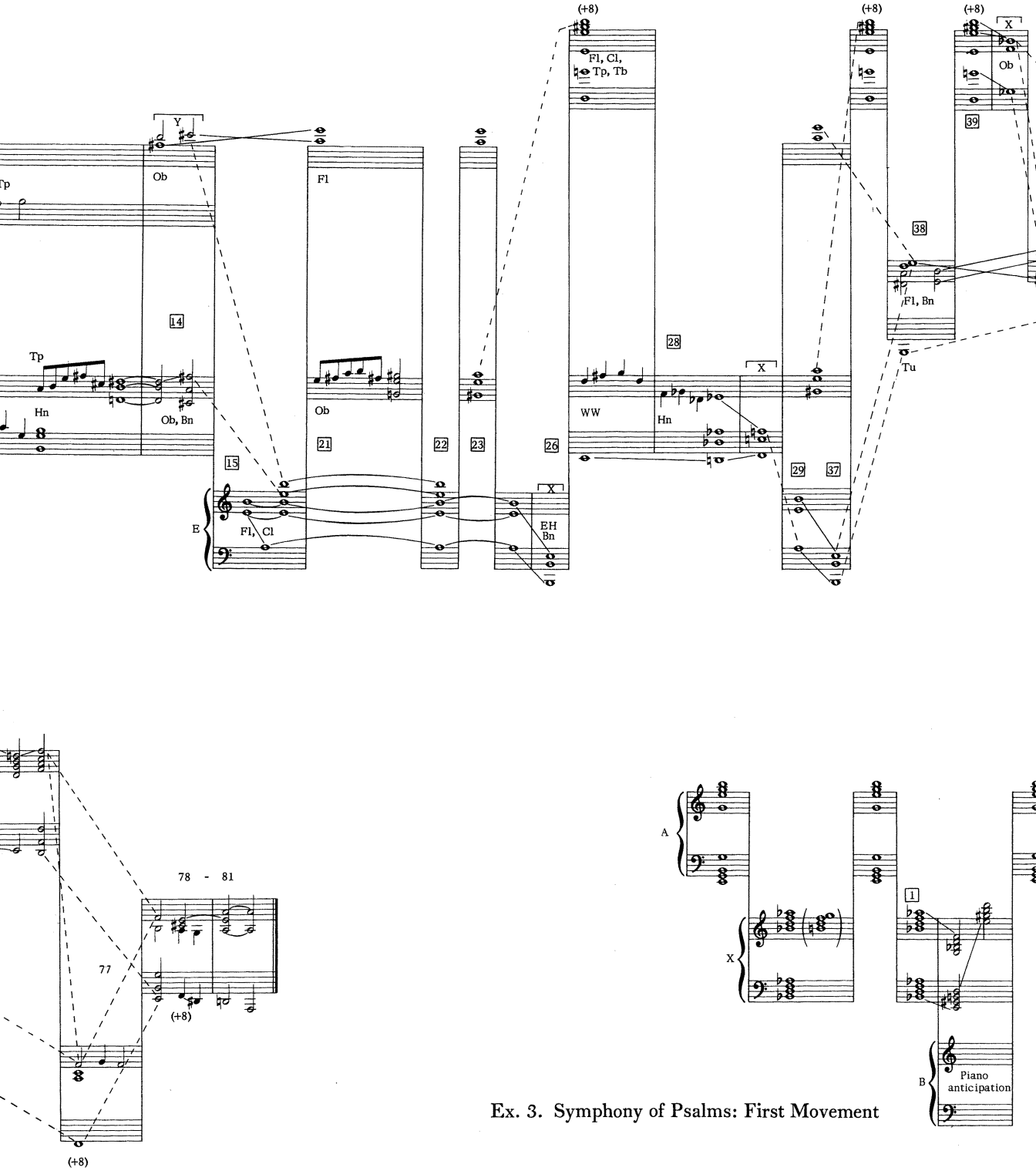
All the examples so far have been taken from the *Symphonies*, the most thoroughgoing of Stravinsky's works in the employment of the technique. Its entire form depends thereon, as I hope the following analysis will make clear. During the years that followed its composition, however, Stravinsky refined his method, as I shall try to show in analyses of the first movements of the Serenade in A and the *Symphony of Psalms*. Finally, a few references to more recent works will attest its continuing importance.



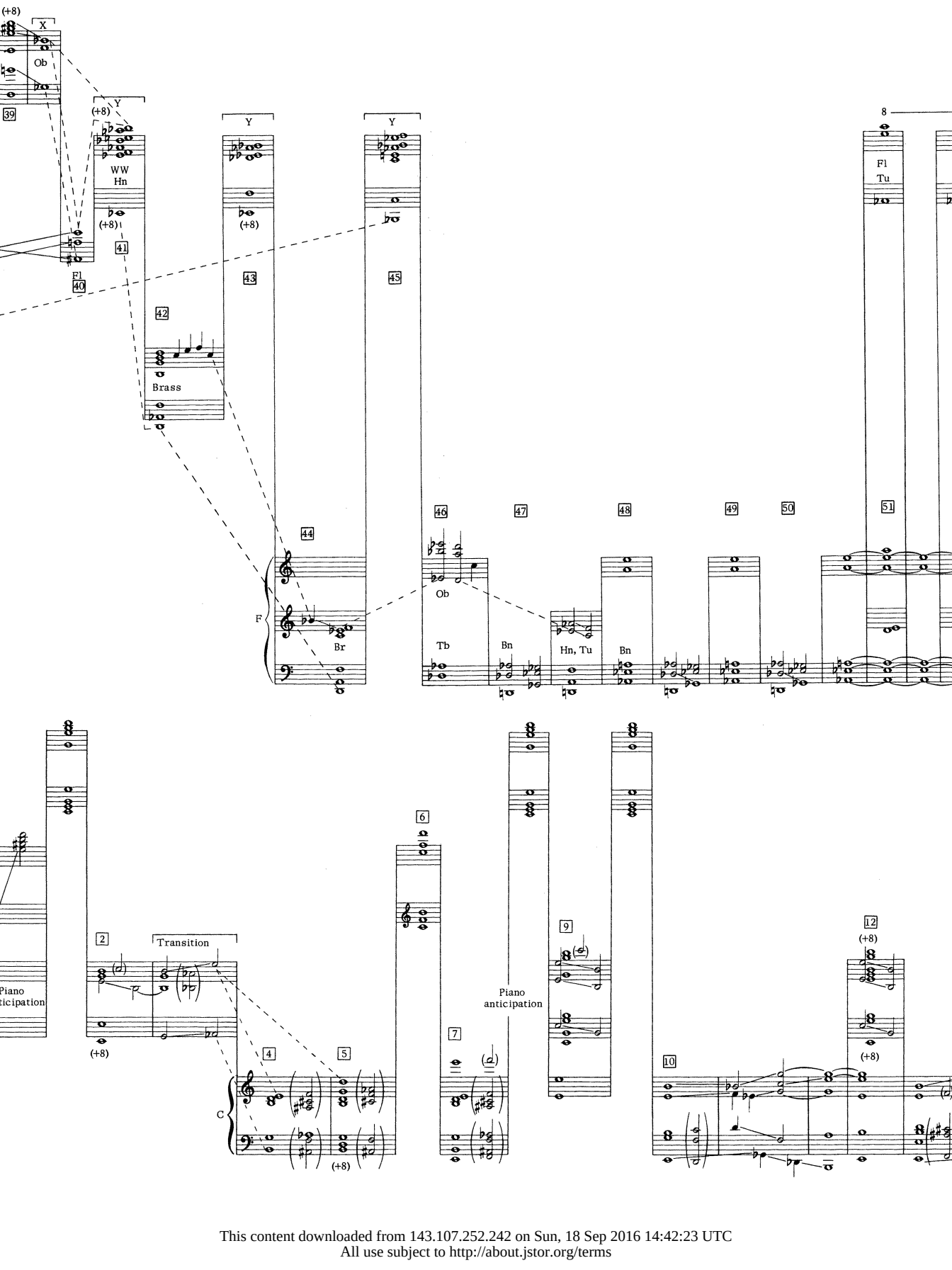

Ex. 1. Symphonies of Wind Instruments

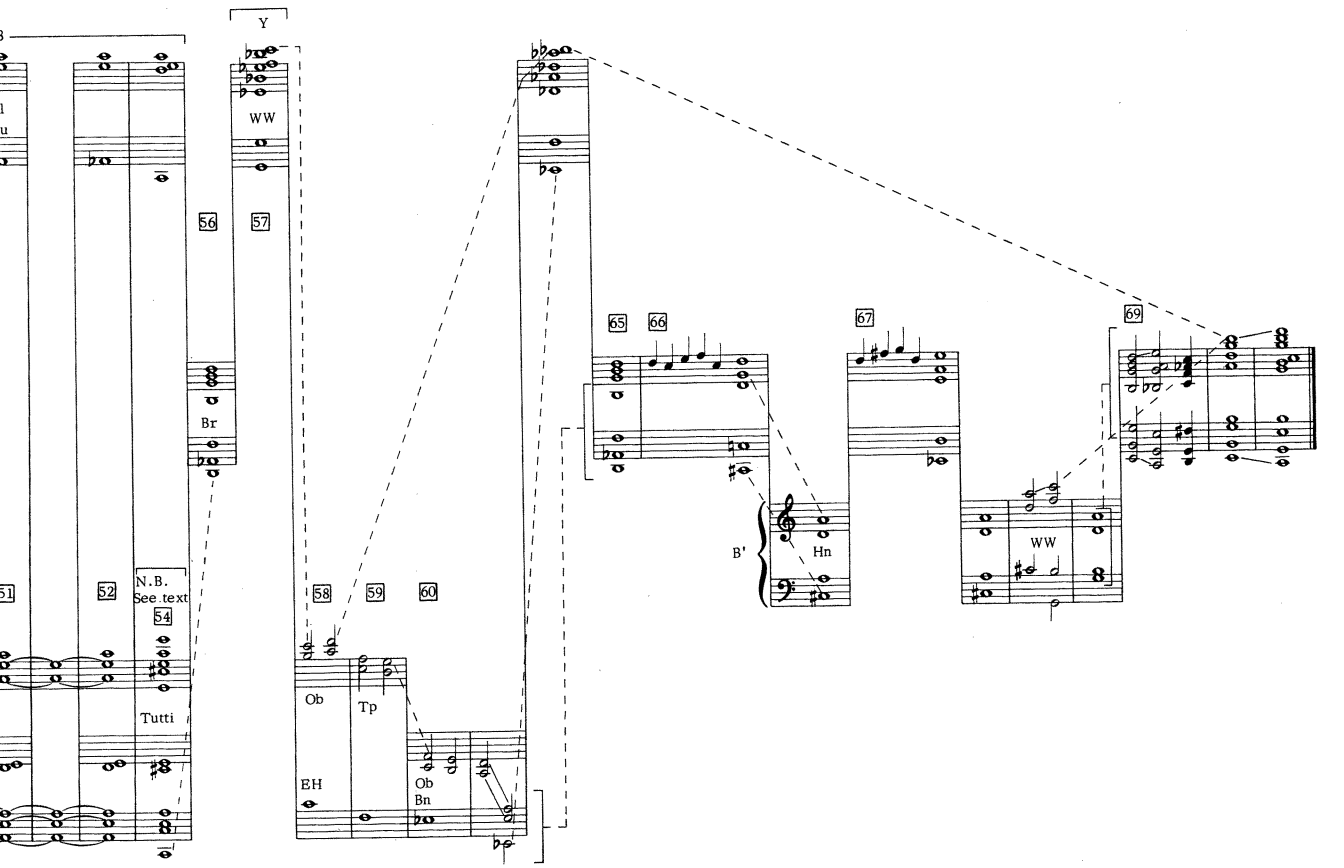



Ex. 2. Serenade in A: Hymne

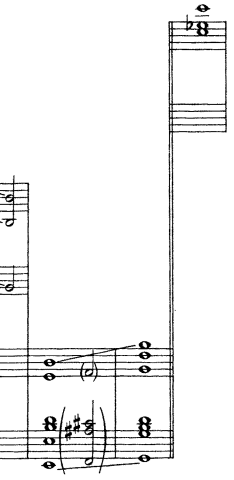



Ex. 3. Symphony of Psalms: First Movement






Second movement



## II

The sketch of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is not meant to serve as a complete linear and harmonic analysis but is rather intended to make clear to the eye the way in which the strata are separated, interlocked, and eventually unified. The thematic material represented by the capital letters is easily identifiable through the corresponding rehearsal numbers in the score; my own notation presents the minimum necessary for following the important lines of connection. These should be read first of all straight across—from the first appearance of A to the second, thence to the third, and so on. If this is done, the continuity of each layer should become immediately clear. When the voice-leading is unusual, or when it has been abbreviated in the sketch, paths are made by unbroken lines, as in the bass of the first appearance of B. Broken lines are used to show connections and transitions between areas, divergences, and elements of unification. The fourth underlying both A and B, for example, is indicated at the outset as a common factor. The transition from A to C at No. 6 is similarly shown, as well as the double connection from C to the following statements of A and B.

One thing the sketch does not show is the contribution of the meter to the differentiation of strata. Taking ♩ = 72 as the common measure, we find the following relationship:

B: ♩ = 72

A: ♪♩ = 72

C, D, E: ♪♪♩ = 72 (actually notated: ♪♪♩ = 108)

F: ♬♩ = 72 (actually notated: ♬♩ = 144)

These relationships also contribute to unification. In the first important step toward synthesis, at No. 11, the area referred to as D brings A and C together at a common tonal level against contrapuntal interjections by B. A is assimilated into the faster tempo of C as well, a movement at first resisted but eventually joined by a B transformed for the occasion. Out of this synthesis appears E as a long divergence that shows its close connection by retaining the same tempo. E in turn suffers frequent contrapuntal interjections by D, and after several more serious interruptions it returns to its parent, never to reappear.

The latter half of the piece is largely concerned with the develop-

ment of the new area F. It has already been suggested that F contains several levels that are unified in the climactic *tutti* at No. 54. The result is an unmistakable emphasis on the fifth A-E as a neighbor to the G-D of the beginning and end. At the same time, another line initiated by the original G-D fifth has descended through F♯-C♯ (No. 9) to E-B (No. 15, and especially after No. 26), and its gradual return to the original level is completed in the final synthesis.

It is thus the role of the late flowering of area B to resolve both of these motions, a role beautifully fulfilled by the last chord. The linear aspects of this synthesis are indicated in the sketch, but even more impressive is the masterly way in which the harmonic progression toward the tonic C is handled. Foreshadowed by the premonitory chords at Nos. 42 and 56, delayed by the long development of section F, clearly approached at No. 65, momentarily circumvented by the divergence within section B, it arrives with inevitability and finality. And although its root is C, the chord is broad enough to contain within itself the triads of G major from the opening and E minor from the long central passage.

This connection of G to E is important for another reason: it demonstrates the influence of the opening motive on the entire course of the piece. Area A is concerned with the contrast of two fifths (or a fifth and a fourth) at the distance of a minor third: G-D and B♭-F. The expression of the same relationship horizontally in the upper voices gives rise to the basic opposition between areas A and B. The progression from G to E and back, again expressed in terms of their fifths, reflects the minor third in the opposite direction. The third thus operates within a single area, by contrast between areas, and through the movement of the whole.

Two recurring transitional passages should be noted: the ones marked X and Y. The former is first used between areas A and C; but later it occurs cadentially attached to A, B, and E—a significant unifying element. Y always functions as a preparation for a longer section: it is used to herald E, F, and the final B.

The most interesting detail of all, however, is the little passage at No. 3. Interpolated as a conclusion to A, it looks forward, both metrically and motivically, to the future F. At the same time it summarizes the two important movements of fifths mentioned above: the neighboring motion from G-D to A-E and back, and the descent from G-D through F♯-C♯ to E-B. And the English horn, its lowest voice, forecasts clearly the tonality of C toward which the entire composition is to move.

## III

The first movement of the Serenade in A is both a simpler and a subtler example of the same techniques—simpler because it is based on only one predominant stratification, and subtler because the two areas develop the same material and are consequently always in close touch with each other. The initial statement of the two strata sets up the immediate contrast: A is *forte*, relatively high in tessitura, and based on a Phrygian mode. B is *piano*, lower in tessitura, and more chromatic, moving from the Phrygian to the major. The "Hymne" records the progress of the gradual assimilation of these levels to each other. The first step on the way, the sudden harmonic shift in m. 22, exemplifies Stravinsky's more flexible approach to his own method, for this passage functions as both a divergence and a unification. From the point of view of B, it is a divergence toward the more diatonic realm of A, a divergence that returns to its origin only at m. 42. But in a larger context this area represents a convergence of A and B, the first of a series leading to the synthesis of the final measures. The sketch tries to make clear both relationships.

Stratum A makes an important step toward unification at m. 52, where for the first time its *forte* interruption is continued *piano*, a dynamic level heretofore associated exclusively with B. In mm. 63-65, a divergence occurs that, like the one noted previously, is at the same time a step toward synthesis. Here A enters the lower tessitura and outspoken chromaticism of B, and even when it returns to its own melodic level in m. 68, the harmony is still colored by the association.

The synthesis of the last few measures is within the range of B, it is true, but it specifically resolves both levels as the sketch indicates. The concluding open octave sounds appropriately neutral.

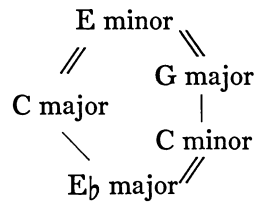
The opposition set up in the first few measures thus not only explains the immediate interruptions so characteristic of this movement, but also underlies the divergences within the larger sections. As in the *Symphonies*, an initial detail controls the course of the form. It can hardly be an accident that if one adds all the sections labeled A and those labeled B, the results are equal in length almost to the eighth note.

## IV

The refinement already noted in the Serenade is carried still further in the first movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*. Here the areas I have designated as B and C represent successive expansions of, and divergences from, the original area A, which is the pure E minor

chord. (Pure but not simple: its unique orchestration and doubling already suggest the important role of G as a future dominant.) B, always easily distinguishable by the predominance of the piano, permits diatonic motion within the static E minor; but C, the vehicle of the vocal lines, contains in its instrumental parts chromatic neighbors that are continually pushing the voices toward C minor or E♭ major. Why?

The answer takes us beyond the confines of this movement. The last appearance of C ends squarely on the dominant of C minor, the key of the second movement. E♭, on which this movement in turn ends, is also prominent in the finale, which resolves its constant struggle between that key and C major in favor of the latter. This completes the circle, so to speak, by its close relation to the opening chord. The following diagram, linking by means of a double line those chords in which the root of one is the third of the other, indicates the progression of the whole symphony:




This progression is forecast in the stratum labeled X, which unlike the others does not relate directly to the opening chord. It begins by alternating the dominants of C and E♭ and moves now toward the one key, now toward the other. It is also an important element of unification. Its sixteenth-note motion constantly underlies B; its harmonies are constantly suggested in C, the accompaniment of which is appropriately based on an augmentation of X. But the true resolution of X comes only with the statement of the fugue-subject of the second movement.

Here, then, is the same technique, but used in a highly complex way. B, although divergent from A in rhythm, develops its harmony; although in instrumental and harmonic contrast to X, it utilizes its rhythm. (At one point—during the transition to the first appearance of C—B even embraces the harmony of X.) C, in turn easily distinguished from its neighbors by its orchestration, nevertheless includes and synthesizes the harmony of them all; and the climax at No. 12 combines C with B, and by implication with A. Interesting overlaps occur, as when the piano twice anticipates the entrance of B (once

before No. 2 and again before No. 9), or when voices—the property of C—reinforce B's tonic pedal (No. 9). Stratification in one dimension thus proceeds simultaneously with unification in another, and the process embraces not this movement alone but the symphony as a whole.

## V

It was suggested at the outset that Stravinsky has never relinquished the method of composition outlined here. A cursory glance at almost any typical piece written before his present twelve-tone period will bear that out. An analysis of the first movement of the *Symphony in Three Movements*, for example, becomes much easier if the principle of stratification is applied. The introduction not only furnishes the basic material of successive divergences forming the important areas of the movement, but also returns at the end to complete its own line and to synthesize the whole. The chief strata of the body of the movement, those beginning at No. 7 and at No. 38, are presented in interlocking pattern; and much that goes on internally within each can be explained by sub-stratifications—such as the contrasting *concertante* areas that comprise the central section.

What is more surprising is to find the same principles at work in the twelve-tone pieces. There is no clearer example of the interlock, for instance, than the recurrent Hebrew letters in contrast to the Latin texts of the "Querimonia" and "Solacium" sections of *Threni*. Each stratum here forms a line unified by melody, harmonic progression, instrumentation, and choice of voices. A more primitive example of the same kind is to be found in the recurring orchestral refrains throughout the *Canticum sacrum*.

It could be argued that these are special cases analogous to stage works, and that only their textual and liturgical demands have elicited a technique characteristic of Stravinsky's earlier period. Yet I believe that a closely related method underlies *Movements*. Here, in a style characterized by wide-ranging, pointillistic melodies, a complete harmonic exploitation of the chromatic scale, and a flexible rhythm free from obvious ostinato patterns, instrumental differentiation becomes the chief source of stratification. This practice is especially obvious in the third and fourth of the *Movements*. In the former, one level is initiated by the piano, one by the oboe and English horn, and one by the harp and trumpets. Only the piano remains unchanged throughout. In the second level, the English horn is replaced first by the clarinet, then by the flutes. In the third, the trumpets are joined by the bass clarinet and are eventually replaced by a clarinet tremolo.

This element serves as a unifying pedal in a final synthesis of all three layers.

The fourth movement presents one level always opened by flutes and sustained by chords in string harmonics. Each statement of this area is answered by one of the piano, but each phrase of the piano is in turn introduced and interrupted by an orchestral interjection. The interrupting area is always the same: solo cellos or basses. The introductory area constantly changes: from cello harmonics (m. 98) to clarinets (m. 111) to trombones and bass clarinet (m. 125).

These two movements are the most thoroughgoing in their use of the orchestra in this way, but all the sections are influenced by the same approach. It is symbolized by the peculiar layout of the full score—a notational scheme that in fact suggested the one I have used in my own analyses. What is more, the entire work shows evidence of a single plan of orchestral stratification, working its way through all the movements. This can be seen in characteristic idioms of certain instruments: the trumpets, whether playing intervals or lines, constantly emphasize the fifth; until the last movement the trombones are heard only as a group; the clarinet tremolo is carried over from the third to the fifth movement. The succession of the interludes emphasizes first the individual sound of each group in turn—woodwinds, strings, and brass—and then the unification of the three. Prepared as it is by the exceptionally clear differentiation of instrumental areas of No. IV, this interlude comes as a climactic synthesis—the only *tutti* in the entire work. It is typical of Stravinsky's current phase that this is followed by a movement of relative attenuation, decomposing the orchestra once more into stratified layers. It is symptomatic that even the harp tone is here divided as it were in two—into a harp and a celesta component (mm. 183ff.).

Many listeners have noted that *Movements*, for all its references to post-Webern serialism, still sounds unmistakably like Stravinsky. The foregoing account of an enduring feature of his style may suggest one reason why.