The Rite of Spring

‘The Augurs of spring’ & ‘Ritual Abduction’.

Stravinsky 1913.

Points of interest

* Stravinsky studied under Rimsky-Korsakov.
* Stravinsky’s relationship with Diaghilev & Nijinsky.
* The reaction to the premiere of The Rite of Spring.
* Stravinsky’s use of tonality & harmony.



**Most commonly used time signatures**

**4/4 - 4 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**3/4 - 3 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**2/4 - 2 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**6/8 – 6 quaver beats in a bar.**

New Directions in Music

Set Work 3

**Harmony & Tonality**

* Harmony and tonality is not functional in *The Rite of Spring.*
* Modulations are made to unrelated keys.
* Dissonance is used throughout.
* Any sense of key is lost by Stravinsky’s use of bitonality.
* The diminished 5th (tritone) is used to suggest death.
* Stamping chords are created by the use of semitone clashes.

**Melody**

* Melody lines tend to meander and do not fall into balanced phrases.
* Melodic lines contain both leaps and conjunct movement.
* Melodic material is derived from small motifs which are developed and transformed.
* The opening bassoon melody is derived from a Russian folksong.
* Stravinsky paints the sound of nature through depictions of animal calls.

**Structure**

* *The Rite of Spring* is in two parts. The first part, *The Adoration of the Earth* describes nature and springtime on prehistoric earth. It culminates with the eruption of a volcano. The second section *The Sacrifice* describes a virgin dancing herself to death as an offering to the gods.
* Both sections are through composed, the music being led by the narrative of the plot.
* Section changes are highlighted by changes in tempo, texture, metre and rhythm.

* Many sections are free of time and pulseless as motifs do not adhere to the metre.
* Frequent pauses are used to prevent any sense of pulse.
* Stravinsky uses triplets and cross rhythms to blur the metre.
* A greater rhythmic drive is heard at the start of the *Ritual Abduction* with the introduction of stamping chords.
* Additive rhythms are used in *Ritual Abduction* (2+2+2+3 division of the beat).
* Off-beat brass is a prominent feature.
* Textures in *The Rite of Spring* are constantly changing.
* Layers of motifs create a polyphonic texture.
* The *Ritual Abduction* features homorhythmic stamping chords.
* Stab chords are used in the dance section – emphasised by brass and percussion.
* *The Rite of Spring* begins with a monophonic bassoon line with the texture gradually thickening during the introduction.
* Textures are built and suddenly reduced to create drama & tension.

**Social & Historical Context**

**Sonority**

**Texture**

**Rhythm, Metre & Tempo**

* The piece marked a new direction in the production of ballet, not only in terms of music but also in the storyline and choreography.
* The premiere caused a riot as the Parisian audience was ‘not ready’ for this new departure.
* Stravinsky had established partnerships with Diaghilev and Nijinsky with whom he had collaborated previously.
* *The Rite of Spring* pioneered a move away from the traditional use of tonality & harmony.
* Instruments are often used at the extremes of their registers to create unusual sonorities.
* The opening bassoon line imitates the Lithuanian Duda pipe.
* Many extended instrumental techniques are used including: pizzicato strings, trills, string harmonics, flutter tonguing, heavy downbows, double stopping, spiccato bowing, tremolos & bouchee accents on the horns.
* Dynamics play a very important role often changing between extremes to create further dramatic tension.

Wider listening: *Prelude de L’Apres Midi d’une Faune –* Debussy, *Petrushka –* Stravinsky*, Aux Canyons Des Etoiles –* Messiaen.