



THE RITE OF SPRING

Igor Stravinsky (1913)



POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Why was it so controversial?
- Eastern European folk music elements
- Use of large orchestra
- Relationship between music and choreography.
- 20th Century techniques.

INTRODUCTION, THE AUGURS OF SPRING AND RITUAL OF ABDUCTION

RHYTHM, METRE AND TEMPO:

- A rhythmic work (eg. pagan dance section)
- Free rhythm
- Groupings: Triplets, quintuplets
- Polyrhythm
- Cross rhythms
- Time signature changes
- Unusual time signatures
- Syncopation

HARMONY AND TONALITY:

- Did not entirely reject tonality at this stage of his career, though there is never any clear sense of key and a constant use of harsh dissonance.
- Hints of bitonality
- Chromatic scale creates atonal effect
- Folk music elements contain modal style melodies. eg. Diatonic melody in Aeolian mode in bassoon.

CONTEXT:

- Stravinsky was invited by Diaghilev to write a piece for the Ballet Russes when some of his early pieces were heard in St Petersburg. This was successful but when he wrote the Rite of Spring this caused a scandal, because the audience found the music too dissonant and violent and were offended by Nijinsky's choreography.
- Described as the starting point of twentieth-century music.
- The music rapidly became popular as an orchestral piece and has become one of the most important works in the orchestral repertoire.
- Dance enhances score further.

MELODY:

- Many melodies taken from Eastern European folk songs, eg. Lithuanian folk song.
- Ostinatos
- Fragmentary and repetitive ideas
- Repeated notes and chromaticism
- Uses acciaccatura ornaments typical of Russian folk song
- Detaches short motifs from longer melodies and re-orders these units.

SONORITY:

- Used one of the largest orchestras ever assembled for his score:
- Quintuple woodwind
- Extra-large brass section
- Large percussion section
- Standard string section.
- Many instruments written in transpositions.
- Music opens with unaccompanied bassoon in high register.
- String techniques: repeated down bows, double-stopped chords, harmonics, pizzicato, divisi, glissando harmonics, Con sordino, Col legno.
- Muted trumpet
- Flutter tonguing..

TEXTURE:

- Predominantly polyphonic.
- 1st section: Monophony to 2 part duet to 4 part.
- Homophonic chords, melody dominated homophony
- Complex polyphony: ostinato fragments and countermelodies.
- Homorhythm