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Stravinsky

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Alien Corn:

Stravinsky's Jazz-Influenced Music

Stravinsky, like many of his European contemporaries, found inspiration in the new forms of popular music emanating from America in the 1910s and 20s. Ragtime, which by the late teens and early 20s had for the most part evolved into the more improvisatory and ensemble-oriented jazz idiom, caught the ears of classical composers with its syncopated take on European dance and march rhythms. As Ernest Ansermet observed, "most ragtime... is founded on well-known motifs or on formulas peculiar to our art – there is one on the *Wedding March* from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, another on Rachmaninoff's celebrated *Prelude*, another on typical Debussy chords, another simply on the major scale."¹

Through distant and haphazard contact with this music, Stravinsky's early writing evolved so that his style owed much at times to the idea of jazz, without necessarily reflecting authentic jazz style, contrary to his assertion decades later that, "Jazz patterns and especially jazz instrumental combinations did influence me forty years ago, of course, but not the idea of jazz."² He is half truthful in this quote. Jazz did indeed influence his choices of orchestration at times, and in his overtly jazz-inspired pieces, he would make sly references to characteristic harmonic

¹ Ernest Ansermet, "Sur un orchestre nègre," trans. Walter J. Schapp as "Bechet and Jazz Visit Europe, 1919," in *Frontiers of Jazz*, ed. Ralph de Toledano (New York, 1947), p. 116.

² Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, (New York, 1959), p. 132.

devices. In addition, the time-world created by improvisation pleased him,³ though he never included improvised sections in even his most overtly jazz-oriented works.

His jazz-influenced works can be divided into three categories: initial explorations into the style that took place toward the end of his Swiss exile in the late teens; commissioned works by jazz bands in the 30s and 40s; and “serious” works that happened to contain elements of jazz that spanned his career from the 20s onward. This paper will discuss relevant pieces in chronological order.

There is some uncertainty concerning Stravinsky’s early exposure to ragtime. In *Dialogues*, Stravinsky claimed 1918 as the year his close friend at the time, the conductor Ernest Ansermet returned to Switzerland from an American tour with the Ballet Russes with “a bundle of ragtime music in the form of piano reductions and instrumental parts...”⁴ Eric Walter White, however, states 1917 as the year,⁵ as does Carl Simpson in the preface for his edition of the score of *Rag-Time (For Eleven Instruments)*.⁶ Similarly, Stravinsky recalled (perhaps faultily at a remove of over four decades) October of 1918 as the start of his work on *Rag-Time*, and the morning of the Armistice as the time of its completion. There is an attractive romance to his story:

I began the *Ragtime* for eleven instruments in Octboer 1918 and finished it on the morning of the Armistice. I remember how, sitting at the cimbalom in my garret in Morges, like *Gretchen am Sprinrade*, I was aware of a buzzing in my ears that increased until I was afraid I had been stricken like Robert Schumann. I went down to the street and was told that everyone was hearing the same noise and that it was from cannon along the French frontier announcing the end of the war.⁷

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 54.

⁵ Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works* (Berkeley, 1966), p. 67.

⁶ Carl Simpson, Preface, *Rag-Time (For Eleven Instruments)* (St. Louis, 1990).

⁷ Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 54.

Robert Craft's and Vera Stravinsky's *Stravinsky: in Pictures and Documents*, shows, however, that the first sketches were made on 27 November, 1917,⁸ with the full draft signed and dated "21 March 1918."

This is all of consequence only for the sake of discerning the nature of Stravinsky's exposure to ragtime music prior to his first forays into composing it. Barbara Heyman argues that due to the widespread popularity throughout Europe of cakewalks (a precursor to ragtime) and ragtime as far back as the turn of the 20th century, Stravinsky would have had to be completely isolated not to have come in contact with it.⁹ She relates, in fact, that according to Victor Yastrebtzev, as early as 17 February, 1904, "Nicholas Richter horrified Rimsky-Korsakov's wife by playing a cakewalk, while Mitusov [one of Igor's close friends] and Stravinsky demonstrated how it should be danced, 'paws up, like circus poodles or boop-a-doop'" at an informal student gathering of Rimsky-Korsakov's.¹⁰ Furthermore, he was quoted in 1916 as saying, "I know little about American music except that of the music halls ... but I consider that unrivalled. It is veritable art and I can never get enough of it to satisfy me I am convinced of the absolute truth in utterance of that form of American art."¹¹

What Heyman fails to take into account, however, is the authenticity or lack thereof of the "ragtime" or jazz Stravinsky was hearing. When he claims in *Dialogues* that he first heard

⁸ Robert Craft and Vera Stravinsky, *Stravinsky: in Pictures and Documents*, (New York, 1978), p. 175.

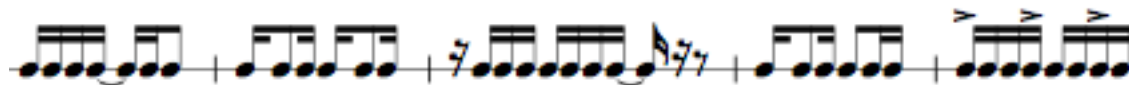
⁹ Barbara B. Heyman, "Stravinsky and Ragtime," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct., 1982), pp. 543-562.

¹⁰ Victor Yastrebtzev, *Recollections of Rimsky-Korsakov*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1962), Vol. II cited in Heyman, "Stravinsky and Ragtime," p. 546.

¹¹ C. Stanley Wise, "'American Music is True Art' says Stravinsky," *New York Tribune*, Jan. 16, 1916, Sec. 5, p. 3. cited in Heyman, "Stravinsky and Ragtime," p. 548.

live jazz in 1919,¹² it is entirely believable, given the idiosyncratic portrait he makes of the style in *Rag-Time* and the *Ragtime* movement of *L'Histoire du Soldat*.

A survey of ragtime sheet music by composers such as Scott Joplin, Eubie Blake, Scott Hayden, et al reveals an identifiable rhythmic language built on a number of frequently used syncopations, many of which contain hemiolas.



The tendency of some ragtime rhythms to delay rhythmic resolution by emphasizing upbeats for extended passages doubtless appealed to Stravinsky's taste for a similar effect, created with additive rhythms and frequent meter changes.

Stravinsky's first attempt at writing in a ragtime style was the *Ragtime* section from the *Three Dances* movement of *L'Histoire du Soldat*, completed in 1918. Its basic properties reflect the conventions of ragtime style. This section is one of only two movements from all of *L'Histoire* with a key signature, and though the work does not follow typical ragtime key structure on the macro level (for example: two strains in the tonic, with a modulation to the subdominant for the third and final strain), many individual phrases reflect a tonic-dominant construction, as typical ragtime phrases would. The opening violin melody exemplifies this. Following the tonic-dominant movement, though, Stravinsky manipulates the expectations of the listener for the second phrase by changing the context of the violinist's notes in relation to the root movement in the bass, which moves from the leading tone down the relative minor rather than returning to the tonic.

¹² I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 54.

Moreover, the rhythm of the violinist's melody is entirely in keeping with ragtime style. Besides the obvious sixteenth-note syncopations, the dotted rhythms that abound throughout the movement reflect a dramatic increase in the notation of dotted rhythms by ragtime composers throughout the 1910s. In his monumental study of ragtime, Edward A. Berlin found an increase from 12 percent in 1911 to 58 percent in 1916 in the use of dotted rhythms in ragtime sheet music.¹³

Starting at fig. 27, Stravinsky introduces a recurring idea, again in the violin, that recalls the practice in ragtime music of creating prolonged displacement of accents. He accomplishes this with frequent meter changes.

This passage in particular speaks to the allure of ragtime for Stravinsky when viewed in the context of a quote from *Poetics of Music*: “Who of us, on hearing jazz music, has not felt an amusing sensation approaching giddiness when a dancer or solo musician, trying persistently to stress irregular accents, cannot succeed in turning our ear away from the regular pulsation of the

¹³ Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*, (Berkeley, 1980), p. 148.

meter drummed out by the percussion?”¹⁴ As in much of this movement, he seems to treat the beat as a jazz musician would. He accomplishes this by manipulating dynamics, pitch, and articulation to create the illusion of a regular meter over which he temporarily reverses established schemes, and creates perceived hemiolas with bars of 3/16, 5/16 and 7/16. Both “resolutions” occur in the above passage on the marcato notes at the ends of the third and sixth measures. The elements of the compound line intersect at these points to state the tonic chord, reinforcing the perception of a downbeat. The listener may perceive the entire passage in a consistent meter, but with accented upbeats, much as American ragtime is written.

Stravinsky wrote in *Chronicle of My Life* in 1936 of how jazz at the time of *L'Histoire* had enchanted him with its “novel rhythm which so distinctly revealed its negro origin.”¹⁵ Perhaps his views had changed by 1959 when he said of jazz that the rhythm held no interest for him. “Rhythm doesn’t exist really because no rhythmic proportion or relaxation exists. Instead of rhythm there is ‘beat.’ The players beat all the time, merely to keep up and to know which side of the beat they are on.”¹⁶ More likely he was speaking of the jazz being played at the time: jazz of the late 1950s was generally more linear, with less overt syncopation. It was the syncopation of ragtime more than any other jazz that reflected his rhythmic ideas throughout his career.

The configuration of early American jazz bands also influenced Stravinsky’s orchestrational choices in this piece, as the ensemble represents Stravinsky’s take on a jazz band.

My choice of instruments was influenced by a very important event in my life at that time, the discovery of American Jazz... The *Histoire* ensemble resembles the jazz band in that each instrumental category – strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion – is represented by both treble and bass components. The instruments

¹⁴ Igor Stravinsky, *The Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, 1942), p. 29.

¹⁵ Igor Stravinsky, *Chronicle of my Life*, trans. (London, 1936), p. 130.

¹⁶ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, p. 131.

themselves are jazz legitimates, too, except the bassoon, which is my substitution for the saxophone... The percussion part must also be considered as a manifestation of my enthusiasm for jazz.¹⁷

Stravinsky's next foray into jazz was *Rag-Time (For Eleven Instruments)*. Far from striving to be an authentic ragtime piece, *Rag-Time* represents Stravinsky's attempt at "creating a composite portrait of this new dance music, giving the creation the importance of a concert piece, as in the past, the composers of their periods had done for the minuet, the waltz, the mazurka, etc."¹⁸ *Rag-Time* is the only work of Stravinsky's from this period that remains in 4/4 for the duration of the piece.¹⁹

A few brief examples of how Stravinsky utilizes ragtime rhythms in this piece will prove instructive in discovering the ragtime influences in his less overtly jazz-derivative works. A perfect example of Stravinsky's use stereotypical ragtime rhythms to displace accented beats occurs at fig. 4:

Figure 4: Musical score for Cimbalom, Cornet, and Violin I. The Cimbalom part starts with a 4-measure rest, then plays a syncopated rhythm. The Cornet part plays a syncopated melody with dynamics *sf secco* and *mp*. The Violin I part plays a steady quarter-note rhythm with dynamics *mf*. The staff is marked with a 4-measure rest at the beginning and a 5-measure rest for the Violin I part.

Written in Stravinsky's usual style, it might look more like this:

Figure 5: Musical score for Cimbalom, Cornet, and Violin I. The Cimbalom part starts with a 3-measure rest, then plays a syncopated rhythm. The Cornet part plays a syncopated melody with dynamics *sf secco* and *mp*. The Violin I part plays a steady quarter-note rhythm with dynamics *mf*. The staff is marked with a 3-measure rest at the beginning and a 5-measure rest for the Violin I part.

Another instance of typical ragtime rhythm in the piece occurs at fig. 11. As in much of the work, Stravinsky imitates a ragtime pianist's left hand "stride." He orchestrates it with the

¹⁷ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, (Los Angeles, 1962), pp. 91-92.

¹⁸ Stravinsky, *Chronicle of my Life*, p. 131.

¹⁹ Simpson, Preface, *Rag-Time (For Eleven Instruments)*.

bass playing pizzicato quarter notes on beats one and three, usually though not always oscillating between notes a perfect interval apart, while the viola and second violin supply the chordal response on the off-beats, also pizzicato. In this passage, the “left hand” figure is interrupted briefly to strengthen a syncopation resulting from accents in an eighth-note line in the cimbalom. Again, the rhythmic construction creates tension by delaying the restoration of the downbeat.

Besides his rhythmic treatment, Stravinsky also cleverly alludes to ragtime conventions such as the four-measure introduction consisting of an energetic upbeat pickup proceeding into a syncopated arpeggiated line scored in octaves. That is where the similarities to ragtime formal devices end. From a harmonic perspective, the piece does not follow typical ragtime key structure. In the first two measures alone, Stravinsky arpeggiates an F7 with an added note on the raised second degree and a D7. That the pitches all belong to an octotonic scale may be a sly reference to the practice of some rag composers opening their pieces with diminished arpeggios. From there, the piece avoids clearly stating any tonality, but seems to travel at times through Bb, B, G, E minor, Ab, and F, before ending on B minor chord with added notes on the second and

fourth degrees. This is not to say, however, that ragtime music did not influence some of his harmonic choices.

Most notably at fig. 6, and again at fig. 34, Stravinsky alluded to a popular ragtime progression consisting of a IV major 6th chord, to a raised IV diminished chord, to a I chord in second inversion, which then turns around to go back to the IV chord for a repeat of the progression. This progression was such a part of the early jazz lexicon, it would soon find its way into many tunes by Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton such as “King Porter Stomp” and “Heyena Stomp” among others.

Finally, Stravinsky’s *idea* of jazz, if not the actual practice of it, influenced him in his use of the cimbalom as a concertante instrument. He had heard the instrument in a restaurant in Geneva four years earlier and had purchased one with which to experiment and compose.²⁰ He used it to evoke an image of jazz with its “bordello-piano sonority.”²¹

This is far from the last time Stravinsky’s selection of instruments would be inspired by jazz music. *Mavra*, composed in 1921-22, uses mostly wind instruments because, among other reasons, Stravinsky desired “‘jazz’ element” that required this sound rather than that of an orchestra.²² Incidentally, this music caught the ear of an English jazz bandleader who arranged part of *Mavra* for his group to play. Stravinsky recalled, “It was an awful flop... *Mavra* has no place on a ‘jazz’ programme. Mr. Hylton [the bandleader] was a sympathetic man, but I think this was the most bizarre concert I have ever attended.”²³

²⁰ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, p. 136.

²¹ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 54.

²² I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, p. 82, see note 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

Obviously, the works commissioned by various jazz bandleaders resulted in pieces orchestrated to their specifications. Such pieces included *Praeludium* for “a certain Reichman”²⁴ in 1936/37; *Scherzo a la Russe*, which was in fact music originally intended for film re-orchestrated for Paul Whiteman in 1944²⁵ that was subsequently re-arranged for orchestra;²⁶ and his best-known jazz commission, *Ebony Concerto*, a “concerto grosso” for Woody Herman’s big band,²⁷ finished on 1 December, 1945, to be premiered on 25 March, 1946.²⁸ More subtly, Stravinsky stated that hearing the jazz trumpet player Shorty Rogers in Los Angeles might have influenced him to use a flugelhorn in his orchestra for *Threni* in 1957-58.²⁹

As Stravinsky freely admitted, *L’Histoire* and *Rag-Time* were not authentic pieces in the style, but a “snapshot” or “portrait” of the genre, as Chopin’s *Valses* were portraits rather than actual dances.

The snapshot has faded, I fear, and it must always have seemed to Americans like very alien corn. If my subsequent essays in jazz portraiture were more successful, that is because they showed awareness of the idea of improvisation, for by 1919 I had heard live bands and discovered that jazz performance is more interesting than jazz composition. I am referring to my non-metrical pieces for piano solo and clarinet solo, which are not real improvisations, of course, but written-out portraits of improvisation.³⁰

²⁴ Robert Craft and Igor Stravinsky, “‘Dear Bob[sky]’ (Stravinsky’s Letters to Robert Craft, 1944-1949),” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 1979), p. 432.

²⁵ White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, p. 419.

²⁶ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 53.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, p. 436.

²⁹ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, p. 132, see note.

³⁰ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 54.

Again the word “portraits” is telling. *Piano-Rag-Music*, completed 28 June 1919 is remarkable for its extended passages without barring, meant to emphasize the improvisatory aspect of the music.³¹

This represents another instance of Stravinsky’s idea of jazz trumping the reality of it in his music. A common misconception that persisted for decades held that jazz improvisation was somehow outside of the scope of Western notation or analysis or was non-intellectual.³² Similar thinking may have informed Stravinsky’s effort to notate a portrait of improvisation by leaving out the barlines.

Through all of the unbarred passages, the left hand alternates a bass note with a two-note chord above it in eighth notes, creating the effect of a manic stride accompaniment. With few exceptions, it is a repeating three-beat ostinato over which the right hand seems to imply 4/4 for the most part, with occasional syncopations, that Stravinsky might have conceived as implied meter changes. This is based on a similar principal to the *Bransle Gay* of *Agon* that he would write some four decades later with a castinet ostinato notated in consistent 3/8 time underneath a score with frequent meter changes in the other instruments. Again, this idea recalls Stravinsky’s amusement with the effect created by a jazz musician’s juxtaposition of changing accents over a fixed beat.

Stravinsky frequently practiced *Piano-Rag-Music* because he enjoyed the feeling of the piece under his fingers. Many of the rhythmic elements in the piece, to his fascination, came from his fingers during its composition. As he writes in *Chronicle*, “Fingers are not to be despised: they are great inspirers, and, in contact with a musical instrument, often give birth to

³¹ White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, p. 281.

³² Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945*, (New York, 1989), p. 308, see note 41.

subconscious ideas which might otherwise never come to life.”³³ This quote raises another contradiction within his thinking as expressed in *Conversations* twenty years later. Accounting for what he sees as a lack of true melodic ideas present in jazz improvisation, he cites their instrumental derivation. At turns praising and critiquing Shorty Rogers, he says “His patterns are instrumental: half-valve effects with lip glissandi, intervals and runs that derive from the fingers...”³⁴

The other unbarred piece he mentioned was *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo*, composed in 1918³⁵, premiered in 1919, and dedicated to Werner Reinhart, a wealthy amateur clarinetist who had financed *L’Histoire*.³⁶ Specifically, the second movement is without barlines. Speculation has abounded, most likely stemming from a 1920 article called “The Stravinsky Debate,” by Edwin Evans that the piece was inspired by the playing of the American jazz clarinetist Sidney Bechet. It is a lovely thought, and all the more believable given Ernest Ansermet’s ecstatic praise of Sidney Bechet in 1919,³⁷ but impossible since Bechet’s first trip to Europe took place in 1919,³⁸ and he did not make his first recording until 1921.³⁹ Stravinsky’s citation of the second movement in the context of jazz is a red herring anyway, since it is the third movement, heavily accented and rife with meter changes, that most resembles his other ragtime-inspired pieces.

The next piece with a clear ragtime influence is the *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments*, most noticeably in the outer movements. In the piano part, the model seems to be the keyboard music Bach or Scarlatti, with endless streams of arpeggiated sixteenth notes, but

³³ Stravinsky, *Chronicle of my Life*, pp. 137-138.

³⁴ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, pp. 131-132.

³⁵ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: a Biography of the Works through Mavra*, Vol. 2, (Los Angeles, 1996), p. 1483, see note 55.

³⁶ White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*

³⁷ See Ansermet, “Sur un orchestre nègre,” pp. 117-118.

³⁸ Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, p. 1483, see note 55.

³⁹ See Sidney Bechet Discography

with a “ragged” rhythm. One perfect example of this is at fig. 13 in the first movement in the piano’s right hand.



The characteristic sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth rhythm, the over-the-barline ties, and the accented hemiolas, reinforced by octaves exemplify ragtime style. Joplin could hardly write something more authentic in spirit than this. Later in the movement, at fig. 39, and continuing in the new tempo at fig. 40, Stravinsky manipulates register and meter to displace accents in a similar fashion to that of the violin’s melody at fig. 27 in the *Ragtime* section of *L’Histoire*.

The third movement also references ragtime linear construction. Three measures before fig. 63 is an excellent example.



Stravinsky takes one

of the main motifs of the movement, present in the first two measures of this example, and by eliminating one of the notes in each figure, “rags” the rhythm, much as a ragtime composer would do to a march or other piece from the classical repertoire.

A few measures later, Stravinsky uses two more of his favorite ragtime devices when an accented sixteenth note hemiola gives way to a compound line that reverses the placement of its pitches in relation to the downbeat, similarly, once again, to the violin passage from *L’Histoire* and the piano line at fig. 39 of the first movement, but much faster.



It leaves the impression of a Bach toccata as if interpreted by a ragtime pianist. And in fact, John Ogdon in his article, “Stravinsky and the Piano,” comments upon the finale’s “wit of jazz, perhaps a prophetic glimpse of the now demonstrated links between Bach and jazz.”⁴⁰

The next piece with notable jazz element is *Praeludium for Jazz Ensemble*, in 1937. Originally scored for a big band, Stravinsky reorchestrated the piece in June of 1953, adding strings. This version was premiered at one of the Evenings-on-the-Roof concerts in Los Angeles on 18 October of that year. The later version is published, while the original is not.⁴¹

A short piece, it foreshadows the *Ebony Concerto* he would write nine years later with lyrical, legato melodies that explore the intervals of the tritone, seventh, and ninth, which are scored for trumpet or saxophones, as well as staccato, “ragged” interjections from the saxophone section. The form of the piece resembles that of a standard dance band chart: a brief introduction, followed a song-like ABA tune. The harmony played staccato in the arco strings underneath the trumpet’s last “A” in the fourth measure after fig. E recalls common chord changes in popular American music of the time in its use of a common tone diminished substitution on the tonic chord and a dominant seventh chord on the leading tone. An example of a song in this style with this harmonic device is “Whispering” composed by John Schonberger in 1920. *Praeludium* ends, as a foxtrot arrangement of the time typically would, on the tonic chord with an added sixth.

In 1945, while working on the *Ebony Concerto* for Woody Herman, Stravinsky was completing his *Symphony in Three Movements*.⁴² It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the influence of jazz is present in this work. Specifically, starting at fig. 7, the celli and contrabass start walking quarter notes, much as a jazz bass player of the time period would, over

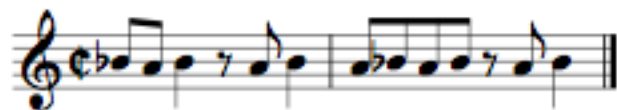
⁴⁰ John Ogdon, “Stravinsky and the Piano,” *Tempo*, New Series, No. 81, Stravinsky’s 85th Birthday (Summer, 1967), p. 40.

⁴¹ White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, p. 399.

⁴² White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, p. 436.

which the high strings and piano play sharply syncopated dominant seventh chords. This continues until fig. 13. The “bass line” is actually a three beat ostinato over which is imposed a meter vacillating between 3/4 and 4/4 to accommodate the shifting accents of the piano and high strings. This device precisely recalls the unbarred sections of *Piano-Rag-Music*.

By the time Stravinsky composed *Ebony Concerto* in 1945, the jazz he professed to admire the most was the music of pianist Art Tatum, saxophonist Charlie Parker, and guitarist Charlie Christian,⁴³ though the influence of any of their styles is nearly impossible to discern in the work. The most recognizable element of “jazz” in this piece, even three decades after Stravinsky’s initial encounter with it, is ragtime. The rhythm with which the trumpet section opens the piece is characteristic ragged syncopation.



Interesting to note is the fact that he was

“obliged to recopy the first movement of the *Ebony Concerto* in quavers, when the jazz musicians, for whom it was written, proved themselves unable to read semiquavers.”⁴⁴ This means that his original writing more closely visually resembled ragtime sheet music, which is typically written as sixteenth notes in 2/4 rather than eighth notes in cut time.

The title of the piece refers not to the wood of a clarinet, but to “African” culture, which for Stravinsky found its representation in the blues. The slow second movement is his interpretation of this type of music.⁴⁵ While the form and harmonic structure bears no resemblance to that of a twelve bar blues, it recalls the blues in its double inflection of the third, as exemplified by the melody in the first tenor saxophone at fig. 2.

⁴³ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 53.

⁴⁴ White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, p. 437.

⁴⁵ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 53.



The movement also continues to display Stravinsky's conception of jazz rhythm as it relates to ragtime. Two measures later, the first tenor and baritone saxophone, joined by the solo clarinet play a sixteenth note line that recalls the ragged piano parts in the *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments*.



As if to reinforce the major/minor ambiguity of the blues (no doubt another attractive element for Stravinsky in this music), he ends the line with another double inflection on the third, displaced by an octave, resulting in a sound that in jazz would be labeled as G7#9 in the tenor saxophone's transposition.

The third and final movement is most remarkable from the standpoint of how Stravinsky explored jazz music in his idiomatic writing for the brass. The plunger mutes in the trumpets after fig. 2 echo the writing of Duke Ellington. Additionally, the wild trombone glissandos starting right before fig. 10 are hardly a more common sound in jazz writing than in classical music, but could be a reference to the "tailgate" style of playing popular in the 1920s. It also recalls an unrulier *Vivo* movement from *Pulcinella* (1920). Additionally, he notates lip slurs in one of the trumpet parts and flutter tonguing in the French horn. He was clearly aware of the possibilities for unusual sounds when writing for jazz musicians. In a discussion on orchestration in *Conversations*, he says, "... let us not forget the fact that traditional symphonic instruments

like trumpet and trombone are not the same when played by jazz musicians. The latter people demonstrate greater variety in articulation and tone color...⁴⁶

While *Ebony Concerto* was the last overtly jazz-inspired work Stravinsky would write, he stated in *Dialogues* that “traces of blues and boogie-woogie can be found even in my most ‘serious’ pieces, as, for example, in the *Bransle de Poitou* and the *Bransle simple* from *Agon* and in the *pas d’action* and *pas de deux* (middle section) from *Orpheus*.”⁴⁷

Indeed, the *pas d’action* from *Orpheus* written in 1947, two years after the completion of the *Ebony Concerto*, exhibits recognizable elements of blues and boogie-woogie, in addition to the syncopated rag-like rhythms so ubiquitous in Stravinsky’s work. The most recognizable reference to Stravinsky’s idea of the blues is a near quotation of the tenor saxophone melody from the slow movement of the *Ebony Concerto* discussed above orchestrated in the violins and violas in the third measure.




The entire beginning slow section of this movement continues to play with the major/minor ambiguity of the G-sharps and A’s. At fig. 95, once the faster tempo has been established, the cellos begin an accompaniment figure comprised of walking sevenths in sixteenth notes, producing the same effect as that of the left hand of a boogie-woogie pianist. Above this, the

⁴⁶ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, pp. 30.

⁴⁷ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Dialogues*, p. 54.

violins interject more ragged syncopations. After a brief woodwind passage, the strings finish the movement with three chords, Asus9(add3), A7(#9), and D6/9, that could hardly sound more natural at the end of a chart by any 1940s jazz arranger.

The middle, faster section of the *pas de deux* features a syncopated arpeggiated melody in the clarinet that again resembles the piano part from the *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments*. At the transition back to the slower tempo, starting in the measure before fig 117, the harp and clarinet trade phrases of a triplet arabesque similar to the trumpet and celeste dialogue that opened *Praeludium*. The writing also resembles the second of the *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo*.

One of the recurring rhythmic motifs from the *Bransle simple* from *Agon* (completed in 1957) is , which is of course one of characteristic rhythms of ragtime as written in eighth notes. This figure takes on special significance in the movement as it occurs four times each in the opening trumpet duet and restatement of the trumpet duet starting in measure 299, in addition to reappearing to announce each of the three occasions the contrabasses strike a D triad in harmonics over a Bb in the harp, comprising a gamut in the movement. Additionally, starting in measure 288, the hocketing between the strings and brass result in recognizable ragtime rhythms. The *Bransle de Poitou (Bransle Double)* is arguably even more syncopated. Again, the most overtly ragtime rhythms are presented in hocket, this time between the trombones and the individual parts of the string section, most vividly starting at measure 344.

Stravinsky once said he could listen to a jazz musician's "good style, with its dotted-note tradition, for stretches of fifteen minutes and more and not feel the time at all, whereas the weight of every 'serious' virtuoso I know depresses me beyond the counteraction of Equanil in

about five.”⁴⁸ It is fitting, therefore, that in creating some of his most serious and virtuosic works, he found musical inspiration in the jazz style.

⁴⁸ I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, pp. 132.