

Analysis of Ravel's Violin Sonata No. 2

Maurice Ravel began composing his Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major in 1923 and completed it in 1927 (Kelly, 2001). It premiered in Paris soon after its completion with George Enescu as the violinist and Ravel on the piano (Foglesong, n.d.). As with many of his other works, the pianist functions as a second soloist rather than an accompanist; it is of equal importance to the violin. The sonata is known for its incorporation of jazz elements, particularly in the second movement. There is also something to be said about the contrast between the illusory and mechanical elements in the first and third movements, respectively.

The first movement, *Allegretto*, features a shifting triple metre. The shifts in metre are unpredictable, as are the changes in tonality. Though the key signature is G major for the majority of the movement, the tonal centre is unstable, making it difficult for the listener to comfortably place themselves in the given key. Additionally, expected resolutions into G major are seldom used. An example of this can be found in bar 10. The violin holds a G against the piano's B flats and C sharps (Ravel, 1927: 1). This vagueness in tonality suggests that Ravel's goal was to evoke colours, or a "floating" feeling in the music. The piano often plays a series of ascending triads usually in a higher register than the violin, contributing to the dreamlike, floating sentiment.

Ravel's evocation of dreaminess is not unique to his Violin Sonata No. 2. In Jessie Fillerup's article, "Ravel and Robert-Houdin, Magicians", she refers to another one of Ravel's works, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (2013: 131). She describes aspects of the orchestration that create illusory auditory effects in this work. One example is how the woodwinds mimic the harp in a scene of *L'enfant et les sortilèges* where the boy and the princess recall their history (2013: 149). The harp is commonly associated with dreams and memories. Ravel uses the woodwinds in a way that resembles a harp to create an auditory illusion that the listener can associate with dreams.

The second movement, *Blues*, greatly appealed to American listeners (Kelly, 2001). It features bitonality: the violin begins in G major while the piano plays in A flat major. As the title suggests, the third and seventh scale degrees are frequently flattened to create the blues scale. There are many chromatic appoggiaturas and flourishes. Many string techniques less frequently seen in violin sonatas at the time such as, *sul ponticello* and intricate glissandi, lend itself to the

jazzy, experimental character of the theme. Later in the movement, many of the chords are unidentifiable tone clusters, meaning Ravel has abandoned standard chords in favour of creating a dense harmonic structure. The violin plays the role of the accompanist with its percussive pizzicato.

The third and final movement is titled *Perpetuum Mobile*. Aptly titled, there are no rests throughout most of the movement. Sequences are common and many fragments are repeated, acting as ostinatos. Similar to the second movement, tone clusters appear in the piano.

The most obvious example of mechanical elements in Ravel's music is the rhythmic ostinato from his *Boléro*. In this work, the snare drum repeats a two-bar rhythmic pattern throughout the piece. It has the consistency of a train chugging along the track. The violin has a similar steadiness, maintaining the same rhythm of twelve-sixteenth notes throughout the movement. By simplifying the rhythm, the listener can focus on the intricacies in the violin's melody.

In conclusion, Ravel's Violin Sonata No. 2 is a work that contrasts illusory elements with machine-like ones. It also incorporates some less conventional techniques and approaches to tonality and harmony than other violin sonatas from the Romantic era.

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Analysis of Delibes' Coppélia

Léo Delibes was born in 1836 in St Germain du Val, France (Macdonald, 2001). His ballet Coppélia, sometimes known as "La fille aux yeux d'émail", is one of his most notable works. The ballet is based on two stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann" and "Die Puppe". The librettist is Charles-Louis-Étienne Nuitter and the choreographer is Arthur Saint-Léon. The first performance took place in the spring of 1870 at the Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra in Paris.

The ballet opens in the village square, where preparations are underway for the celebration of the arrival of Dr. Coppélius, an eccentric inventor. Swanilda and Franz are a young couple who are excited about their upcoming engagement. However, Franz becomes infatuated with Coppélia, a beautiful girl who sits on the balcony of Dr. Coppélius' house but is, in fact, a life-sized doll. Swanilda becomes jealous and suspicious of Coppélia. The villagers gather for the festivities, and various dances take place. Franz, unable to resist his curiosity, sneaks into Dr. Coppélius' house to get a closer look at Coppélia. Swanilda, worried about Franz's intentions, follows him and discovers that Coppélia is just a doll. The act ends with Swanilda and Franz reconciling.

In the second act, Swanilda and her friends enter Dr. Coppélius' workshop, intending to return the key to Coppélia that they had taken during their earlier investigation. Dr. Coppélius, however, discovers them and becomes angry. This act is filled with lively dances, including the famous "Dance of the Hours," during which the mechanical dolls come to life and perform. During the chaos, Swanilda disguises herself as Coppélia to escape from Dr. Coppélius' anger.

The final act takes place during the village's wedding celebration. Several divertissements and dances entertain the guests. Dr. Coppélius, realizing he has been fooled, initially seeks revenge but eventually forgives the young couple. Swanilda and Franz celebrate their wedding, and the ballet concludes with a joyous and lively finale, highlighting the triumph of love and the happiness of the village community.

Coppélia is a life-sized mechanical doll. As such, her movements are choppy, like those of a puppet. Some productions even have puppet strings attached to her so that Dr. Coppélius can control her actions. The ballet's music features exotic and folk elements. These are present in the dances used such as the mazurka, czardas and bolero (Paulsson, 2015: 3).

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Analysis of Stravinsky's The Firebird

Igor Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum, Russia in 1882 (Walsh, 2001). He composed *Zhar'-ptitsa*, also known as "L'oiseau de feu" or "The Firebird", between 1909 and 1910. The opening performance took place in June 1910 at the Palais Garnier in Paris, under the direction of Gabriel Pierné.

In Act 1, Prince Ivan stumbles upon the enchanted garden of the malevolent sorcerer Kashchei. Entranced by its beauty, Ivan captures the mystical Firebird, a creature with magical feathers. In an act of mercy, Ivan releases the Firebird, who, in gratitude, gifts him one of her enchanted feathers. The ballet then introduces the thirteen princesses who have fallen victim to Kashchei's curse, and they partake in a celebratory dance, the *khorovod*.

As the narrative progresses to Act 2, the malevolent King Kashchei discovers Ivan's presence and retaliates with an infernal dance of his minions. Amidst the chaos, a calming *Berceuse* provides a brief respite. The ballet reaches its climax as Prince Ivan, armed with the Firebird's magical feather, confronts Kashchei. With the Firebird's assistance, Ivan defeats Kashchei and breaks the enchantment on the princesses. The triumphant finale sees the restoration of order, the liberation of the princesses, and the celebration of Ivan's victory with his love interest. Symbolising the triumph of good over evil, the Firebird makes a final appearance.

The Firebird's score is known for its heavy use of ostinatos and leitmotifs. In typical Stravinsky fashion, the orchestra uses extended techniques such as harmonics, *col legno* and *sul ponticello* in the strings, and the stopping technique for the brass section.

There are several aspects of Stravinsky's music that could be described as mechanical. His music is renowned for its intricate and complex rhythmic patterns. He frequently employed irregular meters, polymeters, and changing time signatures, to create a sense of mechanical precision. The ostinatos in his works also contribute to the feeling of automation. Lastly, his use of a unique and extended percussion section, as well as using string, woodwind and brass instruments in ways reminiscent of percussion ones, create automation or mechanisation in his works.

Work Cited

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Conference Summary

- Catrina Flint
 - presents “Petit theatre de la marionette”
 - Introduces Henri Signoret, founded “Petit theatre de la marionette” in 1888
 - 10 original works presented at venue can be studied today (music by Chausson, Vidal and Baille)
 - His puppets use levers — 2-3 operators (1-2 manipulators, 1 recitant)
- Sociocultural / Artistic context of works
 - symbolism and the petit theatre
 - ralliement 1880s -> semi religious aspects to the texts
 - blending of genres in religious works -> comic / farcical elements
 - models for marionettes are smaller -> puppets are interpreted differently
 - folk references
 - exoticism: Le Songe de Kheyyam
- 18th century puppet theatre: puppet manipulators did not speak
 - Catrina: puppet as “disembodied voice”
 - used a “sifflet-pratique” to alter the voice of the puppet
 - link with ventriloquy, the dead, witchcraft
 - “engastrimisme” (speaking from the stomach): practiced by Roman Catholic church to hear the final messages of dying
 - not just a show trick, spiritual association (Paul Garnot 1900s)
 - Edison: worked on “necrophone” to communicate with the dead
- Jessie Fillerup
 - emphasis on replication (puppets/machines not really doing x action)
 - imitation and deception
 - Robert-Houdins’ puppets in “Pâtissier magique”
 - Ravel: enchanted, mechanical, illusory
 - she wrote about this (see Ravel and Robert-Houdin, Magicians)
 - Ravel mechanism example: Bolero
 - Wiggins mechanical metaphors/elements
 - described as a prodigy (compared to Mozart), “Blind Tom”: turned into a freak show

- prodigy meant “monster; something out of the ordinary” during his time
- seen eternally as a child -> never given the chance to mature
- she mentions Ravel’s Concerto for the Left Hand
- musical-spirit mediums: supernatural explanation believed to be necessary to explain prodigious talent
 - gender differences: men can be talented, women must have supernatural intervention
- Teal on Wiggins: “Wiggins was an imitating machine, not a thinking one”
 - mechanical metaphors used as racist descriptors (black people listed along with other animals and described as parts of a machine)
- Wiggins would employ some avant-garde techniques -> skilled not only in technique, but also had an excellent understanding of music holistically