

# Term paper on composer

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## **Igor Stravinsky**

Igor Stravinsky was one of the most representative and brilliant composers from the twenty century and had a big influence on the development of the modern music. He wasn't known only for his skill as a composer, he was also recognized as a pianist, conductor and a great and valuable musician.

Throughout his composing career, Stravinsky have experimented many styles in composition using different rhythms and harmonies but musicologists clearly defined three stylistic periods in his musical evolution. The first period was between 1908- 1923 and it was called “ Russian period,” the second period was between 1923- 1953 and it was called “ Neo-classical period,” and the third one between 1953- 1968 and it was called “ The late period.”

Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum, a small town in Russia, near Saint Petersburg in 17 June 1882. He was known by his full name Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky and he was raised by his father named Fyodor a bass singer and his mother, Anna, a talented pianist but his parents didn't want that his soon follow their footsteps so they persuaded him to study law. Stravinsky wasn't interested into Law School so he attended only a few classes and after his father died he decided to study music serious. He started to take classes with Nicolai Rimsky- Korsakov but under his advice he didn't went to the Saint Petersburg Conservatoire and only continued learning with Rimsky- Korsakov until 1908.

The “ Russian period” was marked by Nicolai Rimsky- Korsakov, the first composition teacher that Stravinsky had. Rimsky- Korsakov had a great influence in the initial techniques and composition patterns used by

Stravinsky in composing for big orchestras. This period included diatonic scale without limitation of tonality and pandiatonicism that were used in the ballet "The Firebird" composed with a beautiful and imaginative orchestration. Later for the third ballet "The Rite of Spring," Stravinsky added also polytonality and the sonority of the music became more harsh and barbaric trying to describe thru music the brutality of a Pagan ritual. In 1909, Sergei Diaghilev, the founder of the Russian Ballet and a great impresario became the lucky star of the composer. Diaghilev invited Stravinsky to orchestrate some work of Chopin for the ballet "Les Sylphides" and this was the launch pad for the three of the most important and well known ballet of Stravinsky. First, he composed "The Firebird" in 1910, which was followed by "Petrouska" in 1911, and the last but the most controversial and discussed was "The Rite of Spring." This three works established Stravinsky as a leader of heroic musical generation alongside other contemporary important composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and Maurice Ravel.

Meanwhile, Stravinsky married in 1906 his cousin Catherine Nossenko which gave birth to two kids before 1910 and moved with the hall family in France after the big success of the ballet "The Firebird."

The first performance of "The Rite of Spring" was on 29 May 1913 at the Theatre des Champs Elysee. The piece provoked one of the biggest riots up to that time in the history of the music theatre because of the new sonorities used by Stravinsky in composing the work and also the unusual and suggestive choreography made by Nijinsky and combined with creative but daring music made the audience protested and cheered during the

performance. The compositional was original and involved a lot of unresolved dissonances and rhythmic shifting which the audience wasn't used to hear normally. This particularly work had marked the bridge between post-romantic extravagances to modernism.

The World War I had a big influence in Stravinsky composition connections. The war prevented him to write other piece for Diaghilev's company and the Russian Revolution prevent him to return home from Paris so he didn't have other choice and during the war he lived in Switzerland. There he composed a series of works based on Russian folklore in collaboration with the poet C. R. Ramuz including the famous one " The Soldier's Tale". Stravinsky started to work for another ballet called " The Little Wedding" in 1914 but only managed to orchestrate it in 1923.

The beginning of the second period " Neo-classical period" it was believed that was marked by the work " Mavra" and " The Rake's Progress" marked the ending of this stylistic period. In this period, Stravinsky was influenced now by Tchaikovsky and Glinka. Even " Mavra," a short comic opera wasn't a great success revealed this new lyricism, the changes of the musical sound which later influenced Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich.

Stravinsky's work from this period included Octet for Winds, Serenade for a Piano Solo and Piano Concerto. He produced an opera-oratorio called " Oedipus-Rex" in 1927 and another ballet called " Apollo" in 1928. " The Fairy's Kiss" composed also in 1928 was a ballet made from Tchaikovsky's themes from piano and song pieces. 1929 was an important year that marked the death of Diaghilev and also the end of a social focus on the works of Stravinsky. Nevertheless, in 1934 Stravinsky became a French

citizen but he wasn't able to win the France recognition.

In 1930, Stravinsky composed another masterpiece after "The Rite of Spring" called "The Symphony of Psalm" which was a serious piece was considered a little odd compared with the wordiness sonorities appeared in the ballet. Stravinsky also started to write for theatres. The most important pieces from this period were "Persephone" in 1934 and "Game of cards" in 1936.

In 1936, Stravinsky had written his autobiography. The next couples of years weren't so prospective for Stravinsky. In 1938, his oldest daughter died for tuberculosis and in 1939 the bad lucks continued with the dead of his wife and his mother at the same year but 1939 wasn't only a hard year it came also with new beginnings. Stravinsky went to visited United States and delivered lectures at Harvard Universities and after that he moved permanently in the United States and became American citizen in 1945. Meanwhile, he married Vera de Bosset who was his mistress long years before, even when his wife was still leaving.

During the World War II, Stravinsky composed two important symphonic works, "Symphony in C" between 1938 and 1940 and "Symphony in Three Movements" between 1942 and 1945. Even if the pieces were composed at the same period they had different influences. For the "Symphony in C" Stravinsky used neo-classical principals in a symphonic form and for the "Symphony in Three Movements" he combined the ideas of a symphony with the essential features of a concerto.

After settling in New York, Stravinsky started to develop collaboration with George Balanchine, which was the director of New York City Ballet during

that period. The first piece that was born from this arrangement was "Orpheus" in 1948 followed in the same year by "The Rake's Progress." This full-length opera included some of the most melodies ideas of Stravinsky which also presented his mature ethical and religious concerns. The opera was a neo-classical work written with the libretto by W. H. Auden and the American writer Chester Kallman and the idea presented was a mock-serious pastiche of late 18th century grand opera but of course this thing didn't stop Stravinsky to approach it in his personal brilliant and refinement style.

The third period was mostly base on the serial technique like dodecaphonic material that was used on the most of the pieces from this period. This style is highlighted in the works like "Septet" and the ballet "Agon."

In America, Stravinsky had a powerful collaboration and professional relationship with the young conductor Robert Craft that presented Stravinsky the work of Anton Webern. Stravinsky was pleasantly surprised of this composer and studied him in depth even approaching new elements into his own still evolving, although a very individual style. The influences of this new style can be found in pieces like "Septet" in 1953, "Song" in 1954, oratorio "Canticum Sacrum" in 1956 and in the ballet called "Agon" which was composed between 1953-1957.

The technique used by Anton Webern took part from the new current of musical avant-garde that emerged in Europa and was a way on reject de neo-classicism and the Viennese composers who adopt it were Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and especially Anton Webern. This technique claimed to make melodies using the all twelve tones in an arbitrary but fixed pattern. It seems that by that time, Stravinsky was into a creative major

depression and the uses of serial technique help him recovered and adopted into a personal style, like he did with the other stylistic approaches.

During 1960's, Stravinsky's works still continue to surprise by complexity of rhythm and sound but never letting aside also the importance of harmony and counterpoint. The last major work composed included " Movements for Piano and Orchestra" composed in 1959 and " Variations for Orchestra" composed in 1964. In this two works Stravinsky refined his manner still further using a variety of serial techniques to support the music, increasing the density and economy into a diamantine brilliance. Stravinsky's serial work was a denser musical content and they are briefer than his tonal ones. One of the reason of this multiple stylistic changes influenced by the geographical changes that Stravinsky made thru his life. The " Russian period" was influenced by the geographical changes of scene from Russia to Switzerland and his " Neo-classical period" was influenced by geographical changes from France to USA.

Stravinsky died in New York City in 6 April 1971 and he was buried in San Michelle Cemetery Island in Venice near Diaghilev and other famous personalities.

In conclusion, Stravinsky can be seen as one of the most chameleonic composers, who riches to survive at so many development and transformation along his life from style to style. As many composers, even if they had written hundreds of pieces, he will remained in music history with only a few works and here we can talk especially about his master " The Rite of Spring" who marked the beginning of the modernism period, a brilliant work that involved a new musical concept in the development of the piece

by constantly changing rhythms and metric imbalances that resonated throughout the 20th century. “ The Rite of Spring” took part from the first period of creation of the composer “ Russian period” that will remain maybe the most spectacular one going further piece to the sensual approaches of Debussy into chords and harmony to discordant harmonies in “ The Rite of Spring.” Stravinsky represented also a big influenced for other contemporary composers that tried to by like him or composed in his style and was an amazing tribute to the creative vitality of new composers.

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