

Thesis of a Dissertation

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Pribaoutkas in Igor Stravinsky's  
Russian-Period Works

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## I. Antecedents of the Research

Igor Stravinsky's oeuvre is by no means among the under-processed materials of 20th century music history especially regarding his Russian period, but nevertheless his works composed in the song genre receive much less attention. Even more this genre can be further narrowed down to songs that – based on their thematic connections – are stemming from the same source and thus create an independent genre by the composer.

Béla Bartók was one of the first to try to define the characteristics of *pribaoutkas* – the vocal arrangements of Russian folk rhymes – in his article *The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music*. Regarding Stravinsky's *Pribaoutki* Bartók was primarily concerned with the clash between the tonal character of the vocal and the atonal nature of the instrumental accompaniment, also investigating the folk music origins of the melodies and the influence of the musical language of *La Sacre du printemps* in its immediate environment. Bartók's thoughts were the starting point of my research in applying them to

all of the *pribaoutkas*, analyzing them and understanding their relationships.

In his autobiographical writings and his conversations with Robert Craft, Stravinsky gives some indirect answers to Bartók's suggestions. Eric Walter White summarizes Stravinsky's statements regarding each song, but does not attempt a detailed analysis or a representation of the process. Most of the writings and studies rely on different segments of analysis of the vocal works. Boris Asaf'yev primarily portrays the works on the basis of Russian traditions, while Peter C. van der Toorn or Arthur Berger subject them to a specific music theory analysis. Studies by Marina Lupishko and Peter C. van der Toorn and John McGinness deal exclusively with Stravinsky's prosodic solutions. Only Richard Taruskin's monograph contains an all-encompassing analysis but he thematizes the works according to different points of view.

## **II. Sources**

The compass of my research and the primary source for my thesis was Richard Taruskin's monograph, which deals

with the works from Stravinsky's Russian period and compares them with Russian traditions. In addition, I relied on Stravinsky's published works, his autobiographical writings, as well as his statements and lectures about his compositions and ideas. As secondary sources, I used writings and essays dealing with 20th century music theory, Russian music and ethnography. Studies by Márta Papp, László Somfai and András Wilhelm were especially helpful in processing Stravinsky's works.

### **III. Method**

My thesis is primarily analytical and comparative. In addition to the composition history, internal form and content, as well as ethnographic mapping of the individual vocal compositions, my primary goal was to present the development of the *pribaoutka* arrangements—this specific genre created by Stravinsky—and also to depict the diverse and ever changing inspirations of the composer. I chose the chronological order in presenting the pieces not only for the sake of simplicity. The problems arisen from the

composer's workshop creates successive solutions, therefore primarily determining the structure of my thesis.

In order to make my analysis easier to understand, in most cases I use Stravinsky's own score examples, and also in several instances I use quotations directly from the composer.

#### **IV. Results**

Stravinsky's *pribaoutka* arrangements are almost a byproduct of the textual, sometimes musical material of two stage works *Renard* and *Les Noces*. However a chain of thematic relationships can be discovered through the design of the compositional methods. As a result of my research, it can be concluded that these are materials that are closely related to each other always show a different side when Stravinsky puts them in a new relationship. This is precisely where the moment of genre creation lies. The works include a cycle created from different arrangements of similar nursery rhymes, but also a series of musically consecutive movements and a stage work created from the perfect stitching together of songs. We find examples of

materials inspired by Russian folk instruments or Russian folk polyphony and works inspired by ethnography or pedagogy. The analyzed creative period ends with a song cycle that summarizes the previous techniques and creates a synthesis.

The main goal of my thesis is to present the formative characteristics of the song genre through the creation of the melody and accompaniment in the special environment of the world of *pribaoutkas*. I provide proof that the marked musical language of *La Sacre du printemps* has a direct continuation and influence over the subsequent works, and also how much the language games of Russian folklore has in common with the repeating, permutating motifs of the *Sacre*. Chromatic circumscribing accompaniments, the use of *acciaccaturas*, *ostinatos* built from the same pitch structures or harmony blocks, parallel vocal progressions and interlaced sets of voices and the harmonies formed from them, and accent shifts are all characteristics that —transformed in some way— also appear in the *pribaoutka* arrangements.

## **V. Documentation of the Activities Relevant to the Topic of the Dissertation**

During the research phase of my dissertation I gave several concerts where I played Stravinsky's original works for cimbalom. Furthermore, I regularly played pieces of early music that although were not originally composed for the cimbalom, but their transcriptions were nevertheless in Aladár Rácz's repertoire and therefore served as sources of inspiration for Stravinsky. The program of my Doctoral Concert will also follow this pattern.