

The Instrumental Evolution of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*

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A. Introduction

During the unusually long gestation period of *Les Noces*, Stravinsky radically rescored the composition a number of times. Although the initial germinal idea for the piece dates as far back as 1912, it was not brought to fruition until the premiere in 1923. Part of the delay was probably due to the various extenuating circumstances surrounding Stravinsky during that time, such as the First World War and his migration from Russia to Switzerland to France, but perhaps a greater part of the delay was caused by Stravinsky's ambivalence and indecision regarding the instrumentation. Three versions from the mid-1910's show that Stravinsky initially conceived of the piece essentially as a work for chamber orchestra. One early configuration is a version for mezzo-soprano soloist, woodwinds, and two string quintets (one bowed, one plucked). Another changes the two quintets to a unified group of eight strings and adds cimbalom and timpani. The third version in this group adds diverse brass and percussion, harpsichord, harp, and piano, and the single vocal soloist gives way to a full complement of SATB soloists backed by an SATB chamber choir. After this orchestral proliferation, Stravinsky performed an about-face in 1919 and scored the work for harmonium, two cimbaloms, pianola (mechanized piano) and percussion. After considering various other configurations, for four pianolas or four cimbaloms, for example, he decided against them all and finally settled on four conventional pianos and percussion just before the premiere in June of 1923.

Various sketches and drafts¹, which now reside in the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland, help document the compositional process culminating in the work we know as *Les Noces*. Close examination of these materials from the perspective of instrumental evolution demonstrates the relationship between instrumental and structural changes through time, which in turn yields insights into the nature of the composition that would be difficult to gain from the final score alone. After a general overview of the materials, a sample analysis will be provided

¹The terms "version" and "draft" need to be distinguished from one another. In this study "version" is used to refer to discrete phases of the instrumental evolution (e.g. the woodwinds and two string quintets version versus the harmonium, cimbalom, and pianola version), and "draft" is used to refer to physical scores that represent a particular version. This distinction is necessary because some versions are represented by more than one draft.

that highlights Stravinsky's compositional tendencies in this piece. The observations and conclusions drawn here could in turn be used to inform future investigations of the remainder of the composition.

B. Overview of the Materials

1. Sketches

A number of loose, individual sketches for *Les Noces* play a key role in any exploration of the work's prehistory. They have been placed in a very approximate order in the archive on the basis of correlations to the final composition. This ordering in no way implies specific chronology—indeed the chronology of the sketches is a very large problem unto itself and will not be dealt with here. Sketch 1 will play an important role in the sample analysis.

2. "1914-15"

Contrary to Stravinsky's habitual precision with dates, he did not specifically label the early drafts. As a result, their precise chronology is somewhat murky. In the Paul Sacher archive, the first folder of early drafts bears the label "Late 1914 - Early 1915" in an archivist's hand. The exact rationale for this label is unclear, but it is probably an assumption based on circumstantial evidence, or on evidence available to the archivist but not brought to light in this seminar. The only indication in Stravinsky's own hand is "early projects". This is the version for mezzo-soprano solo, woodwinds, and two string quintets.

In the woodwind section, Stravinsky employs the traditional flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns² in pairs, but with a twist in the upper woodwinds: one of the flutes is a piccolo flute, one of the clarinets is a piccolo clarinet, and one of the oboes is actually an English horn. The clear intention in the upper woodwinds is for a distinct tone color for every instrument, and indeed they play correspondingly soloistic material in a manner that will be explored later. French horns are brass instruments of course, but here they are acting in their

²Music for only one horn actually appears in this draft, but its label "Corno I" implies the intention of a second horn as well.

capacity as honorary woodwinds in the tradition of the woodwind quintet. The two bassoons, which possess no timbral distinction from each other, appropriately play as a pair.

Stravinsky's treatment of strings in this version is quite different from that of the woodwinds. Each of the two string quintets consists of two violins, a viola, a cello, and a contrabass. The first quintet always plays *pizzicato* or plucked, and the second quintet always plays *arco* or bowed. The sound within each quintet is therefore homogeneous and its members always act together, so in essence the two quintets are two collective instruments with distinct timbres playing off against each other.

This version is given the shorthand title "1914-15"³. The "1914-15" folder is divided into four sections. Without going into all the textological details, Sections II and III can be taken together as the main representative of the "1914-15" version, consisting of music from the beginning of the composition up to [4].⁴

3. "1915-16"

Another folder contains the "1915-16" version. Again, the authority for this date label is unclear. There are two drafts for this version, a working draft and a "fair copy". (From the latter cleaner draft, reproductions of only two pages out of eight were provided to this seminar). The presence of a fair copy at this point indicates some feeling of finality in terms of instrumental make-up, but this version is soon abandoned—it extends only up to [3].

"1915-16" is scored for woodwinds, cimbalom, timpani, and eight strings. The list of woodwinds repeats that of "1914-15", and their essential behavior has not changed much. The

³It should be kept in mind that "1914-15" is a title and probably does not refer to a two-year time span, but rather to the winter season spanning the end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915. Subsequent version titles will also be given in quotes and should be kept distinct from actual dates.

⁴Section IV is fragmentary and so it is difficult to determine the exact stage it represents. It does seem to come from a later stage than "1914-15", though, and one should keep in mind that its inclusion in the folder may have been somewhat arbitrary.

Section I consists of only two dense score pages, but these seem to be carbon copies from among a 17-page score that remains in private hands. The owner put it up for auction at Sotheby's in London on 15 May 1996, but it did not fetch a high enough price and was withdrawn. It consists of music up to [17], which happens to be the same extent as "1914-15-16". It is difficult to make judgments on the basis of only two pages, but my best guess, based on the staff names down the left side of the pages and the various cluttered insertions of music within the body of the pages, is that this version was originally for an earlier configuration of instruments (something like "1914-15"), then extensive revisions and insertions were made to bring it into line with a newer configuration (something like "1914-15-16").

These seemingly intermediate stages point up the fact that the materials examined here are major signposts along the way but do not necessarily represent the whole picture. These signposts are, however, still very instructive for retracing the instrumentation's evolutionary road.

working draft has an amusing quirk: in the opening bars, the E^b piccolo clarinet part is transposed incorrectly, up a minor 3rd instead of down a minor 3rd. Stravinsky caught the mistake before proceeding to the fair copy; emphatic marginal notes both to the left and right of the staff remind him to “transpose down diminished 5th.” This effectively compensates for the mistake, and indeed in the fair copy the E^b piccolo clarinet part appears correctly transposed.⁵

One entirely new element in this version is the cimbalom, a hammered string instrument (dulcimer-type) that is associated with Hungarian folk music. Small, portable cimbaloms date far back, but a larger chromatic version fitted with a damper pedal was invented in 1870.⁶ Stravinsky’s composition clearly requires this “concert version” of the instrument, since chromatic notes and pedal markings are written for it. In January 1915, when Stravinsky was in Geneva, he heard a cimbalom played and was so enamoured with the sound that he purchased one on the spot. From this point on, Stravinsky included a cimbalom in every version of the piece, dropping it only for the final 1923 version.

In the string section, the two quintets of “1914-15” become a unified ensemble of eight strings in “1915-16” (three violins, two violas, two cellos, and contrabass). Stravinsky still makes good use of *arco/pizzicato* contrasts, but these are spread throughout the ensemble and are no longer rigidly divided between two groups.

4. “1914-15-16”

In contrast to the previous two drafts, this title derives from Stravinsky himself: he brushed this date in watercolor on a preliminary page. It probably does not indicate that he worked on this particular version for these three years, but that this version represents a culmination of all prior efforts.

⁵It is possible, but seems unlikely in the context of the composition as a whole, that Stravinsky actually did want the E^b piccolo clarinet to double the vocal line at a diminished 5th (as would have occurred had he left it as written), but then changed his mind when it came time to produce the fair copy.

⁶[New Grove, “Cimbalom” ****format this footnote]

“1914-15-16” is the most complex of the early drafts. It is scored for a diverse collection of woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings:

Woodwinds: 2 flutes (doubling on piccolos), 2 oboes (one doubling on English horn), 2 clarinets (1 doubling on E^b piccolo clarinet), 2 bassoons

Brass: 3 trumpets (1 E^b piccolo, 2 in C), 2 B^b bugles, 4 horns, 1 B^b baritone, 3 trombones, 1 tuba

Auxiliary strings: cymbalom, harpsichord, harp

Percussion: 3 timpani, bass drum and cymbals, tambourine and triangle

Strings: 3 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos, 1 contrabass

Voices: SATB soloists; SATB chorus (4 per part)

In the woodwinds, the doublings allow Stravinsky the flexibility to create either the homogeneous sound of the traditional orchestral woodwind section or the more heterogeneous sound of the “1914-15” and “1915-16” versions. The title page for this score, which lists the instruments, shows the brass section originally consisting of 4 horns and 4 trumpets—but these are crossed out and replaced by the more diverse ensemble indicated above. “Bugles” seems to refer to what today are called “cornets”. Today as in Stravinsky’s time, cornets and baritones have no place in the orchestra, but they are mainstays of the brass band. Their conical bores create a mellower sound as compared to the brighter cylindrical bore sound of trumpets and trombones. Stravinsky was clearly striving for timbral diversity by including these “brass band” instruments. The cymbalom and timpani appeared already in “1915-16”, but the harpsichord, harp, and other percussion are new additions. The strings are the same collection of eight as in “1915-16”. On the title page next to the list of strings, Stravinsky wrote “Defense absolut de doubler!⁷ Igor Strawinsky” indicating that the strings were conceived as a chamber ensemble and not as an orchestral section. Previously, the vocal component of this composition consisted of a single soloist, so the SATB soloists and choir (limited to four per part, i.e. a “chamber choir”) are a significant expansion of the vocal realm. While “1914-15-16” displays a certain degree of continuity with its previous version, it also displays a decisive proliferation of tone colors. Indeed, with its wide variety of instruments (many unusual) and its strict limits on doubling, it stands at the apex of a trend toward timbral diversity.

⁷ “Absolutely do not double!”

“1914-15-16” is also the most extensive of the early drafts. It extends as far as [18]—the majority of the first tableau.⁸ The careful craftsmanship and meticulous presentation of this score suggest a sense of finality for Stravinsky at this point, but of course before long he continued to tinker.

5. “Winterthur manuscript”—W

The only manuscript under consideration here that is not from the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel is the so called “Winterthur manuscript” or W, which resides in Stiftung Reychenburg in Winterthur, Switzerland.⁹ It is a curious document, a book cobbled together from a variety of papers. It contains the entire composition—all four tableaux—but is very rough in other respects, including indication of instruments. It seems to be a continuity draft whose main purpose is to represent for the first time the temporal succession of sections. Stravinsky compiled the book from existing materials (e.g. piano scores, sketches) and filled in the gaps where necessary. He made revisions, either during or after the compilation process, to bring the possibly outdated materials into line with his present conception of the piece. W represents the finished composition; on the last page, the date ____, 1917 appears, along with Stravinsky’s signature. Notably, the final score published in 1923 still gives 1917 as the date of composition. In terms of order of sections, number of measures, rhythms, and basic pitch collections, very little changes between W and the final score (although instruments and textures change quite a bit, of course).

Instrumental indications are scattered haphazardly throughout W. Most apparently belong to the revision phase (most revisions appear to have been done with a thicker stylus). Obviously they are not a thoroughgoing attempt at an orchestration, just hints at its salient features.

⁸Only a few pages of this score were made available to this seminar, but Professor Mazo kindly provided her personal transcription by hand for perusal.

⁹A microfilm copy of W was available to this seminar.

A much clearer indication of the composition's intended orchestration comes on **W**'s last page. Stravinsky pasted a small piece of notepaper¹⁰ there that contains the following chart:

1	Fl. picc.	22	[	Cimba-	45	V	1
2	Fl. gr.	23	[	lum	46	V	2
3	Ob.	24	[	Clavecin	47	V	3
4	C. Ingl.	25	[		48	Vla	1
5	Cl.	26	[	Arfa	49	Vla	2
6	Cl.	27	[		50	VC	1
7	Fag.	X 28	--		51	VC	2
X 8	--	29	Sopr.		52	CB	
9	Cor I II	30	--				
10	Cor III IV	31	M-S				
11	[Trombe (4)	32	--				
12	[	33	T				
13	[Tromboni	34	--				
14	[	35	B				
15	[Tuba	36	--				
X 16	--	37	S				
17	Timp.	38	--				
18	[Triang.	39	A				
	[T.d.B.	40	--				
19	C. cl.	41	T				
20	[Piatti	42	--				
	[Gr. C.	43	B				
X 21	--	44	--				

Example: Score-planning chart pasted on to the last page of **W**.

All instrumental indications in **W** are drawn from this list. The abbreviations in it require some expansion and interpretation. 1: piccolo flute. 2: flute. 3: oboe(s). 4: English horn. 5: clarinet. 6: clarinet (possibly doubling on E^b piccolo clarinet). 7: bassoon(s). 9 and 10: four horns. 11 and 12: four trumpets. 13 and 14: trombones (three?). 15: tuba. 17: timpani. 18: triangle and "Tambour de Basque" = tambourine. 19: "Caisse claire" = side drum. 20: cymbals and "Grosse-Caisse" = bass drum. 22 and 23: cimbalom. 24 and 25: harpsichord. 26 and 27: harp. 29, 31, 33, and 35: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass soloists. 37, 39, 41, and 43: chorus of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices. 45-47: three violins. 48-49: two violas. 50-51: two violoncelli. 52: contrabass.

¹⁰Even on microfilm, the outlines of the paper can be seen, and numerical figures from the paper's reverse side bleed through a little.

More than a simple list of instruments, this chart appears to be a plan for the layout of a score. The numbers refer to staff numbers, and the total number of staves needed is calculated at 52. Blank staves marked with an “X” serve as section separators, e.g. staff 8 separates woodwinds and brasses. The blank staves between vocal parts would presumably carry text. These allowances for blank staves suggest that Stravinsky did not intend to custom-make each page with his “Stravigor”, his patented adjustable rastrum which allowed maximum flexibility in creating scores. Instead he wanted an all-purpose staff paper that could accommodate any conceivable combination of his performing forces. He apparently wanted to produce in quantity (or perhaps purchase) staff paper that had a sufficient number of tightly spaced, equidistant staves.

Three highly suggestive links exist between **W** and “1914-15-16”. First, the instruments on the score-planning chart on the last page of **W** match, with the exception of a few brasses, the instruments called for in “1914-15-16”.¹¹ Second, several verso pages in **W** which would otherwise be blank contain expanded orchestrations of a few bars from the facing recto page. In these cases it seems that Stravinsky was putting a bit of flesh on the **W** skeleton as he had inspiration. A comparison of these segments with the corresponding segments in “1914-15-16” reveals that they are exactly reproduced there, in notes and instruments, almost without exception. For the majority of music that does not receive verso orchestrations in **W** itself, it is easy to see that the basic pitches and rhythms correspond closely between **W** and “1914-15-16”. Third, the staff paper used for “1914-15-16” exhibits characteristics deduced from the staff-planning chart of **W**, namely blank staves for section separators and for carrying text, and tightly spaced, equidistant staves. It falls short of the full 52 staves called for in the chart, but it is possible that the two sample photocopied pages we have of this score do not reproduce the full 52 staves of the original, i.e. some are cut off because they are blank in the original (because much less than the full orchestra is playing).¹²

¹¹ The **W** chart does not indicate bugles or baritone, and indicates one more trumpet than “1914-15-16”.

¹² Indeed, in the photocopies the staves extend right to the top and bottom margins and possibly beyond, but it cannot be known how far beyond without perusing the original.

While the date labels suggest that “1914-15-16” preceded **W**, it is at least conceivable that Stravinsky compiled the first tableau of **W** first (and the remaining tableaux later, when he dated the whole manuscript 1917), then fleshed it out into the “1914-15-16” version. On the other hand, it is possible that Stravinsky made the emendations and verso insertions in **W** on the basis of what he had already composed in “1914-15-16”. More in-depth textual criticism and documentary interpretation remains to be done to see if the exact relationship between “1914-15-16” and **W** can be established. In the absence of a firm conclusion one way or the other, it suffices at present to say that “1914-15-16” and the first tableau of **W** are essentially two drafts of the same version, albeit exhibiting very different degrees of orchestrational completion.

6. “1919”

Unlike the earlier orchestral versions, “1919” is complete, which suggests the possibility that Stravinsky worked directly from **W** when arranging this score, at least for the second, third, and fourth tableaux. This version marks a decisive turning point in the instrumental evolution of *Les Noces*, reflecting a fundamentally altered conception of the piece’s overall timbre. Stravinsky seems to have had some notion of recreating an authentic “village band” sound; it is unusually scored for SATB soloists, SATB chorus, harmonium, two cimbaloms, pianola, and percussion.

Like the cimbalom, the harmonium exists in various small “folk” versions and in a larger, modern concert version. It is a keyboard instrument that produces sound with a bellows passing air over a set of freely vibrating metal reeds.¹³ Stravinsky’s harmonium part, with its wide range and indications for different stops, requires the modern concert version, which is similar in appearance and sound to a small organ.

“Pianola” refers exclusively to player pianos made by the Aeolian company at this time. Player pianos mechanically reproduce music encoded on “piano rolls”, spools of paper

¹³NG, “Harmonium”

punched with rectangular holes that activate the piano's mechanisms.¹⁴

Stravinsky maintains a variety of percussive timbres for this instrumentation. He calls for various cymbals and small drums (both with and without snares), and carefully specifies types of beaters, e.g. wooden sticks vs. soft-covered sticks. (He also indicates wooden sticks or leather-covered sticks for the cymbaloms). Small diagrams within the score show how to suspend a small cymbal or how to spatially arrange a set of four drums, for example. Such variety and exactitude in the percussion section is common today, but it represented a relatively new mind set at the time.

In this scoring, the tone colors overall have been somewhat homogenized, but it still provides for fine gradations of timbre within the more limited timbral scope, as evidenced by the stop indications for the harmonium and the beater indications for the cymbaloms and percussion. This score also creates an interesting juxtaposition of the natural "folk" sounds of the harmonium and cymbaloms with the mechanical sound of the pianola.

Although arguably the most interesting version of *Les Noces*, "1919" was never realized. The piano rolls were cut by Aeolian, but the entire ensemble was not brought to performance. Perhaps coordination between live musicians and an inflexible pianola proved too difficult.¹⁵ It may also have been that the piano roll technology was not quite equipped to handle the immensely complex part. When creating this part, Stravinsky treated the pianola as a *tabula rasa*, and did not subject the music to any biological constraints on range, density, or rhythmic complexity, so perhaps the reproduction was not satisfactory.

Stravinsky apparently considered a version for four pianolas, which might have created even greater coordination problems. He also considered a version for four cymbaloms, which, given the rarity of the instrument and of competent performers upon it, was only slightly more feasible than an idea he flirted with for including a *mechanized* cymbalom (since for some reason no one had as yet bothered to mechanize one)!

¹⁴NG, "Pianola"

¹⁵Just such difficulties are apparent in Dmitri Pokrovsky's recent recording of the piece (**citation**), which uses pre-programmed, synthesized piano parts.

7. “1923”

This is the end of the road, the version for four pianos and percussion¹⁶.

“*L’instrumentation—achevée à Monaco le 6 Avril 1923*” appears after the music on the last page of the score published by J. & W. Chester Ltd.¹⁷ The piece premiered in Paris two months later.

One gets the sense that “1923” was not necessarily the most satisfactory version for Stravinsky, and had not the necessary forces finally come together to stage the work, he may have continued tinkering. Perhaps his heart was leaning toward something like “1919”, but he had to settle for the four pianos for practical reasons. Since *Les Noces* was ultimately performed and published this way, it is by far the most widely known version.

It should be understood that in the foregoing discussion no firm claims to a *specific* chronology have been established. The complete picture of exactly what Stravinsky worked on and when is probably more complex than the evidence can attest to. Rather, a *relative* chronology of the versions under consideration— “1914-15”, “1915-16”, “1914-15-16”/W, “1919”, and “1923”— has been established for the purpose of analysis. If further research were to significantly reorder this list, some parts of the analysis would have to be reconsidered.

The various versions of this composition witness a broad timbral trend. The early versions (“1914-15” to “1915-16” to “1914-15-16”) see increasing complexity, whereas the later versions (“1919” to “1923”) embody a reversal toward less differentiated, homogeneous timbres. Two contradistinctions to this general trend can be made: the SATB chorus and soloists, once established in “1914-15-16”, are never abandoned, and the percussive diversity achieved in “1914-15-16” remains steady or even increases through to “1923”.

¹⁶Four timpani, xylophone, tambourine, triangle, cymbals, two side drums, two snare drums (one with snare turned off), and bass drum; also a bell and two crotales (small tuned cymbals) for the very end of the piece.

¹⁷The published score actually bears a copyright date of 1922, when Stravinsky had submitted a four-hands (one piano) version to Chester.

C. Sample Analysis

Although the relatively untilled territory that these materials represent merits a complete section by section treatment, such a comprehensive analysis lies beyond the scope of a seminar paper. Instead, one section of music from the first tableau will be highlighted to demonstrate the invaluable contribution that a knowledge of the work's instrumental evolution, derived from the sketches and drafts, makes toward understanding and appreciating *Les Noces* from a general compositional perspective. The opening section of music, given the shorthand label "Kosa" from the first word of the text, has been chosen for analysis here, which will proceed via the relative chronology established above.

Although the topography (the shape of the audible surface) shifts radically from the beginning to the end of the compositional process, the structural principle underlying "Kosa" remains constant. The single vocal line stands at the core of the structure; all other instrumental lines radiate outward, deriving both pitch and rhythm from it, each with one or more characteristic gestures that function on progressively less active rhythmic levels.

In "1914-15", the vocal melody proceeds in larger metrical units (5/8, 6/8, 7/8), whereas in "1915-16" and later versions, Stravinsky chops the units down to 2/8 and 3/8. With the metrical reduction comes a reorientation from the quarter note to the eighth note as the pulse unit, and a roughly 30% decrease in absolute tempo: quarter note = 56 in "1914-15" and eighth note = 80 in subsequent versions. Between "1914-15" and "1915-16", Stravinsky tinkers with the syllabification of the text and therefore with the melody's rhythmic configuration. The basic construction of the vocal melody remains consistent, however. It is constructed from the same four pitches



with e¹⁸ being a "reciting tone" or drone, and grace note gestures derived from the remaining

¹⁸The following nomenclature will be used to distinguish octaves: a to g is the octave including "middle C", a' to g' is the octave above that, and a'' to g'' the octave above that. When more than one note name is given, "-" denotes a melodic interval and "/" denotes a harmonic interval.

pitches being excursions away from that reciting tone. The structural principle relating the vocal and instrumental lines is not affected by the initial reduction in meter and tempo, or by the changes in the vocal melody.

1. “1914-15”. The vocal melody in “1914-15” is accompanied by a single cello, necessarily from the second quintet as labelled¹⁹ because it plays *arco*. Whenever the soprano sings *d'* to *e'*, and only then, the cello chimes in with that same *d'* to *e'* (very high in its range). The cello also performs the *f#'* grace note on the third and final *d'-e'* gesture, which is not consistent with the previous two gestures. The horn’s sole *crescendo*-ing note at the end of this section effects a transition to the next section. Although this note is not rhythmically tied to the vocal melody, it does occur on the all-important pitch *e'* (when transposed to concert pitch).

2. “1915-16”. The vocal melody as it appears in “1915-16” remains unchanged through to the final score. Here Stravinsky provides it with a few more accompanying instruments. The emphatic minor 9th on the initial downbeat, provided by the cimbalom and strings, stands apart from the structural principle as an autonomous element, which will reappear in one form or another in all subsequent versions. The task of the E^b piccolo clarinet, however, is to double the *e'* reciting tone and about half of the



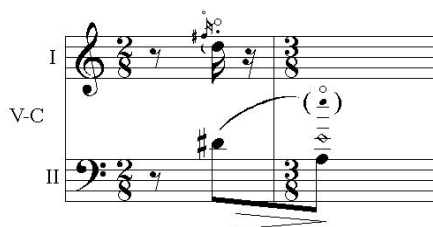
gestures an octave above, and nothing else, thus ignoring



So the E^b piccolo clarinet functions on a slightly less active rhythmic level, and pursues a policy of what can be called “quasi-doubling”.

¹⁹ “2me quattuor”. Quattuor or quartet instead of quintet seems to be a mistake, since music for two sets of five strings is clearly written later in the score.

The first and second celli work as a team to create this characteristic gesture in mm. 3-4, 6-7, and 9-10:



Note the tone color of the first cello that is playing harmonics to achieve notes very high in its range, and also its clipped rhythm. The second cello's *d#* is a “wrong” or “maladjusted” note: it creates a harmonic interval of a diminished octave with the first cello (and the vocal melody), and a melodic interval of a minor 9th with itself. By swooping up to the *e'* reciting tone and achieving that note with a harmonic, the second cello completes the first cello's idea. The quirky celli gesture occurs three times, each time linked to a



occurrence in the vocal melody, but ignoring two such occurrences. Whereas the *E^b* piccolo clarinet part permitted five characteristic gestures, the celli part effects only three.

The cymbalom's activity is the most sparse of all. Whenever the celli perform their gesture, the cymbalom contributes a simple *d'/d''* (in octaves).

3. Sketch 1.²⁰ The vocal melody given here is the same as in “1915-16” and subsequent versions. The clarinet line is also the same as in “1915-16”, though it appears here in “C” (i.e. untransposed, not indicating a specific clarinet but just a clarinet). A telling deletion occurs in the second measure of the clarinet line: the *f#''-d''* on beat 3 is scratched out, and an emphatic, larger-than-usual dot is placed on the preceding *e''* to compensate for the deleted notes. This correction shows the clarinet deliberately ignoring a part of the vocal melody, which in turn attests to an intentional quasi-doubling behavior.

²⁰The decision to consider Sketch 1 in this order is based on purely musical considerations. Equal cases can be made for its occurrence between “1914-15” and “1915-16”, and between “1915-16” and “1914-15-16”.

One other unspecified instrument interjects a diminished octave ($d\#'/d$ -natural) on the same rhythmic level as the cimbalom in “1915-16”. Judging by the cimbalom’s music in “1915-16” and “1914-15-16”, a cimbalom seems to be intended in this sketch as well.

4. “1914-15-16”. Both the clarinet and the celli repeat the music they had in “1915-16”. The cimbalom here picks up the diminished octave of Sketch 1 and continues with one e' reciting tone; at the same time it appears to be a less elaborate version of the celli gesture.

5. W. Although Stravinsky doesn’t label instruments, the characters are by now well-known: a fairly active line quasi-doubling at the octave, and a sparse line interjecting three diminished octaves (presumably clarinet and cimbalom, respectively).

6. “1919”. Stravinsky makes one (non-structural) change to the vocal melody in this version: all the grace notes are sixteenths rather than eighths, suggesting a desire for a rhythmically precise delivery, which would be necessary for singing with a mechanical piano.

The right hand of the harmonium takes on the role previously assigned to the E^b piccolo clarinet, namely quasi-doubling the vocal melody an octave above. The left hand of the harmonium doubles the right hand two octaves below, and leaves out the grace notes, which leaves it simply oscillating between d'' and e'' .

The “right hand” (or upper staff) of the pianola also quasi-doubles the vocal melody an octave above, but leaves out the grace notes (i.e. it doubles the left hand of the harmonium two octaves above). The “left hand” (or lower staff) of the pianola maintains an e , leaping up a minor 7th to a d' every time the “right hand” dips down to a d'' . Stravinsky highlights the mechanical character of the pianola by requiring a technique that would be impossible (or at least extremely difficult) for a human to sustain: it is to play all its notes *tremolando*.

At first glance, the cimbaloms in this version would seem to be acting somewhat unpredictably, i.e. not in accordance with the structural principle laid out so far. First, it appears that Cimbalom II drops out in the second system, leaving Cimbalom I to play three-note chords. But given the $8va$ line from the upper pianola staff encroaching on the territory of the Cimbalom II staff, and given that the cimbalom is played with two sticks, it seems that

Stravinsky simply condensed music for both cimbaloms into the upper staff, rewriting Cimbalom II's $d\#$'s as e^b 's in the process in order to minimize the number of accidentals to be written. Second, if the cimbaloms are taken to be repeating a pattern of low rhythmic activity from previous versions (Cimbalom I repeats "1915-16"; Cimbalom II repeats "1914-15-16" or W), then the notes in measure 5 deviate from that pattern. But these are an additional, autonomous element, repeating the minor 9th on the initial downbeat in resonance with the start of the new phrase in the text and in the vocal melody. So the cimbaloms in fact do behave predictably according to the structural principle underlying this section of music, and play one additional element besides.

It should be evident by now that Stravinsky imbues each instrument with its own identity, its own characteristic way of behaving, from a quasi-doubling clarinet to a *tremolando* pianola. In "1919", even the two hands of the harmonium and of the pianola, and the two cimbaloms as well, display different behaviors. But it is precisely at this point that these individualities begin to be submerged as well. Partly as a result of the trend toward timbral homogenization begun in "1919", the instrumental characters begin to coalesce: Cimbalom I's lower note always merges with Cimbalom II's upper note; the two characters within the harmonium and within the pianola are distinguished from each other only by range and not by timbre; and the differences among characters become less marked, e.g. pianola right hand has the same pitches as harmonium left hand.

7. "1923". The instrumental coalescence begun in "1919" finds its ultimate expression in "1923". Some character types are still identifiable, but they are spread across the four pianos in ways that are not immediately evident. A "quasi-doubler" appears in Piano I (adding not one but two octaves above the vocal melody). A key element of this character, however, namely the d'' (in this case d''/d''') of the



group, is given over to Piano II. (This also happens between Pianos III and IV, but only in the

first two measures, after which the *d''* returns to the domain of Piano III.) Stravinsky apparently intended to create a spatial displacement, and perhaps also a psychological displacement in the performers which presumably would engender some audible effect. The instinct of a trained pianist would be to play grace notes as smoothly and connected as possible, but Stravinsky subverts this instinct by separating the grace note from the main note, making the passage nearly impossible to play smoothly. These displacements of both types may have been intended to contribute to the mechanical effect of the music, thus regaining some of the mechanism lost when the pianola proved infeasible.

As for Pianos III and IV, they are essentially a consolidation of all previous cimbalom behavior; all cimbalom gestures from all earlier versions are subsumed in the music of these two pianos. At the same time the music for Pianos III and IV blurs the distinctions between the quasi-doublers and the cimbalom characters, merging the *D*'s of the quasi-doublers with the *D*'s of the cimbaloms, and ultimately showing how all characters were derived from the vocal melody in the first place.

Although the pianos provide the bulk of the instrumental material in this version, the percussion must not be forgotten. Playing on the simplest, least active rhythmic layer, the xylophone adds a single *d'* under the *d'* of the vocal melody's



occurrences. The cymbal executes a program quite apart from the structural principle, but one that is mechanical in its own respect and even amusing. It performs seven strokes (including the downbeat of the next section) with one less eighth rest between each successive stroke, from six to one. So the cymbal is an accelerating “countdown” into the next section!

D. Conclusion

First, the various versions of *Les Noces* were examined in order to underscore their relative chronology and to give a broad view of the composition's instrumental evolution. Then, a very close reading of "Kosa" from "1914-15" through to "1923" was undertaken to demonstrate Stravinsky's compositional tendencies in this section. While only this small portion of the first tableau was given such scrutiny here, many of the conclusions can be generalized to other portions of the composition as well. Stravinsky endows each instrument with a distinct character, with a unique way of behaving, though sometimes two or more instruments work together to create one character. Stravinsky's "quasi-doubling" procedure—doubling a line but ignoring selected elements—occurs in many other places in the composition, but nowhere is it carried out to the same extent as in "Kosa". In fact, the entire "structural principle" of "Kosa" is based on the quasi-doubling technique, with less active instruments ignoring more elements of the vocal melody. Finally, as a corollary to the increasing timbral homogenization in "1919" and "1923", instrumental characters, while still present, become submerged.

This examination of the early drafts of *Les Noces* from the perspective of its instrumental evolution has, if nothing else, helped to uncover the rich complexity of the nine or more years of history preceding the final score.