

**Order and Continuity in
Igor Stravinsky's Music:
An Analysis of 'Marche
du Soldat' from *L'Histoire
du Soldat*.**

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Abstract

The works of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) have been criticised for the tendency of their compositional technique towards ‘repetition,’ ‘stasis,’ ‘non-progression,’ ‘block juxtaposition,’ and even ‘discontinuity’ by musicologists and analysts including Taruskin (1996), Whittall (1997), Cross (1998), and Boulez (1968). However, more and more contemporary theorists argue that his music is not only characterised by repetition or consistency, but also that many structural phenomena and musical parameters have distinct development within the internal structure. Moreover, they point out that characteristics of both discontinuity and continuity are found at different structural levels within his compositions (Cone; Horlacher 2018; Wang 2004; Kramer 1986, 1988).

Taking the above scholarship into consideration, this essay analyses several musical elements to explore features of order, regularity, continuity, and consistency in the first movement of Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat*, “Marche du Soldat”. Closer analysis reveals that this movement exhibits many tendencies of order and consistency within individual parameters, but this order is broken when considering all parameters together, as each has its own pace and structural pattern. The analytical results presented in this essay align with the emphasis by contemporary musicologists and scholars on Stravinsky’s tendency towards consistency and order in his compositions, affirming that his music does indeed possess these features, but they require a different perspective to observe.

Keywords: Igor Stravinsky, *L’Histoire du Soldat*, order, consistency, temporality

Recommended Music to accompany this article

Stravinsky

L’Histoire du Soldat

Order and Continuity in Igor Stravinsky's Music: An Analysis of 'Marche du Soldat' from *L'Histoire du Soldat*.

Introduction

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) is widely regarded as one of the most influential representatives of musical modernism from the last two centuries. The compositional technique of his orchestral and chamber works is frequently discussed in terms of its 'stasis,' 'non-progression,' 'block juxtaposition,' and even 'discontinuity,' which reflect his position as a modernist icon. Richard Taruskin points out that these characteristics are the core concept in Stravinsky's compositions.^[1] Aligning with this perspective, other scholars, such as Arnold Whittall,^[2] and Jonathan Cross,^[3] also consider traits such as fragmentation, discontinuity, and repetition as the central elements in Stravinsky's compositional process. Even the composer's critics concur with such diagnoses, albeit viewing the result in a more negative light. In his essay '*Stravinsky Remains*,'^[4] Pierre Boulez criticises Stravinsky's music for its rigidity, repetition, and refusal to develop the process of music, which display a negative assessment on his compositional techniques. All these critiques reflect the 'absence of goal-orientedness,' 'immobility,' and 'mindless repetition,' that can be found in Stravinsky's works.^[5]

However, some scholars disagree with these points. Edward T. Cone in '*Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method*' draws attention to the progression of momentum in Stravinsky's music, exhibiting three stages to illustrate the progression: stratification,

[1] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A biography of the works through Mavra*. Volume 2. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1675.

[2] Arnold Whittall, "Modernist Aesthetics, Modernist Music: Some Analytical Perspectives," in *Music Theory in Concept and Practice*, eds. James M. Baker, David W. Beach and Jonathan W. Bernard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997).

[3] Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[4] Pierre Boulez, "Stravinsky Remains," in *Notes of an Apprenticeship*. Trans. by Herbert Weinstock, (New York: Knopf, 1968), 72-145.

[5] Joseph N. Straus, "Stravinsky's Aesthetics of Disability," in *Broken Beauty: Musical Modernism and the Representation of Disability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 80.

interlock, and synthesis.^[6] Cone examines various compositions by Stravinsky, including *Symphony of Wind Instruments*, *Symphony of Psalms*, *Serenade in A*, and *Symphony in Three Movements*, explaining the impact of tonality and pitch on the composer's continuity and non-stasis. Another theorist, Jonathan D. Kramer, claims that the *Symphony of Wind Instruments* demonstrates different types of temporal structure on various levels, arguing that continuities can be found in the background.^[7] Moreover, Gretchen G. Horlacher proposes the perspective of ordered succession on a large scale to support her analysis on this topic, which has a degree of similarity to Kramer's analytical results.^[8] More and more research is emphasizing the tendency toward continuity, momentum, and forward motion in Stravinsky's music, or characteristics of both discontinuity and continuity at different structural levels within his compositions. Observing the state of academia in the 21st century, scholars' evaluations and analyses of Stravinsky's works have changed in significant ways. More specifically, while previous scholars generally criticised the discontinuity and excessive repetition that resulted in musical stasis in his music process, contemporary musicologists and theorists seek and emphasise the opposite aesthetic perspective of his music within pitch, metre, rhythm, and smallest units—the momentum and consistency that propel the music forward.

Taking the above scholarship into consideration, this essay analyses several musical elements to explore order, regularity, continuity, and consistency in the first movement from *L'Histoire du Soldat*, 'Marche du Soldat'.^[9] Previous analytical research (e.g. Cone or Kramer) mainly focuses on pitch and harmony to examine how these structural phenomena generate forward momentum at different structural levels (whether in the foreground, middleground, or background). Building on that scholarship, this essay discusses metre, motive, form, and harmony to uncover orders and continuities within the music. The following part analyses each parameter in the first movement of *L'Histoire du Soldat*, then compares the analytical results to previous critiques, displaying the different musical style in Stravinsky's composition.

[6] Edward T. Cone, "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," in *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 156-164.

[7] Gretchen G. Horlacher, *Building Blocks: Repetition and Continuity in the Music of Stravinsky*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 56; Also see Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 211.

[8] *Ibid.*, 54-61.

(a) notated

(b) rebarred

Figure 3: “Marche du Soldat,” real notation and rebarred notation, bars 43-49

(a) notated

(b) rebarred

Figure 4: “Marche du Soldat,” real notation and rebarred notation, bars 59-65

Although the preceding examples depict various changes in time signature, the steady, consistent feeling of 2/4 metre runs through the notated irregularity like a soldier's steps. In this movement, it is worth noting that there are four interruptions to the stable 2/4 rhythmic pattern during the process of music. Closer inspection reveals that these discontinuities and inconsistencies, which appear in bars 18-19, 28, 35, and 82, all share the same trait of introducing a new element or contrasting with previous motives. For example, the stable 2/4 is broken in bars 18-19 by following a new theme (motive b) at the same time. Another example can be found in bar 28, where the prominent line in the clarinet plays a long note that does not belong to any previous motive. The same case appears in bar 35. The last example in bar 82 displays a dynamic contrast at the end when the stable ostinato of 2/4 is broken. All these examples show that when the stable metrical pattern is broken, these places (bars 18-19, 28, 35, and 82) also allow the audience to perceive new material after the break while still establishing a fixed pattern and providing order.

The consistent rhythmic pattern outlines another order of the work: form. At first glance, it is difficult to define sections of this movement since it is not only distinguished by numerous fragments emerging in higher voices, but also strongly

influenced by the alternating interjections of the narrator during the music. However, two types of low voices reveal clear musical parameters of this movement: the pattern of the ostinato figure (I-V⁹) in G major and the constant pedal tone in D (see figures 5 and 6). Taking these musical parameters as a basis for dividing the structure of the work, the first movement can be divided into four sections (see table 1). As shown in table 1, the lower voice provides a clear alternating pattern from A to B, forming a recognisable order of form under the complex prominent line.

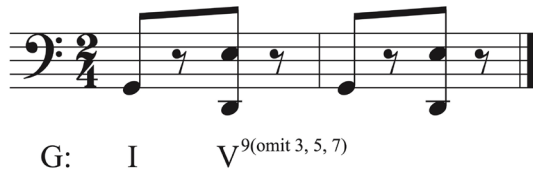


Figure 5: The pattern of ostinato in lower voice

Figure 6: Pedal tone in D in lower voice

Measures	Section	Lower voice
01-28	A	Ostinato (I-V ⁹)
29-39	B	Pedal tone
40-78	A	Ostinato (I-V ⁹)
79-end	B	Pedal tone

Table 1: The form of composition by dividing through the lower voice

While the lower voice outlines the structure, this essay also explores how Stravinsky establishes stable continuity through motives and the arrangement of themes. There are three sorts of motives in this movement: motives a, b, and c (see figures 7-9). Motive a is a diatonic figure, with a short unit that descends and then ascends, creating a curve shape. Motive b differs from motive a as it consists of outlined triads with large intervals in the melodic contour. Motive c is closely related to motive a, much like the stable rhythmic pattern that corresponds to the soldering step. The difference is that motive c is made up of many repetitive notes that change in half steps. Motive c in bars 61-64, for example, is centred around F and G and moves chromatically. These three types of motives exhibit different

characteristics during the music, providing a brilliant sonority when audiences listen to this piece. While initially it seems that many fragmented motives are intertwined in an irregular way, careful analysis reveals that these themes are organized to create a regular pattern.

mm. 1-2 cl in A.

mm. 6-8 pn.

mm. 10-12 cl in A.

mm. 12-15 pn.

mm. 41-44 pn.

mm. 46-48 pn.

mm. 48-51 pn.

gva mm. 51-55 pn.

The figure displays eight staves of musical notation for Motive a. The first staff (mm. 1-2) is for clarinet in A (cl in A) in 2/4 time. The second staff (mm. 6-8) is for piano (pn) in 2/4 time. The third staff (mm. 10-12) is for clarinet in A (cl in A) in 2/4 time. The fourth staff (mm. 12-15) is for piano (pn) in 2/4 time. The fifth staff (mm. 41-44) is for piano (pn) in 2/4 time. The sixth staff (mm. 46-48) is for piano (pn) in 2/4 time. The seventh staff (mm. 48-51) is for piano (pn) in 2/4 time. The eighth staff (mm. 51-55) is for piano (pn) in 3/4 time, marked *gva* (grave).

Figure 7: Motive a

mm. 18-19 cl in A.

mm. 24-26 pn.

mm. 26-27 cl in A.

mm. 31-32, and 37-38 vln.

mm. 43-44 cl in A.

m. 45 cl in A.

mm. 24-26 pn.

mm. 56-57 cl in A.

Figure 7: Motive b

mm. 20-21 pn.

mm. 59-61 cl in A.
8va

mm. 61-64 cl in A.
8va

Figure 9: Motive c

Table 2, below, shows that the form of composition depends on the motive and prominent line. First, the composer introduces motive a from bars 1-17, then introduces the other two new themes, motives b and c, from bars 18-24. As mentioned before, many fragmented lines and numerous motivic transformations interlock together, causing the sensation of irregularity and instability. However, by closely looking at the framework, an order becomes apparent. Stravinsky builds a fixed order of the appearance of motives b and a after revealing primary theme at the opening. For example, when motive b appears it is always followed by other motives, especially motive a, producing a distinct order of appearance of prominent lines. Motive a follows motive b four times from bars 24 to 54. Therefore motive b does not repeat itself or form a continuous group consisting entirely of motive b. After a regular pattern of 'motive b → a (or c),' the end of the piece returns to a variation of motive a, illustrating a stable sequence within the form of the work. As a result, instead of each block having no connection to the motivic pattern, the lower line and the prominent melody together create a logical section.

Bars	1-17	18-19	20-24	24-28	29-30	31-32	32-36
Motive	a	b → c		b → a'		b → a' (inv.)	
Bars	37-40	41-43	43-45	46-54	55-58	59-78	79-84
Motive	b → a		b → a		b → c		a'

Table 2: The prominent voice shapes the stable sequence of form

In harmonic idiom, much of this movement is bitonal. The lower progression and the higher melodic contour present contradicting tonalities, creating a strong sensation of conflict and tension. With the exception of the clear triads in bars 4-5 (I-V⁹ in G major), 18 to 19 (I-II-I in A Lydian), and 84 (C major, the only triad in the end of the piece), the harmonic content is primarily a bitonal mix. In this analysis, I consider that the subtle changes in the shifting of tonality will bring a certain degree of force and momentum to the entire piece. The changes in sonority and harmonic colour bring more stimulation to the listener.

Bars	1-3	4-5	6-17
Harmony	Chromatic	G Major	G Lydian G
Bars	20-28	29-43	44-58
Harmony	A (with chromaticism)	D major with chromatic	E Lydian with chromatic
	G	D pedal tone	G
Bars	79-83	84	
Harmony	G minor	C Major	

Table 3: The harmonic structure of the composition

As shown in table 3, the bitonal mix does not combine the same scale system (e.g. G major in the higher voice and C major in the lower voice, which are both diatonic systems), but rather combines different scale systems such as diatonic vs chromatic or diatonic vs church mode, resulting in a certain degree

of harmonic tension until the end. This phenomenon contradicts with the criticism that Stravinsky's music often remains harmonically static.

Results and Reflection

After analysing many parameters within this composition, it is time to collect all the materials, which imply many characteristics of order and consistencies, and complete this map. Stravinsky employs many tactics in the first movement of this piece, such as fragmented, irregular, or seemingly inconsistent material organisation. These tactics reflect numerous criticisms related to discontinuity, stasis, non-progression, and lack of goal-orientation. Returning to the analysis of metre, the composer changes the time signature throughout the piece, creating a sense of rhythmic irregularity. However, beneath this complex surface lies a stable 2/4 feeling in the bass line, a steady ostinato, and a consistent pattern from beginning to end. Furthermore, while the inconsistency of the rhythmic pattern is visible in a partial section, Stravinsky devised a formula to form an order amidst uncertainty.

Regarding the bass line and motivic line, these two elements also show a conspicuous order after detailed analysis. The two types of bass lines, the ostinato of I-V⁹ in G major and the pedal tone in D, not only divide the composition into four sections but also create a sequence of the melodic themes' appearances, framing an ordered structure. Moreover, harmonically this movement is extremely active and full of tension. A large part of the tonal mix includes diatonic, chromatic, and modal scales, which produce a constant harmonic polarity between the prominent line and accompaniment. Taking the movement 'Marche du Soldat' from *L'Histoire du Soldat* as an example, we can conclude that Stravinsky's music has a significant tendency toward continuity, order, consistency, and force. This contradicts with many problematic assessments by previous analytical studies (of course, many theorists have defended him against these negative criticisms).

If several musical parameters show continuity, order, and consistency in this work, why might Stravinsky receive those assessments? The significant key is how we examine the piece. In other words, whether we look at each parameter individually or comprehensively observe the overall materials at the same time. In most instances, audiences listen to the piece with all parameters being performed simultaneously rather than taking notice of each aspect individually. This may be because while each parameter independently establishes a sense of order (as the results of this analytical essay shows), when they are all joined this order breaks, since they each have their own pace and pattern of structure. Therefore, to discern the whole picture of this work, the audience might deconstruct different layers thematically, harmonically, or rhythmically, discovering the varied traits in a specific hierarchy.

Deconstructing these parameters separately provides a clear map to the features of Stravinsky's compositional technique, but it also reminds the analyst that listening selectively or seeing the entire picture has a specific purpose. Although this essay responds to previous criticisms through careful analysis of specific musical elements, this approach may not accurately present a comprehensive appearance of the musical architecture. That is, we cannot browse the overall framework itself at the same time. On the other hand, by deconstructing the details of this architecture we can understand the order shaped by each musical element and clarify why so many scholars contribute different opinions to support Stravinsky.^[12] Cross briefly states that the 'true dynamism' of his work comes from the manipulation of its rhythmic cells. While this only partially explains the source of the work's driving force, he correctly points out that Stravinsky's compositional technique and Germanocentric approach to composition are significantly different.

^[13] Building upon what I mentioned earlier, contemporary scholars continue to utilise their analysis to uncover and emphasise the different faces of Stravinsky's composition: the consistency, continuity, and momentum. Their analysis leads us to understand another side of the viewpoint, and the analytical results in this essay also indicate a similar consequence in emphasising that Stravinsky's music does indeed possess those features (the

[12] For another example, see Jonathan D. Kramer, "Discontinuity and Proportion in the Music of Stravinsky," in *Confronting Stravinsky*, ed. Jann Passler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 174-94; Kramer analysed many works and calculated the proportion of moment and submoment time in Stravinsky's music, showing the 'balance' and 'consistency' in his composition. In addition, other scholars such as Wang Yuh-Wen have also pointed out that Stravinsky's music is not simply fragmented, and lacking continuity as claimed by Taruskin and others. Through her analysis, she has identified that the momentum or force in the music comes from its rhythmic and structural elements at the level of beats and smallest units. See Wang Yuh-Wen, "Musical Modernism, Stasis, and The Rite of Spring," in *Humanitas Taiwanica* 61, (2004): 53-102.

[13] Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, 103-104.

order, consistency, and so on), but they require a different perspective to be observed.

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