Prokofiev's 1947 Cantata
Flourish Mighty Land
The years 1944-47 witnessed Prokofiev’s greatest success as a Soviet composer. During this period he received several state prizes for his scores, even though cultural officials could not, in general, countenance the works that he composed for official occasions, the single exception being his cantata in honor of Stalin’s 60th birthday. One such problematic score, the subject of the feature article by Vladimir Orlov, is his Cantata for the Thirtieth Anniversary of October, which was no sooner performed that consigned to agitprop oblivion. The Cantata is an economical setting of a Party-line poem by a Party-line poet (Yevgeniy Dolmatovsky) that bore the title—in the poet’s final version of the text—“Praise to You, Motherland!” (Slav’sya Rodina!). Once the text had been approved by the agitprop censorship board, Prokofiev tweaked it for musical reasons, and assigned it a slightly catchier title: “Flourish, Mighty Land” (Rastsvetay, moguchiy kray). In 1962, when the Cantata was published with a de-Stalinized text, it assumed yet another title: “Praise to You, Our Mighty Land” (Slav’sya, nash moguchiy kray). Prokofiev seems not to have devoted much time to this obligatory composition. Indeed, upon receiving the commission for the Cantata for the Thirtieth Anniversary of October, he bristled that his first and greatest paean to the Revolution—the 1937 Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October—remained unperformed.

The core of the issue comprises two articles by Kevin Bartig, leading Prokofiev scholar and Reviews Editor for Three Oranges. The first explores the political context of another troubled Prokofiev opus, The Queen of Spades, conceived for an ill-fated film project associated with the 1937 Pushkin jubilee. Bartig’s second article considers the influence of Igor Stravinsky’s seminal The Rite of Spring on Prokofiev’s mid-career works.

This issue also contains a discussion of the sources of inspiration for Prokofiev’s Flute Sonata, one of his most beloved scores, composed in 1943 during evacuation in the city of Perm. The author of the article, Vladimir Kachmarchik, is Professor of Flute at the Music Academy in the currently besieged city of Donetsk, Ukraine. Prokofiev was born not far from the city, in the village of Sontsovka—hence the rather opportunistic (from the standpoint of branding and tourism) naming of both the Musical Academy and the Donetsk International Airport after him. That Professor Kachmarchik was able to complete and submit his article to Three Oranges during the current political crisis evinces impressive Prokofievian fortitude on his part. The editorial team sends our thoughts and concerns to him and his students.

Simon Morrison
Stravinsky, The Rite of Spring and Prokofiev’s Audiovisual Sense

Kevin BARTIG
In the summer of 1929, Sergei Prokofiev decamped to the southeast of France, where he spent an idyllic few months away from his Paris apartment composing and seeking out culinary treasures at the wheel of his beloved eight-cylinder Ballot. A high point was a lavish brunch at the summer residence of soprano Nina Koshetz, who seated Prokofiev across from another Russian expatriate: Igor Stravinsky. The two composers had not seen each other for some time, and their encounter moved Prokofiev to take stock of their relationship. That evening he penned an uncharacteristically sober passage in his journal, admitting that “the successes and honors that Stravinsky enjoyed in the West were so superior to my own that it always seemed to me that I had been judged unfairly.” His feelings were mixed; he professed no bitterness or jealousy, his study of Christian Science having taught him that such emotions were counterproductive. Yet he was still willing to indulge in some pride, noting that in recent years he seemed to have overtaken Stravinsky.

Prokofiev’s competitiveness reflected more than a decade and a half of working in the same claustrophobic musical milieu as Stravinsky, a period that encompassed his entire peripatetic career abroad. Indeed, the elder Russian’s music was the main attraction when the twenty-two-year-old Prokofiev ventured outside of Russia for the first time, as it happened, just days after the notorious Paris premiere of The Rite of Spring on May 29, 1913. His journey brought him to Paris while elite circles still chattered about Stravinsky’s succès de scandale, an event Prokofiev lamented missing. A consolation was the remaining Ballets Russes season, which included Petrushka, the first Stravinsky ballet Prokofiev heard in its entirety. His theater-going also introduced him to the spectacular staging and choreography for which Diaghilev’s company had become famous. Journal entries and letters to friends at home document a flurry of impressions, as do those from a year later, when he returned as Diaghilev’s guest to take in more of the theater season. Although the impresario had not programmed The Rite, its looming presence clearly fired Prokofiev’s imagination, the composer surmising that the way to Diaghilev’s heart was through a “mischiefive ballet.” As Prokofiev set about currying the impresario’s favor, he keenly sensed the stylistic gulf that separated his pet project, the tuneful First Violin Concerto (op. 19), and the neo-national brutality with which Stravinsky had conquered the Paris elite.

Scholars have thus presumed a degree of musical emulation on Prokofiev’s part, a natural assumption given ample evidence that Prokofiev felt he was competing with the elder Russian for recognition as a musical modernist. For instance, Prokofiev biographer David Nice describes the fifth of the composer’s Sarcasms (op. 17) as “a parody of The Rite of Spring’s metrical freedom and pounding chords, which quickly fizzes out into Petrushka-like irresolution.” Yet he is puzzled by the “utterly original opening measures” of Chout (The Buffoon, op. 21)—the first Prokofiev ballet Diaghilev brought to the stage—which are not “accounted for” in Stravinsky’s Petrushka, the work Nice assumes was Prokofiev’s model. Even more problematic, if far more ideologically expedient, were the assertions of Prokofiev’s first Soviet biographer, Izrail’ Nest’yev. Disparaging parts of the Stravinsky’s choreography of The Rite of Spring, which superseded Vaslav Nijinsky’s more controversial staging and offered an “objectivity” that inspired Prokofiev’s work both in ballet and, much later, in film.

Initial Impressions

Indeed, Prokofiev’s observations of the 1913 and 1914 Ballets Russes seasons are striking for attention to staging. Of particular interest, largely because he had seen nothing like it in Russia, was the pervasive use of so-called “presentational music,” in which musical figures and on-stage physical movement are intimately coordinated. Highlighted in a report to friend and supporter Nikolay Myaskovsky, for example, was how Stravinsky “illustrates the tiniest details of the action wonderfully with a great deal of movement and exclamation (just as the action successfully illustrates the minuet of the orchestra’s phrases).” Yet even as he admired the audiovisual dazzle, Prokofiev quietly catalogued pitfalls, including musical passages that seemed superfluous or, as Prokofiev described in his journal, “a bunch of padding (remplissage).” In question, it would seem, was not whether coordination itself was inherently misguided, but rather whether music’s function was limited to parroting physical movement. Other concerns were more pedestrian, such as the alignment of what Prokofiev perceived as the emotional high-points of dance and music. His attention to the stage thus heightened, Prokofiev griped about other Ballets Russes productions. Ravel’s Daphnis et Chloé irritated him because the ballet’s composer “couldn’t illustrate the stage.” He opined that “music sympathetically responds to the staging when things concern elegant girls and forest scenery. But when approaching dramatic moments or Bacchans, the composer’s inability reveals itself.” Although Prokofiev does not propose a corrective for Ravel’s defects, these and other observations document both a newfound attention to the stage and, at the same time, an anxiety that one could easily resort to unsophisticated mime, with musical and physical movement in redundant lockstep.

Although Prokofiev may have harbored doubts about the Ballets Russes’s idiosyncratic aesthetics, he nevertheless understood that pervasive audiovisual coordination had become a cornerstone of ballet’s initial modernist remaking. Perhaps not surprisingly, presentational music suffuses Chout (the first version of 1915), which Prokofiev based on a Slavic fairy tale to satisfy Diaghilev’s commission for something “Russian.” But the Russian Revolution and Prokofiev’s temporary emigration to America meant that the impresario saw the score only in 1920, by which time he found its style embarrassingly outmoded. As Press has reconstructed, Diaghilev and Prokofiev mapped out a revi-
The Rite meeting with Stravinsky in March of 1915, the occasion of a schadenfreude was tempered when Diaghilev arranged a journalist André Levinson's excoriation is oft-cited for its co-

26 namely Massine's 1920 version of Chout.

At the same time, a similar purge of the past was underway, which corresponded with Nijinsky's 1913 choreography, a change of heart that both justified a new production and signaled a nascent insistence on “objectivity”: Roerich's intricate scenario and thrillingly heathen characters were jettisoned and the new production billed as “a spectacle of pagan Russia” that “involves no subject.”

Prokofiev attended the new production on May 23, 1921. He was enthralled, writing in his journal that he “the enormous impression” had “truly astounded” him. The performance was the first time he had seen the ballet staged, and the visual aspect of the work seems to have accounted at least in part for his positive reaction. He had been, for example, far less impressed by the work seven years earlier, when he heard the St. Petersburg premiere of The Rite, a concert performance that took place in the capital's Philharmonia Hall on February 18, 1914. “I was in ecstasy over ‘The Adoration of the Earth,’” Prokofiev opined, “but it’s so clamorous, and in other, quieter passages so unmistakably contrived that you marvel that the talented and ingenious Stravinsky has a screw loose!” He also took particular pleasure in the bemused expressions of fellow concert-goers, and he imagined those with more conservative leanings pondering “the filth that the Futurists compose.” Yet Prokofiev’s obvious schadenfreude was tempered when Diaghilev arranged a meeting with Stravinsky in March of 1915, the occasion of a command performance of The Rite played by the two Russian composers themselves in four-hand arrangement. Here the impression was more favorable, Prokofiev even venturing that he had misunderstood Stravinsky’s approach:

Sitting with the composer to play [The Rite] in four hands in front of a large crowd, I was intimidated because I knew of the work’s incredible difficulty. During the performance, Stravinsky—always small and anemic—seethed, poured out his blood, perspired, sang hoarsely, and so deftly gave the rhythm that we played The Rite with stunning effect.

Stravinsky’s physicality was central, both embodying the work’s primitive subject and maneuvering Prokofiev through The Rite’s metrical complexities. Given that Prokofiev’s very different evaluations depended at least in part on a perceived kinetic logic—a passive concert performance versus Stravinsky’s corporeal command—his enthusiastic reaction to the 1921 staged version is perhaps not all that surprising. Indeed, after some reflection, Prokofiev concluded that “for concert performance, The Rite is unpleasingly formless” and that “this formlessness is justified when the work is staged,” perceiving in the dancers the kind of physicality his erstwhile duet partner had exhibited.

Of course, “the staging” that Prokofiev had in mind was Massine’s, which Parisian and London critics were at pains to show was nothing like Nijinsky’s of 1913. The consensus was that the new Rite was dry and straightforward; the dance journalist André Levinson’s excoriation is oft-cited for its cogent summary of the collective disappointment:

What has Nijinsky made of this music which defies all translation into plastic terms? The sole result of the movements, as he imagined them, was the realization of the rhythm... But in Massine’s staging, the music does not succeed in truly moving the dancers... Nijinsky’s dancers were tormented by the rhythm. The present ones relax into marking the beat, and too often it escapes them.

In an interview, Stravinsky endorsed what Levinson and his colleagues condemned, instead highlighting what he felt Massine had accomplished:

Massine does not follow the music note by note or bar by bar. Quite the contrary, he battles against the meter, but keeps exactly to the rhythm. I will give you an example. Here is one bar of four, then one of five beats: Massine might make his dancers do three threes, which corresponds and adds up to exactly the same total, but goes better under the music than a note-by-note transference, which was the fault of the old choreography. And he starts up this battle, this slowing down or quickening, whether for two or twenty bars, but always falls back into accord with the section as a whole.

What Levinson perceived as passive detachment was for Stravinsky the basis of an “objective construction,” a staging that accorded with music purported to have no subject.

Prokofiev, it would seem, was struck by the dance’s articulation of musical time, what Massine described as “bridging” groups of measures, forming “a counterpoint in emphasis between the score and the choreography.” How this bridging worked in practice can be seen in example 1, which comes from a two-piano score of The Rite with annotations concerning choreography, likely Stravinsky’s own.

Whose choreography has been debated, but Stephanie Jordan has argued compellingly that the annotations match Massine’s prose descriptions. For example, Jordan suggests that the three horizontal lines indicate three groups of dancers, the vertical dashes demarcating four separate phrases that each group executes in staggered fashion, like a canon. The more indistinct markings between systems seem to indicate a recurring rhythmic pattern eight quarter-notes in length. This regular pattern moves out of phase with the meter as the latter shifts from 4/4 to 5/4 to 3/4. In short, here is a clear trace of the counterpoint Massine described.

To be sure, it is unlikely that Prokofiev perceived this counterpoint visually, but since his evaluation concerns the perception of musical form, he more likely attended to what Stravinsky called “fall[ing] back into accord,” or the moment when dancing groups come back into phase with each
other, which, as example 1 demonstrates, would coincide with a strong metrical pulse in the music. From this perspective, dance and music exist not in passive detachment, but rather each maintains integrity, with dance articulating hypermetrical blocks in the music in a fashion that, at least according to Prokofiev, aided comprehension. This audiovisual aesthetic must have seemed a more satisfying modernist updating of classical vocabulary than the presentational passages Prokofiev observed in Petrushka and other early Ballets Russes productions, insofar as it precluded “padding” or illustration. At the same time, Massine’s choreography must have assured Prokofiev that Diaghilev’s recent instruction for Chout was in keeping with what Stravinsky and his collaborators were up to.

Although there is no evidence that Prokofiev read the Stravinsky’s interview concerning the Massine choreography cited above, he uses strikingly similar language in his journal, specifically concerning Massine’s ability to avoid music and dance from “restricting” each other. More importantly, this formulation furnished Prokofiev with a blunt tool for pigeonholing other stage works by Stravinsky: A Soldier’s Tale was disappointing, for instance, as “the staging disrupted the music, and the music dragged out the action on the stage.”27 Bronislava Nijinska’s choreography for Les Noces distracted him and he longed to see the work in a concert performance, largely, it seems, because the dancing added layers of complexity to the music but did not simultaneously aid in comprehension the way he felt Massine’s approach had done for The Rite.28

### Later Echoes

Prokofiev’s aversion to audiovisual “restriction” also shaped his early work in sound film. Although he approached his first film project, the anti-tsarist satire Lieutenant Kizhe (Poruchik Kizhe, 1932-34), with some trepidation, his anxieties concerned cinema’s low-brow status rather than matters of aesthetics.29 In fact, he confidently warned Kizhe’s director and actors during his initial studio visit not to expect any “illustration” from his music; his skills would be put to use conveying the time and place of the action and the essence of the film’s characters.30

Prokofiev’s invoking of “illustration” would seem most likely aimed at Hollywood films, where “hyperexplicit, moment-by-moment musical illustration” of visual movements, as Claudia Gorbman described it in her classic study, was on the rise already in the early 1930s.31 But Prokofiev had scarcely seen a sound film when he began work on Kizhe in 1932, and his knowledge of Hollywood films at the time was largely anecdotal. A more satisfying explanation is found in a 1932 issue of the French magazine Pour Vous devoted to film music, a genre the journal’s editors felt was worthy of aesthetics.32 In fact, he confidently warned Kizhe’s director and actors during his initial studio visit not to expect any “illustration” from his music; his skills would be put to use conveying the time and place of the action and the essence of the film’s characters.30

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Indeed, “polyphony” was the preferred category in Prokofiev’s audiovisual taxonomy: he was content to work away from the film studio, composing short musical cues relying on only verbal descriptions and timings (rather than viewing rushes in the studio, the standard practice of Hollywood composers). At the same time, he insisted that this music be aligned not only with the beginning and end of short visual segments, generally under one minute in length, but also that his music would correspond metrically to key moments in the plot, as an aid to comprehension when a viewer should experience a shift in the narrative’s direction. For example, in his score for Mikhail Romm’s unrealized 1936 screen version of Pushkin’s The Queen of Spades (Pikovaya dama), he called for audiovisual alignment only in rare instances, notably when a contrived love letter is exchanged, a development that determines the outcome of Pushkin’s tale. In the manuscript score, an excerpt of which is in example 2, Prokofiev insists that the entrance of a musical theme occur at the instant the letter exchanges hands on-screen. Such an analogue to Massine’s “falling back into accord,” here articulating a narrative juncture that determines the remainder of Pushkin’s tale, which would be told, at least in Prokofiev’s imagination, with polyphonic sight and sound.

Prokofiev, The Queen of Spades, manuscript (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art f. 1929, op. 1, yed. khr. 93, l. 6).
Prokofiev helped directors and sound engineers to realize demands such as this, in some cases including “optional” measures that could be either skipped or repeated to effect the correct audiovisual alignment. In other instances, he insisted that sound engineers momentarily slow or speed up the image track during the soundtrack recording to align key moments.

This conception of audiovisual polyphony—or, more generally, counterpoint—circles back to The Rite of Spring. More than a decade separated the evening that Prokofiev saw Massine’s staging and his appearance on the set of Lieutenant Kizhe. Yet the former event effectively furnished the latter with an aesthetic of audiovisual relations, or at the very least confirmed what was already taking root in Prokofiev’s outlook. More to the point, as Prokofiev simplified his musical style in the later 1920s and early 1930s, hoping to appeal to a broad audience, he sought to remain respectively modernist by clinging to principles that he had adopted earlier in the 1920s. Concerning collaborative efforts in cinema, he insisted on his contrapuntal approach largely because it ensured that music would retain integrity while still shaping mood and articulating the formal structure of the narrative. It also connected him with the past: he might have been accused of pandering to low-brow tastes with his increasingly streamlined and uncomplicated musical style, but his audiovisual conception had an impeccable high-brow pedigree.

This connection, of course, also circles back to Stravinsky. Professed reconciliation aside, Prokofiev returned to his radically changed homeland at least in part due to Stravinsky’s prominence in the West. This was Prokofiev’s sacrifice “to the bitch goddess,” as Stravinsky famously derided it, his compatriot and erstwhile competitor having exchanged creative freedom for fame. But in retrospect—and putting aside the many unfortunate things that did befall Prokofiev in Stalin’s Russia—his Soviet music exuded what had always been just under the angular surfaces of his earlier works: lyricism, a conservative harmonic palette, and a classical metrical and formal sense. A similar continuity exists in his audiovisual sense, one that connects Prokofiev’s education in Diaghilev’s modernist milieu in the 1920s and his work in the Soviet Union’s most mass-oriented medium in the 1930s, venues that in other respects remained worlds apart.

This essay is based on a paper delivered at “Reassessing The Rite,” a conference held jointly at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA) on October 25-28, 2012 and at the Moscow State Chaikovsky Conservatoire on May 13-15, 2013. All translations from Russian are my own.

2 Ibid.
4 Nice finds specific moments in Prokofiev’s early ballet Alla and Lolli that reference The Rite of Spring, such as the quiet music that accompanies the moon-daughters’ visit, which parallels the opening of Part II of The Rite of Spring. Likewise, he considers the “ten-part string discord” that ends Alla and Lolli to be an “explicit homage” to The Rite of Spring. David Nice, Prokofiev: From Russia to the West 1891-1935 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 98-99, 112.
5 Nice, Prokofiev, 113.
7 And also put Nest’yev in a flattering political light at the height of the Cold War; at the time he was writing his biography of Prokofiev, Nest’yev also published two deeply ideological attacks on Stravinsky: “Dollarovaya kakovofinya” [Cacophony Paid For in Dollars], Izvestiia, January 7, 1951, p. 3; and “Svyashchennaya kakovofinya” [Ritualistic Cacophony], Sovetskaya muzїka 2 (1958), 132–35.
12 Prokof’yev, Dnevnik, vol. 1, 301 (entry of June 3-8, 1913).
13 Ibid.
14 Press, Prokofiev’s Ballets for Diaghilev, 176-98.
16 Prokof’yev, Dnevnik, vol. 2, 160-61 (entry of May 1-31, 1921). Prokofiev saw The Rite again with Massine’s choreography on June 13, 1924 and noted that his impressions of three years earlier were confirmed (ibid., 266 [entry of June 13, 1924]).
17 Ibid., vol. 1, 413 (entry of February 12, 1914).
18 Ibid., vol. 1, 555 (entry of March 20-22, 1915).
19 Ibid., vol. 2, 266 (entry of June 13, 1924).
20 Berg, Le Sacre du printemps, 72-73.
26 Jordan, Stravinsky Dances, 437-38.
27 Prokof’yev, Dnevnik, vol. 2, 253 (entry of April 25, 1924).
28 Ibid., vol. 2, 266 (entry of June 13, 1924).
29 Lieutenant Kizhe, dir. Alexander Fayntsimmer, Belorussian State Film Studios (Belgoskino).
31 Claudia Gorbman, Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 87.
32 Viktor Varunts, Prokof’ev o Prokof’ev: Stati’ i interv’yu (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1999), 103.
33 Ibid.
34 Bartig, Composing for the Red Screen, 53-54.