

Stylistic and Technical Juxtaposition in Igor Stravinsky's *The Owl and the Pussycat**

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Igor Stravinsky's last completed work is his art song setting of *The Owl and The Pussycat*, completed in 1966 at the age of 84.¹ Stravinsky and his wife Vera (the dedicatee) had a strong emotional attachment to the work, as this poem was among the first words of English that Vera learnt whilst fleeing war-torn Europe to settle in sunny California.² The work has a whimsical and child-like veneer, aptly reflecting Edward Lear's nonsense poem. Despite its outward appearance, this short song juxtaposes stylistic allusions and compositional techniques from across Stravinsky's musical career. In this article, I analyse the complex web of musical techniques and styles behind the austere façade, with particular attention to the hybridisation of Stravinsky's residual tonality with his later serialism. *The Owl and the Pussycat*, despite its historical significance as Stravinsky's last original work, remains largely ignored in music-theoretical literature, receiving fleeting mentions in two footnotes in Joseph Straus' otherwise comprehensive monograph, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, as well as a brief examination from the view of piano technique in Graham Griffith's *Stravinsky's Piano*.³

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¹ Stephen Walsh, 'Stravinsky, Igor,' *Grove Music Online*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/.

² Jane Manning, *Vocal Repertoire for the 21st Century. Volume 1: Works Written Before 2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 301.

³ Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 86, 90; Graham Griffiths, *Stravinsky's Piano* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 243–45.

Throughout this article, I distinguish between technique and style, with ‘technique’ being the underlying compositional process, and ‘style’ being the resultant musical surface. Together, style and technique form a composer’s musical language.

Serialism

The Owl and the Pussycat is certainly serial, as the entire pitch content is derived from a single tone row shown in Example 1.⁴ The adjacent interval series is $\langle 2, 4, 4, 0, 1, 0 \rangle$, showing a disposition towards seconds and minor thirds, with a complete lack of major thirds and tritones. As suggested by the symmetry of $C\sharp-A\sharp-G\sharp$ followed by $G\flat-A\flat-C\flat$ in the middle, the row can be broken up into two hexachords: H_1 being 6-Z23 (023568) and H_2 being 6-Z45 (023469). Importantly, 6-Z23 and 6-Z45 are Z-related, as they both have the same interval vectors of $\langle 2, 3, 4, 2, 2, 2 \rangle$. This means that even though the hexachords have a different intervallic structure, they will sound audibly similar. Example 2 illustrates how Stravinsky composes in discrete hexachords, with each phrase corresponding to a different hexachord of I. Additionally, the piano also follows this reversed hexachordal structure created by RI. Thus, H_1 in the voice corresponds with H_2 in the piano, followed by H_2 with H_1 . This switching of H_1 and H_2 between the upper and lower voices resembles invertible counterpoint.

Example 1. The prime form of the row showing intervals and hexachords (H).

Interval: +2 -5 +2 -3 -2 -1 +2 +3 +3 +3 -1 (-3)

Row Order: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Hexachords: $H_1 = 6\text{-Z}23 (023568)$ $H_2 = 6\text{-Z}45 (023469)$

Example 2. Composing in hexachords (fitting the text structure); Igor Stravinsky, *The Owl and the Pussycat* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1967), page 3, systems 1–2.⁵

I H_1
The Owl looked up to the stars above,

RI H_2 H_2
And sang to a small guitar,

H_1

⁴ Note that no subscript numbers are used as the rows are untransposed.

⁵ Due to the lack of barlines, page and system numbers are used as references.

As well as hexachords, the row is segmented into four discrete trichords centring around pitch-class set 3-7 (025) (see Ex. 3). The occurrence of set (025) three times during the row adds significantly to the apparent simplicity and repetitiveness of the work. However, there are also four indiscrete trichords of interest, with an additional three sets 3-2 (013) and another set (025), illustrating the prominence of these sets in the row. At first glance it appears that these two sets are unconnected, but they can be related through an M7 (multiplied by 7) transformation in Example 4, making the row appear structurally unified and coherent.⁶ Further, the intervallic contraction from (025) to (013) across the row can also serve a quasi-cadential function. For example, the first and second verses both end on I with C#-A#-B creating centrality around B, which is discussed further in Example 15.

Example 3. The row with trichords (Tr) marked.

Example 4. M7 transformational relationship between 3-2 (013) and 3-7 (025).

1. Take (013)

$$(0 \ 1 \ _ \ 3)$$
2. M7 (multiply by 7) transformation

$$(0 \ 7 \ _ \ 21)$$
3. Apply modulo 12

$$(0 \ 7 \ _ \ 9)$$
4. Normal Order

$$(7 \ 9 \ 0)$$
5. Prime form

$$(0 \ 2 \ 5)$$

Exact repetition of pitches is a common feature of the work, and notes are sometimes repeated within a discrete trichord a number of times before moving to the next trichord in the row. This gives the listener and the singer a momentary grounding whilst moving through the rows. This technique is highlighted by Example 5, showing the opening vocal line with repetition occurring within each trichord. With the exception of 'Wrapped,' functioning as an upbeat to trichord 4, each trichord maps onto a distinct phrase in the poem, albeit for the symmetrical dyads (A#-G# and G#-A#) on 'They took some money and plenty of honey.' Stravinsky's equal treatment in contour, phrasing, rhythm and text-setting of each of these

⁶ This transformational approach between sets is based on Robert D. Morris, 'On the Generation of Multiple-Order-Function Twelve-Tone Rows,' *Journal of Music Theory* 21/2 (1977): 238-262, and Daniel V. Starr, 'Sets, Invariance, and Partitions,' *Journal of Music Theory* 22/1 (1978): 1-42. There is an early discussion of the M7 transformation in serial music through viewing the chromatic scale as a cycle of fifths (called 'Quintentreihen'), which Stravinsky may have been aware of. See Herbert Eimert, *Lehrbuch der Zwölftontechnik* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1950), 28.

trichords further suggests equivalence of set (025) with set (013). Underneath the vocal line, the piano begins with a discrete trichord (025) on the opening three notes of P, moving to an indiscrete trichord (025) on notes 2-4 of P before the trichordal structure liquidates.

Example 5. Composing in trichords; page 2, all systems, to page 3, system 1.

Tr₁ (025)

Tr₂ (025) **indiscrete (025)**

Tr₃ (025)

Tr₄ (013)

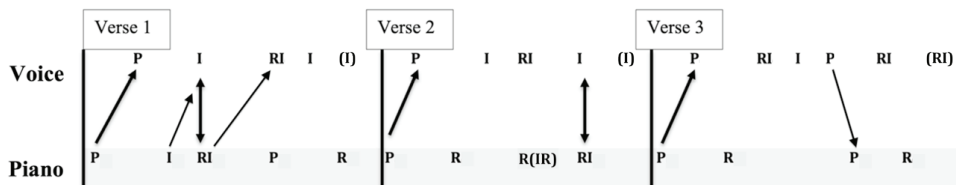
Piano trichordal structure liquidates...

A#-G# dyad **A \flat -G \flat dyad**

Throughout *The Owl and the Pussycat*, Stravinsky utilises the rows linearly, treating them like melodies, and moulding 13 rows (16 including direct repeats) around Lear's 11-line poem. This creates a potentially audible serial form (see Ex. 6), in a style not unlike the lyrical serialism of Luigi Dallapiccola, as well as being typical of Stravinsky's linear approach to serialism. Notably, at the end of each verse, the last row is directly repeated in the voice, further adding

to a sense of simplicity in the work. In addition, there is a notable degree of serial imitation in the work, as a canon with a leader and follower, as discussed further below.

Example 6. Order of rows, with diagonal arrows indicating serial imitation and vertical double arrows indicating simultaneous entries.



The use of row transformations in this work is absent due to the lack of transposed forms of the row, which is typical of Stravinsky's serialism.⁷ This lack of transposition makes it more idiomatic for vocalists, as it is not only repetitive in terms of intervals, but also with pitch classes. Example 7 illustrates the five row forms used in the work: P (prime), I (inversion), R (retrograde), RI (retrograde of inversion), and R(IR) (retrograde of inversion of retrograde).⁸ Straus notes that IR (inversion of retrograde) is a common occurrence in Stravinsky's serialism, despite being unusual in works of the Second Viennese School.⁹ Straus credits Stravinsky's adoption of IR to the influence of Ernst Krenek who wrote the first English language textbook on serialism, *Studies in Counterpoint* (1940), where Krenek employs both RI and IR row forms.¹⁰ However, Stravinsky does not employ IR in this work and there is only a single occurrence of R(IR), with a preference for the more 'traditional' row forms of P, I, R and RI (refer Ex. 6). The R(IR) may serve a dramatic purpose to mark the entry of the 'Piggywig.'

Example 7. Row forms.

The diagram shows five row forms on musical staves: P, R, I, RI, IR, and R(IR). Each form is shown on a single staff with notes and accidentals.

⁷ Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 103.

⁸ This is used instead of a matrix, as Stravinsky does not employ transposition.

⁹ Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 28.

¹⁰ Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 28; and Ernst Krenek. *Studies in Counterpoint: Based on the Twelve-Tone Technique* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1940), 11.

Additionally, Stravinsky likes to play with retrogradation, especially as there are a few moments where one can clearly perceive the row moving backwards, due to his straightforward horizontal placement of the rows. Example 8 shows how in the first verse RI is both preceded and followed by I in the vocal part (see Ex. 8a). The felt sense of retrograde is reinforced by the fixed registral positions and the lingering on B4 at end of I and the start of RI (see Ex. 8b).

Example 8. Overt retrogradation between end of RI and I in the vocal line; page 3, systems 2–4, to page 4, system 1.

a)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

The Owl looked up to the stars a - bove, _____

(7 8) 9 10 11 12

And sang to a small gui - tar, _____

RI 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 **I** 1 2

"O love - ly Pus - sy, O Pus - sy, my love, _____

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

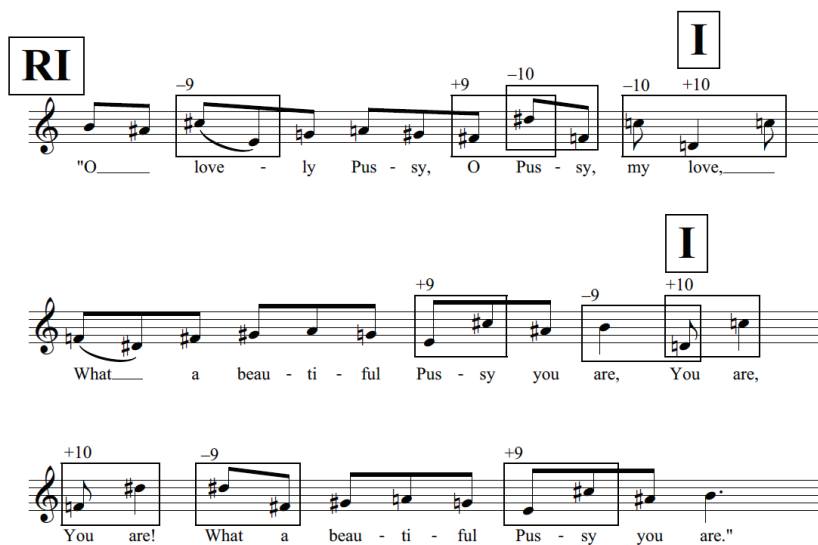
What a beau - ti - ful Pus - sy you are, _____

b)

I 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Throughout, Stravinsky plays with register by alternating the 'closed' and 'open' forms of intervals. This is possible due to the use of seconds and minor thirds in the row (as discussed in Example 1), allowing for the possibility of inversion to large intervals. However, there is never a single row that is entirely open or closed; instead, each row contains a mixture. Example 9 shows the Owl's declaration of love for the Pussycat where there are a number of expressive leaps, along with short melismas, that capture the Owl's reverential pleading.

Example 9. Expressive leaps; page 3, system 4, to page 4, systems 1–2.



RI

O love - ly Pus - sy, O Pus - sy, my love, I

I

What a beau - ti - ful Pus - sy you are, You are, I

+10 -9 +9

You are! What a beau - ti - ful Pus - sy you are."

Residual Tonality

Tonal elements are infused into the musical language of *The Owl and the Pussycat*. To distinguish between Stravinsky's interwar neoclassical period and his continued use of tonal allusions, I employ the term 'neoclassicism' for the stylistic period, and 'residual tonality' for the continuing technique. Throughout *The Owl and the Pussycat*, there are many tonal allusions, with notable blurring of the border between tonality and atonality. Many serial works are atonal without being diametrically opposed to tonality, as described by Straus' serial 'myth of anti-tonality'.¹¹ This is reinforced by Stravinsky's assertion that 'the intervals of my series are attracted by tonality.'¹² Furthermore, Stravinsky stated that his compositional process at a fundamental level comprises solely 'intervals and rhythms,'¹³ a technique that remained constant whilst he shifted through musical styles.¹⁴ Throughout, dissonant intervals are used freely and do not resolve like they do in traditional tonal music. There are many instances of consecutive vertical dissonances, which categorise the work as clearly post-tonal albeit with some tonal allusions, rather than being a hybrid tonal / post-tonal work.

Stravinsky utilises certain intervals that imply tonality, such as thirds that suggest triadic harmony. However, vertical thirds are scarce, as he favours the more tonally ambiguous seconds, fourths, fifths and tritones for simultaneities. Horizontally, three minor thirds are found directly in the row, with another wrapping around from the first to the last note (refer Ex. 1). These thirds are used cautiously and repeated less than other horizontal intervals. Another technique employed is to offset the thirds with horizontal chromatic neighbour thirds in the piano. One example is around 'beautiful' in the second line of the piece, which obscures the tonal

¹¹ Joseph N. Straus, *Twelve Tone Music in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 185.

¹² Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 24.

¹³ Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, 17.

¹⁴ Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, 17.

connotations of the thirds (see Ex. 10) where A and C in the piano form chromatic neighbours to A \sharp and C \sharp in the voice, albeit in different registers. In addition, the almost complete lack of major thirds throughout the piece moves it away from any major triad implications.

Example 10. Alternating thirds; page 2, system 2.

The image shows a musical score for Example 10. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "went to sea In a beau-ti-ful pea-green boat,". The middle staff is the piano right hand, and the bottom staff is the piano left hand. Above the vocal line, there are two boxes labeled "C \sharp -A \sharp " and "A \sharp -C \sharp ". The piano part features a sequence of chords: C \sharp -A \sharp and A \sharp -C \sharp .

Another tonal allusion is the prominence of D as a loose tonal centre, as the first and last note in both the voice and piano parts. Example 11 illustrates how the voice and piano come together at the end to rest on a unison D through contrary motion between the piano left hand and the voice, resembling a modal cadence typical of Renaissance polyphony (the piano right hand doubles the pitch classes of the left hand in contrary motion ending an octave higher). Additionally, the opening D2 in the piano and the final D4 in the voice are in the lower extremes of the register, making it more prominent and creating a sense of lingering. Furthermore, both P and I forms hinge on an inversive axis around D, making D a central tone in less tonal terms, forming a loose tonal centre without necessarily being scale-degree $\hat{1}$. Overall, this can give the appearance at first that Stravinsky is treating the rows as a chromatic mode centred on D. However, there are other tonal centres, notably B, which is discussed below.

Example 11. D centricity at the ending; page 8, system 4.

The image shows a musical score for Example 11. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "They danced by the light of the moon." The middle staff is the piano right hand, and the bottom staff is the piano left hand. The piano part features a sequence of chords.

Related to the D centricity is the repetition of small groups of notes that momentarily create pockets of diatonicism before moving to the next group, often creating a new pocket. Repetition is a key element of tonality but, as observed above, it can be used in serial music and was notably utilised by Schoenberg himself. Example 12 shows two adjacent diatonic pockets. The first pocket is the lower tetrachord of B minor forming set 4-10 (0235), with the low D suggesting a first inversion B minor triad. The B and C \sharp are then shared with the next diatonic pocket which forms the same (0235) tetrachord in root position in G \sharp minor. This resembles Boulez's idea of 'horizontal diatonicism' in *The Rite of Spring* (1913), where he argues that Stravinsky is 'very primitively diatonic,' but this diatonicism is metrically displaced or polytonally juxtaposed,

obscuring a vertical sense of tonality.¹⁵ Additionally, the two tetrachords of Example 12 form six notes from an octatonic collection, with the sense of octatonicism dissipating after the excerpt. Overall, Example 12 illustrates a connection of Stravinsky's horizontal diatonic thinking between *The Owl and the Pussycat* and his earlier, more tonal works.

Example 12. Diatonic pockets; page 4, systems 3–4.

B minor: B-C#-D-E = set 4-10 (0235)

G# minor: G#-A#-B-C# = set 4-10 (0235)

However, tonality in this work cuts to a deeper level with diatonicism being infused into the row. As mentioned, the trichords in the row are (013) and (025), both of which are very common in a tonal context. Example 13 illustrates the four possibilities of set (013) and the eight possibilities (025) in a major scale. These sets often sound diatonic, but it is ambiguous as to which scale degrees they are. Given the prominence of these sets in diatonicism, and the repetitiveness of *The Owl and the Pussycat*, it is no wonder that there are tonal allusions. Turning to the row itself, there are two plausible tonal readings (see Ex. 14a). First and more strongly is B minor that can cover the first eight notes, becoming weaker as the row progresses. A second and weaker reading is in D major encompassing the first four notes before liquidating. Despite the B minor reading being stronger, there is nonetheless some ambiguity between the first four notes, and a prominent first D would pull it slightly towards D major. However, the I row form (see Ex. 14b) is much more strongly in B minor, with ten of the notes alluding to scale degrees, as well as a wraparound third progression from D to B. The remaining C \sharp and F \natural could be read as tonally incomplete neighbour notes. Additionally, the close proximity of both $\natural 3$ ($\flat 3$) and $\sharp 3$ along with $\natural 2$ ($\flat 2$) and the prominent diminished seventh, could suggest an octatonic influence. This falls short of actual octatonicism as the diminished seventh belongs to a different octatonic species to the first two aspects. This allusion to B minor in the abstract row is supported through score analysis, as discussed below, taking into consideration other factors such as metric placement, phrase length and register.

¹⁵ Pierre Boulez, 'Stravinsky Remains', in *Pierre Boulez: Notes of an Apprenticeship*, translated by Herbert Weinstock (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 72–146 at 74.

Example 13. Major scale showing sets: (a) four occurrences of set 3-2 (013); and (b) eight occurrences of 3-7 (025).

Example 13 consists of two musical staves, (a) and (b), each showing a major scale with various triads and dyads marked above the notes. Staff (a) shows four occurrences of set 3-2 (013) with brackets and labels: 234 (under notes 2-3-4), 345 (under notes 3-4-5), 671 (under notes 6-7-1), and 712 (under notes 7-1-2). Staff (b) shows eight occurrences of set 3-7 (025) with brackets and labels: 124 (under notes 1-2-4), 235 (under notes 2-3-5), 356 (under notes 3-5-6), 561 (under notes 5-6-1), 612 (under notes 6-1-2), 672 (under notes 6-7-2), 723 (under notes 7-2-3), and 245 (under notes 2-4-5).

Example 14. Row with tonal reading: (a) P; and (b) I forms.

Example 14 shows two musical staves, (a) and (b), each with a boxed letter 'P' or 'I' at the beginning. Staff (a) is labeled 'P' and 'B minor'. The notes are: 3̂, 4̂, 1̂, 2̂, #7̂, #6̂, ♭6̂, ♭7̂, ♭2̂, #3̂, 5̂, ♭5̂?. Below the notes are two tonal readings: 'D major' (under notes 1̂-2̂-6̂-7̂-#5̂?-#4̂?-4̂-5̂) and 'Diminished 7th' (under notes #6̂-♭6̂-♭7̂-♭2̂-#3̂-5̂-♭5̂?). The word 'liquidates...' is written under the final notes. Staff (b) is labeled 'I' and 'B minor'. The notes are: 3̂, ♭2̂, ♭5̂, #3̂, 5̂, #6̂, ♭7̂, ♭6̂, 4̂, 2̂, 7̂, 1̂. Below the notes is a tonal reading: 'Diminished 7th (as dominant)' (under notes ♭2̂-♭5̂-#3̂-5̂-#6̂-♭7̂-♭6̂-4̂).

The end of verse two has the longest diatonic pocket in the work, with an extended allusion to B minor created by two iterations of I in the voice, and one slower iteration of RI in the piano (see Ex. 15). The hierarchisation comes from the scale degrees, alongside the rhythmic emphasis and registral high or low points.¹⁶ For example, 2̂ is read as hierarchically important by being accentuated in a scalar descent, the text and registral emphasis of 'His' in the first iteration, and the registral prominence of the C# in the second iteration. There are three further valuable insights from the analysis. Firstly, the excerpt commences on a pronounced vertical minor third (D4 and B3) and ends on the inversion as a major sixth (B4 and D4), suggesting a large-scale voice exchange. Additionally, these are the most accentuated vertical consonances in the work. Secondly, the tonal functions P do not quite align between the voice and piano

¹⁶ Criteria for hierarchisation derived from: Fred Lerdahl, 'Atonal Prolongational Structure,' *Contemporary Music Review* 4/1 (1989): 65–67; and John Roeder, 'Superimposition in Kaija Saariaho's "The claw of the magnolia...",' *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music from 1960–2000*, edited by Laurel Parsons, and Brenda Ravenscroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 156–75. This is not an argument for post-tonal prolongation, but a mere diatonic allusion. For a discussion on the possibility of post-tonal prolongation see: Joseph Straus, 'The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music,' *Journal of Music Theory* 31/1 (1987): 1–21.

parts, as illustrated, with a notable blurring of subdominant and dominant functions (the latter implied by the diminished seventh). This suggests a more horizontal approach to tonality, as discussed above that emphasises the independence of the two voices. However, both lines do start and end on the tonic. Thirdly, the vocal line ends in a linear cadential-like figure moving to rest on $\hat{1}$ that resolves the preceding horizontalised vii° chord. This is placed over an ambiguous patch in the piano line and culminates on a I^6 -like chord. The cadential idea is strengthened rhythmically through both parts coming together and momentarily pausing on B and D. Lastly, the piano appears to be like a bassline, but it does not behave like one, as it does not move in fourths and fifths as typical of common practice tonality. Instead, it functions more like invertible counterpoint, which is emphasised by the imitation throughout the song and the voice exchange.

Example 15. Extended B minor; page 6, systems 1–3.

The image shows a musical score for Example 15, consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "With a ring at the end of his nose, His nose, His nose. With a ring at the end of his nose." The piano part features vertical octaves and various chords. Harmonic analysis is provided below the piano part, including Roman numerals (I, IV, V, vii°), figured bass (D# / D# = 3, 4, 2 7 1), and labels like "cadence", "E-G align", "D#-F# align", and "(vertical M6)".

Another prominent feature with tonal implications is the use of vertical octaves throughout the piano part (see Ex. 16), which were forbidden by Boulez and other post-war serialists as harbingers of tonality, and as a result are rare in much serial music, including that of Stravinsky.¹⁷ Graham Griffiths argues that octaves are an 'important part of Stravinsky's style' and Stravinsky himself regarded them more as an orchestration technique since 'octaves are peculiarly pianistic' and '[n]o instrument produces them so well.'¹⁸ The fact that the piano part is almost entirely in octaves (apart from the opening D2) supports this, as the listener becomes familiar with the sound so that the effect is not heard as a violation of atonal conventions. Acoustically, the first partial of the harmonic series is an octave and would thus occur regardless. Octaves are practised by beginner pianists (and of course above and beyond) in scales, études and technical exercises; perhaps the octaves could replicate the sound of a child practising scales, adding to the infantilism of the piece, especially as the work is the setting of a children's poem by Lear.¹⁹ Additionally, there is a connection to the child-like aspects espoused in earlier works

¹⁷ Pierre Boulez, 'Schoenberg is Dead!' *Pierre Boulez: Notes of an Apprenticeship*, translated by Herbert Weinstock (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 268–75 at 269; Boulez was a major inspiration on Stravinsky during Stravinsky's 'formative' serial years of the early 1950s; see Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*.

¹⁸ Griffiths, *Stravinsky's Piano*, 243–44.

¹⁹ Griffiths, *Stravinsky's Piano*, 245.

of Stravinsky, notably the pedagogical *Les cinq doigts* (1921).²⁰ Perhaps Stravinsky was aware of Boulez's 'octave cancellation', and its use in this setting carries a degree of irony.

Example 16. Piano octaves as shown in the opening of composer's autograph: Igor Stravinsky, *The Owl and the Pussycat* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, [1966] 1967), 1.

The Owl and the Pussycat

to VERA

Edward Lear *1917*

H. H. 2-46 (circa)

Piano

pea-green boat: They took some ho-mey, and plenty of mo-ney wrapped

Beyond tonality itself, there are other notable residual tonal elements present in *The Owl and the Pussycat*. In particular, the key contrapuntal device of imitation is used throughout the piece in two main ways. First are canonic entries at the start of each verse, such as at the beginning of the third verse where P is introduced in the piano and closely imitated by the voice as a form of both melodic and serial imitation (see Ex. 17). Second is the more local

²⁰ 'Infantilism' comes from Adorno's discussion, which is not relevant to the scope of this article, See Theodor W. Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, [1949] 2016), 112–13.

imitations of pitches (see Ex. 18) that not only connect the two parts, but also demonstrate how the piano supports the voice by using notes soon before the voice sings them, making it easier for the singer to pitch their notes. This frequent imitation adds to the quasi-two-part invention-nature of the work between the voice and the piano octaves, as well as illustrating a clear hybridity between serialism and imitative counterpoint.

Example 17. Canonic entries of P; page 6, system 3.

Example 18. Pitch imitation of P; page 4, system 3.

Contrapuntal serialism is typical of Stravinsky's late works, with counterpoint being a technique that evokes the imitative polyphony of the Renaissance and Baroque, as well as being a key device of Second Viennese School.²¹ Curiously, Stravinsky connects his use of counterpoint to Schoenberg, 'justif[ying] his procedure by adducing the authority of Schoenberg[']s.'²² Additionally, Stravinsky was influenced by Krenek's serial treatise that introduces serialism through counterpoint. Krenek writes that this is 'an essentially polyphonic conception of music ... related to ... [how] music was viewed in Middle Ages, before tonality ... had developed.'²³ Following on, Christoph Neidhöfer observes a 'cross-fertilisation' of serial techniques with traditional contrapuntal devices first appearing in Stravinsky's *Cantata* (1951–52), and it seems that this 'cross-fertilisation' of tradition with modernity continues to appear throughout his late music.²⁴

Example 19 highlights some of the boisterous rhythms associated with Baroque allusions, as the Owl and the Pussycat 'dance by the light of the moon.' To musically reflect their ecstatic dance, Stravinsky strongly alludes to a gigue in a 6/8 meter, suggested by the rhythmic groupings

²¹ Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 113.

²² Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 113.

²³ Krenek, *Studies in Counterpoint*, viii.

²⁴ Christoph Neidhöfer, 'A Case of Cross-Fertilization: Serial and Non-Serial Counterpoint in Stravinsky's *Cantata* (1951–52),' *Tijdschrift voor Muziektheorie* 9/2 (2004): 87–104.

and placement of important text syllables (despite the lack of barlines). However, the piano does not take part in the gigue, instead largely retaining a crotchet pulse, creating hemiolas of $3/4$ against the $6/8$, as was common in eighteenth-century music in duple compound time. This metrical dissonance is further reinforced by the contrast between the dry articulation of the piano, which is indicated 'staccato-tenuto,' against the assumed lyricism of the voice part. This not only illustrates a Baroque form of rhythmic syncopation, but also illustrates Stravinsky's idea of juxtaposition in several different ways: harmonic, rhythmic and stylistic.

Example 19. Neoclassical rhythms; page 7, systems 2–4.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Example 19. Each system consists of a piano part (treble and bass clefs) and a voice part (treble clef). The piano part maintains a steady crotchet pulse, while the voice part features more complex rhythmic patterns. The first system includes the lyrics "on the edge of the sand, They danced by the" and is annotated with a $6/8$ time signature and fingerings (1, 2, 1, 2) above the voice line. The second system includes the lyrics "light of the moon, The moon, The moon," and is annotated with a $3/4$ time signature and fingerings (1, 2, 3) below the piano part, with the label "metrically ambiguous" placed between the piano and voice staves. The third system includes the lyrics "They danced by the light of the moon..." and is annotated with a $6/8$ time signature and fingerings (1, 2, 3, 1) below the piano part, with the label "rhythmic coordination with voice" placed between the piano and voice staves.

Example 20 shows the ambiguity surrounding Stravinsky's text setting of 'You are, You are!' where the voice is seemingly in-time, and the piano is metrically displaced. In the voice, emphasis is placed on 'are' as it is positioned in a higher register after a disjunct leap, and has a longer rhythmic value, following Lear's iambic prose. However, this is offset by the seemingly

syncopated piano part, which plays mostly crotchets.²⁵ Perhaps the solution to this metric conflict is illustrated in Example 21 that shows the sole barline in the opening of the work, which indicates that the piano is playing offbeat crotchets throughout, against the regularity of the vocal line. Moreover, the syncopated rhythmic character around 'You are, You are!' alludes to a hemiola, with the vocal line being grouped in three quavers against a series of crotchets in the piano. Stravinsky's syncopation of voice against piano further reflects the nonsensical nature of the text, as well as highlighting the Owl's insistence on the beauty of the Pussycat.

Example 20. Text-setting of 'you are, you are'; page 4, systems 1–2.

Example 21. Solitary barline at the opening; Stravinsky, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, 1.

Beyond pitch and rhythm, the dry, restrained articulations, along with the lack of expressive markings and dynamics, suggest a sense of neoclassicism throughout by resembling the articulation of many of Stravinsky's neoclassical works, such as the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930).

Thus, in short, *The Owl and the Pussycat* demonstrates Stravinsky's continued devotion to the tonal tradition, with this work connecting his earlier interwar neoclassicism with his post-war late serialism. However, despite all these clear past allusions (as discussed above), it is difficult to precisely pinpoint their exact origin. Writing on neoclassicism in Stravinsky's *Octet*, Martha Hyde devises the idea of 'eclectic imitation,' where 'allusions, echoes, phrases, techniques, structures, and forms from an unspecified group of earlier composers and styles all jostle each other indifferently.'²⁶ This aligns with Pieter Van den Toorn's observation that

²⁵ Supported by the 1967 recording by Stravinsky's assistant and pianist, Robert Craft, and soprano, Adrienne Albert.

²⁶ Martha M. Hyde, 'Neoclassic and Anachronistic Impulses in Twentieth-Century Music,' *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/2 (1996): 200–35 at 211.

Stravinsky's neoclassicism has an 'extraordinary 'reach' in historical scope' that includes aspects from the sixteenth-century through to the early nineteenth-century.²⁷ Certainly, this 'eclectic imitation' is a stylistic feature of *The Owl and the Pussycat*.

Russian Nationalism and Octatonicism

Alongside serialism and neoclassicism, *The Owl and The Pussycat* contains a number of octatonic elements creating a link to Stravinsky's Russian nationalist period.²⁸ Richard Taruskin writes that this scale comes from late-nineteenth-century Russian music and 'looms so large in Stravinskian harmonic practice' throughout, and briefly remarks that 'its farewell appearance was in *The Owl and the Pussycat*.'²⁹ Straus writes that whilst octatonicism is prominent in Stravinsky's earlier music, 'very little can be meaningfully attributed to octatonicism' in Stravinsky's later music.³⁰ Thus, it appears that the octatonic allusions here are somewhat unusual, and are perhaps a shadow or memory from Stravinsky's earlier Russian nationalist music. The presence of octatonicism may be explained by Taruskin's discussion of the octatonic collection being a product of the 'late-nineteenth-century Russian fantastic harmonists' (fantastic in the sense of mythical worlds that transcend humanity).³¹ It may also be explained by how Stravinsky often employs octatonicism to contrast with diatonicism 'differentiating the human and fantastic worlds' in works such as *Petrushka* (1911). This suggests that octatonicism is employed in *The Owl and The Pussycat* to reflect the whimsical, fantastical world of Lear's anthropomorphised animals.

Despite its ambiguity, there are still a number of clear octatonic elements in *The Owl and The Pussycat*. Firstly, there are a number of octatonic features in the row as illustrated in Example 22. It is possible to read all three octatonic collections into the row, as well as three horizontalised diminished seventh chords, mostly the clear ordering of notes 8-11. The first seven notes neatly fit into (OCT_{1,2}) and form a complete scale with the addition of the wraparound F at the end of the row. In fact, there are two moments where there is a repeated row, both I, that due to the wraparound of the last note allow for all eight notes of (OCT_{2,3}) caused by I (and centring on B) in Example 23. These two examples, despite their brevity and chromatic ambiguity, nonetheless confirm the underlying octatonicism embedded in the row.

Example 22. An octatonic reading of the row.

Example 22 shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The staff is annotated with 'Octatonic Collections' and 'Diminished Sevenths'. The octatonic collections are labeled as (OCT_{1,2}) for notes 1-7, (OCT_{0,1}) for notes 8-11, and (OCT_{2,3}) for notes 8-11. The diminished sevenths are labeled as [147t] for notes 2-7, [0369] for notes 8-11, and [258e] for notes 1-12.

²⁷ Pieter C. Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 257.

²⁸ There is a large body of scholarship of Stravinsky and octatonicism, notably: Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*; and Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

²⁹ Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 2, 257, 272.

³⁰ Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 39.

³¹ Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 283.

Example 23. Two occurrences of a complete octatonic set: (a) end of verse 1; page 4, systems 1–2; and (b) end of verse 2; page 6, systems 1–3.

a) **I** **I**
 (OCT_{2,3}) 7 of 8 (OCT_{1,2}) 5 of 8 (OCT_{2,3}) 8 of 8 (OCT_{1,2}) 5 of 8
 With a ring at the end of his nose, His_ nose, His_ nose, With a ring at the end of his nose.

b) **I** **I**
 (OCT_{1,2}) 5 of 8 (OCT_{2,3}) 8 of 8 (OCT_{1,2}) 5 of 8
 Pus - sy you are, You are, You are! What a beau - ti - ful Pus - sy you are!"

Secondly, the two trichords, set 3-2 (013) and 3-7 (025), are very common in octatonic collections. Example 24 illustrates eight iterations of set 3-2 (013) (one for each scale-degree) and six iterations of 3-7 (025), in contrast to four and eight respectively for the major scale (Example 13), suggesting the set 3-2 is particularly idiomatic of octatonicism. Furthermore, these small repeating cells or trichords may relate back to the ostinato-derived processes of Stravinsky's earlier Russian nationalist works, including *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913). In fact, set 3-7 (025) that dominates the row of *The Owl and The Pussycat* appears prominently in the opening of *Les Noces* (1923). Writing on *Les Noces*, Van den Toorn labels this (025) trichord as the 'basic cell' from which the subsequent pitch material is generated.³² This highlights a similarity in musical material, despite the differing compositional processes and resultant musical style.

Example 24. Eight occurrences of Set 3-2 (013) and six occurrences of set 3-7 (025) within (OCT_{0,1}).

(OCT_{0,1})
 Set 3-2 (013)
 Set 3-7 (025)

Furthermore, the repetitiveness of the work, coupled with the austere economy may also indicate a parallel to the emerging new style of minimalism in the 1960s. However, this economy is also a typical feature of the stripped-down late styles of many composers, and this is prominent throughout Stravinsky's late music, as demonstrated in Straus's monograph *Stravinsky's Late Music*, despite not being discussed explicitly in the text.³³

³² Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*, 163–65.

³³ Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*.

Conclusion

Milton Babbitt wrote that Stravinsky's serial music is the simplest of all of Stravinsky's music.³⁴ On one level, the serialism of the *The Owl and the Pussycat* is no exception. However, behind the infantalist façade, a number of complex musical elements still linger. *The Owl and the Pussycat* combines a variety of techniques and styles, notably the polystylist juxtaposition and hybridity of serialism with neoclassicism and octatonicism. Despite the work coming from his later serial period, many of Stravinsky's earlier musical techniques are evident: ambiguity, juxtaposition, displacement and distortion. These techniques are together synthesised into a polyvalent 'collage' or 'montage.' Thus Stravinsky wears different musical 'masks,' much like the complex dualistic nature of the masked *commedia dell'arte* character, Pulcinella.³⁵ Stravinsky is not solely a 'restorer' of the tonal tradition, but is instead a multifaceted composer whose nuanced musical language forms a complex dialectic between tradition and modernity.³⁶ *The Owl and The Pussycat* embodies this dialectic, which not only provides an apt summary of Stravinsky's stylistic trajectory and musical life, but also of the modernist trajectory of western art music in the twentieth century.

About the Author

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³⁴ Milton Babbitt, 'Remarks on Recent Stravinsky,' *Perspectives of New Music* 2/2 (1964), 35-55, 49.

³⁵ See Maureen Carr's discussion of Stravinsky's "multiple masks" in his neoclassical works: Maureen Carr, *Multiple Masks: Neoclassicism in Stravinsky's Works on Greek Subjects* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

³⁶ Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, 95, 146.