

# The Importance and Analysis of Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo by Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky in Terms of The Repertoire of Clarinet

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## Abstract

In this study, the importance of *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* by Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky who was one of the important composers of contemporary period music was mentioned; the effects of, especially, the changes in the number of measures, breath marks, grace notes, nuance and accent articulations on performance were analyzed. In the light of this information it is aimed to create a source for clarinet performers.

*Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* composed by Stravinsky in twentieth century has an important place in terms of the transferring of musical characteristics of the time. The work consists of three pieces. The first two pieces were composed for A clarinet which is among the soprano group of clarinet family, the last piece was composed for B flat clarinet as a member of the same group. The composer employed chalumeau register, which has the most vibrant tone color of clarinet, in the first piece of the work and he used all registers of clarinet in the second and third pieces of the work. The first piece of the work is as tranquil as possible and it is a piece which is quite easy to be played with piano nuance until the last two measures. The second and the third pieces vary from pianissimo nuance to fortissimo nuance and necessitate professional performance in terms of finger techniques, metronome speed and the performance of nuance.

In this study, first, composer identity of Igor Stravinsky and then the contribution of *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* in the repertoire of clarinet were discussed. Second, technical and musical difficulties in this work were analyzed and suggestions were presented to eliminate the difficulties for performance practice. In accordance with the obtained data, it is thought that this study is going to present a new perspective in the performance of the work for today's clarinet performers.

**Key Words:** Stravinsky, Twentieth century, Clarinet, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, Nuance

## 1. Introduction

### Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky (1882-1971)



Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum near St. Petersburg on 17 July 1882. He was one of the composers that led 20th century music. His father was Feodor Ignatyevich (1843-1902) one of the famous basso vocals of Imperial Opera. Stravinsky started to practice piano with Rubenstein's (1829-1894) students at the age

of 9. Then, he took counterpoint, invention and fugue lessons from Kalafati in order to improve his harmony knowledge. His family opposed to the idea that he was dealing with music. However, although Stravinsky studied law and philosophy at University of St. Petersburg, he spent most of his time with music. Later, a family friend who was interested in music introduced the studies of the Russian Five to Stravinsky. In this way, the young composer became a bridge between Russian nationality and German academicianship (İlyasoğlu, 2001: p. 219-220). The Russian five are Cezar Cui (1835-1918), Mussorsky (1839-1881), Blakirev (1837-1910), Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) and Borodin (1833-1887) who dominated the period of Stravinsky aimed planting Russian folklore to classical music and also combining it to the natural realism of that period (Pamir, 1989: p. 315).

Stravinsky took piano lesson when he was young and became a good accompanist. He took private harmony and theory lessons from Fedir Akimenko (1876-1945), the student of Rimsky-Korsakov, before 1901, later he continued lessons with Vasily Kalafaty. In 1902, he had visited Rimsky-Korsakov who were staying in Hamburg in summer and he had a chance to show some of his compositions to him. Rimsky-Korsakov advised him to continue theory lessons and told him that he would control his composition lessons. Stravinsky, worked with Rimsky-Korsakov until his death in 1908 (Rice, 2017: p. 236) and regarded him as his father figure throughout his life after the death of his father. He first composed piano sonata and the first work that was published was the symphony with B Flat Major tone. Stravinsky completed his law education at the age of 23. The first ballet he composed was *Firebird*. Later he gained more prominence with two more ballet works. These are: *Petrushka* and *the Rite of Spring* which were staged by Sergey Diyailef (1872-1929) as a part of Russian Ballets. Although *the Rite of Spring* caused a lot of scandals, it has been among the most important works today (İlyasoğlu, 2001: p. 220).

The works of Stravinsky were classified into three periods as early period until 1920, as Neoclassical period between the years 1920-1950 and as late period from 1950 to 1971 when he composed off tone. *Petrushka* (1911) which was among the works composed in the first period, *Eboby Concerto* (1945) which was a work composed for clarinet and jazz orchestra in Neoclassical period, and *Cantata* which was among the works composed in the late period can be showed as examples composed in these 3 periods. However, since the composer changed into 12 Tone Method by Schönberg from 1951 to 1971, *Cantata* was the first work that he wrote in sequential method (Say, 1994: p. 488-489). This work of composer was followed by a chorus work called *Canticum Sacrum* composed in 1955, *Agon* (ballet music) composed in 1957, *Movements* for piano and orchestra in 1958-1959, *The Flood* (ballet music) in 1962 and *Requiem Canticles* for chorus composed in 1966 (Kolatz, 2011: p. 13).

The composer became a citizen of France in 1935 and of America in 1945. His works were performed in some places in America. The deterioration in his health caused his works to decline. Although he died in New York on 6 April 1971, his wife Vera requested him to be buried in Venice.

## 2. Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo by Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky

*Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* written by Stravinsky for is among the most important works of twentieth century clarinet training repertoire. This work which can be played in clarinet exams instead of morceaux imposé and etudes frequently appears in competitions and concerts. It is among the most significant works played especially by undergraduate and post graduate clarinetists. It can be played by high school students in accordance with their advancement. When this work is considered in terms of technique and musicality, especially the second and third pieces necessitate professional clarinet performance.

Stravinsky composed the first piece of *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* in Morges Switzerland on 6-19 September 1918. The second piece was composed between the days 11-24 November and the third piece was composed 2-15 November. The first edition is known as: Igor Stravinsky, *Trois Pièces pour Clarinette Solo*, Londra: J. & W. Chester, 1920. Other editions are known as: Igor Stravinsky, *Trois Pièces pour Clarinette Solo*, Londra: J. & W. Chester, 1920 and the last edition: Igor Stravinsky, *Three Pieces for Clarinet (A or Bb) Solo*, ed. Gerard Alphenaar, New York: Omega Music, 1949. The first performer of the works is Italian clarinetist Edmondo Allegra. The first performance was in Lausanne, Switzerland on 8 November 1919 (Rice, 2017: p. 236-238). Stravinsky who was one of the pioneers of neoclassical movement dedicated this work called *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet* to clarinetists Werner Rheinart (1884-1951) due to his contributions to original production of theatre-chamber music called *L'Historie du soldat* (Yalçınkaya, 2010: p. 33). Stravinsky wrote in his autobiography as follows:

*I have kept a special place in my memory for that performance, and I am grateful to my friends and collaborators, as well as to Werner Reinhart, who, having been unable to find any other backers, generously financed the whole enterprise himself. As a token of my gratitude and friendship, I wrote for, and dedicated to him, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, he being familiar with that instrument and liking to play it among his intimates (Stravinsky, 1936 cited by Rice, 2017, p. 238).*

On the top of the pages, where the first and second pieces of the work are written, there is a statement saying that they can be played with an A clarinet preferably and on the page where the third piece is written that it can be played with a B flat clarinet preferably. This is completely left to the preference of the performer, with which clarinet the player feels comfortable or likes the tone, s/he can play with it. On the first piece, it is written on the top right-hand corner of the page that “*The breath marks, accents and metronome marks indicated in the 3 Pieces should be strictly adhered to*” The player should perform the work exactly by paying attention to each breathing mark, accents and metronome marks written on this comment.

The nuances used throughout the work are important in terms of the inference musical context. However; if these nuances are expressed as desired by the composer, the musical context can be revealed. When the work is considered as a whole, the nuances and abbreviations are *pianissimo (pp)*, *piano (p)*, *mezzo-piano (mp)*, *mf (mf)*, *forte (f)*, *fortissimo (ff)*, *crescendo (cresc.)*, *decrescendo (decresc.)*, *diminuendo (dim.)*, *ritardando (rit.)*.

### 2.1 The First Piece

The first piece of the work is played with an A clarinet which is in the soprano group of clarinet family and has a deeper voice than B flat clarinet. The piece is written in low chalumeau register which has the most vibrant tone color of the clarinet. *Sempre piano, poco piu forte*, crescendo and decrescendo were used as nuances. Speed term is *molto tranquillo*. It lasts for 30 measures in total. Different beats were used in almost all the measures from the beginning of the piece till the end. The piece starts with a 2/4 measure and the following measures are 5/8, 2/4, 5/8, 7/8 (see example 1), 5/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 5/8, 3/4, 5/8, 2/4, 5/8, 3/4 (6/8), 5/8, 6/8, 7/8, 2/4, 3/8, 3/4 respectively and the change in measures finishes with 5/8. Although continuous changes in beat seem hard, considering each note as 1 beat per a quaver note in while practicing eases the performance and enables tempo to be maintained consistently. The piece consists of quarter and quaver notes. The desired metronome speed is 52 = a quarter note. This speed is 104 when considered as 1 beat per a quaver note. If the piece is performed as 104 metronome speed = a quaver note, rhythmic structures in the piece will be familiarized in shorter time.

*Sempre p e molto tranquillo. mm ♩=52*



Example 1. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The First Piece, measures from 1 to 5

Grace notes do not just dominate this piece; they dominate all pieces of the work. All in all, melodic elements are combined with graces that support the musical sentences. As soon as the piece starts, the first thing that is heard is a grace note (see example 2). While performing these grace notes, the tempo should not be delayed, they should be played as if they grace and escape from the following the note and the performer should have gracing character heard meticulously. Moreover, being heard of grace notes as equally and similarly is quite important. In order to achieve that, not only the grace notes within the piece but also the grace notes in all registers of the clarinet can be practiced. These practices should be done successively in a chromatic way or in different tones as triple intervals. What is important is that the player should start the following note in time after the grace note.

*Sempre p e molto tranquillo. mm ♩=52*



Example 2. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The First Piece, measure 1

Legato is used as articulation almost throughout the whole piece. While performing this articulation, breaths should not be taken except from the breath marks and the sounds should be played smoothly along with this

articulation. The breath marks created by the composer were placed to create specific pauses in addition to create breath requirements and the sounds need to be suspended lightly (see example 3).

*Stravinsky described these breath marks to the clarinetist, Rosario Mazzeo, in this way: "Each breath is not just so much exact time; its length depends on the moment in the music." (Mazzeo, 1991 cited by Rice, 2017, p. 240).*



Example 3. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The First Piece, measures from 5 to 6

The piece starts *sempre piano e molto tranquillo* and continues till decrescendo which means reduce in the sound level in the 28<sup>th</sup> measure. The use of aforementioned nuance along with decrescendo throughout 28 measures is 7 times and the use of forte nuance along with it is for once in the last measure of the piece. Crescendo nuance is used for once in the last measure of the piece.

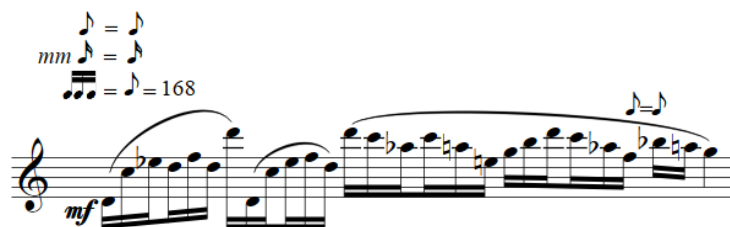
The tranquility until the 28<sup>th</sup> measure of the piece is disturbed with the *sudden poco piu f e poco piu mosso* in the last two measure of the piece (see example 4) and preparation for the second piece starts. The breath should be blown to clarinet by being increased gradually with the help of diaphragm for each of the piano nuance along with the crescendo nuance for eight times that have continued for 28 measures. On the other hand; the breath should be blown to clarinet by being decreased gradually with the help of diaphragm in decrescendo nuance. All in all, musical integrity is important throughout the piece.



Example 4. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The First Piece, measures from 29 to 30

## 2.2 The Second Piece

In addition to be on the foreground of especially the technical performance and nuances in the second piece, it is also important that rhythmical values should be performed with a tone that is equal, clear and soft. The piece is a miniature part without bar lines. It is in a faster tempo when compared to the first piece and the number of metronome is 168 MM = a quaver note. At the beginning of the piece, the composer wanted beats to be thought as follows; a quaver = a quaver, a semi-quaver = a semi-quaver and three semi-quaver notes = a quaver. To play as stated by the composer especially in the hard passages is important in terms of not disturbing the tempo and true performance. Due to the domination of semi-quaver trios in the second piece, it has a harder rhythmical structure when compared to the first piece. In order to be rhythmic in these sections, it should be considered that three semi-quaver notes = a quaver note as stated by the composer. The piece starts with semi-quaver trios (see example 5). Each of the semi-quaver trios should be practiced in a slow metronome rhythmically and in a clear intonation, later the practice should be continued by increasing the number of metronome until reaching targeted metronome.



Example 5. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The Second Piece, First Staff

The composer wanted septuple notes on the second staff and nontuple notes on the third staff to be considered as: a septuple = a quarter, nontuple = a quarter (see example 6,7). The practice that is done for semi-quaver trios can also be done for septuple and nontuple notes. It should be provided for these kinds of sections that the notes should be played piece by piece and completely with a comfortable finger technique. As it is in the first piece, there are also grace notes in this piece. In order not to disturb the tempo, it is also important to key the graces in time. The suggestions related to grace note in the first piece can be employed in this piece, as well.



Example 6. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The Second Piece, Second Staff



Example 7. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The Second Piece, Third Staff

The mezzo-forte nuance that starts in the beginning of the piece continues till the double lines in the middle of the piece. To perform the notes in the maximum octave in a controlled way along with the aforementioned nuance until that piece is significant in terms of both musicality and the continuation of the nuance. In addition to all these, a clear intonation should be noted. After the double line, sounds in low octave that start with a pianissimo nuance are in chalumeau tessitura in septet intervals and right after it, it includes a mezzo-piano nuance response with graces and expressions (see example 8). While playing these sections accompanied with nuances, the question – respond relation should not be ignored. One more pianissimo and mezzo-piano nuance change after these nuances, the piece continues with subito pianissimo, mezzo-piano and mezzo-forte nuances and it ends with a ritardando along with *subito meno forte* nuance.



Example 8. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The Second Piece, Fourth Staff

### 2.3 The Third Piece

As it is in the second piece, the technical performance is in the foreground. To perform rhythmical structure in an equal, clear and soft tone is important for the continuation of the musical sentences. Additionally, all the accents in the piece should be played energetically in order to reflect the character of the piece. The number of metronome was stated as a quaver = 160 MM in the beginning of the piece and they were wanted to be always thought as (*sempre*) a semi-quaver = a semi-quaver. When the register is considered, it is seen that it is completed in clarion register and it is expected to be played in forte from the beginning to the end of the piece. Just like in the first piece, different measure numbers are used in almost all measures in this piece (see example 9). The first measure of the piece starts with 2/4, then the following measures change as 5/16, 3/16, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8 (6/16), 3/4, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 5/16, 3/16, 2/4, 3/8, 3/16, 5/16, 3/8 (6/16), 2/8, 3/16, 3/8, 3/16, 3/8, 5/16, 3/4, 5/8, 5/16, 3/8, 2/4, 5/16, 2/4, 3/8, 4/16, 3/16, 3/8, 5/16, 5/8, 2/4, 5/16, 2/4, 3/4, 3/16, 3/4, 5/16, 2/8, 3/16 respectively and the piece finishes with a 5/16 measure change. Although continuous changes in measures seem hard and confusing, the suggestion of the composer saying that quaver notes should be considered as 160 MM metronome and a semi-quaver as semi-quavers ease the performance.



Example 9. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The Third Piece, measures from 4 to 8

The piece lasts for 61 measures. Crescendo, decrescendo, forte and fortissimo are used as nuances. However, when the piece is considered as a whole, forte nuance is dominant all over the piece as stated by the composer. The last note of the last measure should be noted (see example 10). *Sombrier le Son Subito* (abrupt change in tone color) in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> measures in the piece, accent notes, the spots where crescendo and decrescendo nuances are significant spots to reflect the character of the piece. The grace notes should be performed carefully as they should in the other pieces.



Example 10. I. F. Stravinsky, Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo, The Third Piece, measures from 58 to 61

The piece should be challenging in terms of performing articulations along with the aforementioned nuances. In this piece which is short but challenging, a strong diaphragm resistance and a steady lip condition are needed in order to perform the articulations along with the nuances easily.

This piece progresses in a fast tempo like in a jazz mood and reminds of *Ragtime* session in Stravinsky's *Story of A Soldier*. Each sign which is written on the notes and helps the character of the piece to be revealed should be noted throughout the piece (Yalçinkaya, 2010: p. 35).

### 3. Conclusion

Stravinsky was one of the most important and outstanding Russian composers. The works of Stravinsky are classified into three periods as early period, neoclassical period and late period when he composed off tone. Although the work called *Rite of Spring* of the composer created scandals, it is among the most important works.

*Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* which Stravinsky composed in 1918 is among the works of early period. The composer dedicated and composed this work to clarinetist Werner Reinhart due to his contributions to original production of Theatre-chamber music called *L'Historie du soldat*. This work is also among the solo works of clarinet training repertoire. This work which did not lose its significance has been one the most important and difficult works of clarinet training repertoire in twenty-first century. Having an important place in the repertoire of clarinet of *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* has been a factor for this study.

In this study, the importance of *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* by Igor Stravinsky in the repertoire of clarinet was discussed, and technical and musical difficulties in this work were analyzed and suggestions were presented to eliminate the difficulties for performance practice. When considered this point of view, it is thought that this study is going to provide and insight by presenting a new perspective and creating a source for present and future clarinet performers.

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