

Channeling Bodily Movement in Performing, But How? Stravinsky Petrouchka – Petrouchka's Room

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Abstract: Y's famous ballet Petrouchka was arranged by the composer into a piano solo work consisting of three different movements. The ballet's music is full of contrasts portrayed by the orchestra and has very percussive quality to the music. The plot for the main characters: petrouchka, the moor, and the ballerina, has an abundance of twists inside the characters' mental states. The dancers use their entire bodies and facial language to depict the story and the struggle with the music. When an intensified musical work such as petrouchka was arranged for piano solo, it is essential to for the pianist to show the depth of the story with the piano. To achieve this state of mind, I believe the key is the "embodied performing experience" that Elisabeth Le Guin suggested; the performer has to physically and mentally channel with the music. It is suggested that body language is the key to the succession or coherency while interpreting and performing work. In this paper, I will use the second movement of Petrouchka (for piano solo) to support this statement further, proving that body language is needed for portraying a work.

Keywords: Body language; Petrouchka; Stravinsky

1. Introduction

In 1911, one of the most significant works of Stravinsky was premiered in Paris.

Alongside The Rite of Spring and Firebird, Petrouchka was originally a Ballet and Orchestral work composed under the demand of the famous Russian Patron Diaghilev. As Richard Taruskin points out, Petrouchka is a supremely theatrical work^[1]. The work unifies music, dance, and theatrical aspects. It is a tragic love story tangled between three puppets that came alive at the corner of one of Russia's traditional market fairs. As hard as it may be, the composer arranged this work to a piano solo composition consisting of three movements. The concept of transfiguring a work that combines multiple implications of musical instruments (orchestration) and physical arts (Dance and theatrical effect) seems very intriguing to me. As I recall learning this work, I dedicated a significant effort to attempting to imitate the whole scenery and orchestration within this piano solo work and trying to bring the idiosyncratic emotional aspects within this work to the audience with my instrument.

I will focus on the second movement of this music, which is titled Petrouchka's room. In this movement, the main character, petrouchka the puppet, is experiencing tremendous loss and confusion mentally with his identity and love. I picture this whole movement as a scene that all happens inside Petrouchka's mind, almost schizophrenically. On this side, the amount of physical effort for the performer to express plays a crucial role inside this music.

Elisabeth Le Guin suggests that the embodied experience of a performer while performing, both physically and mentally, is highly connected to the succession or coherency when interpreting a work. She suggested several ways that occur in the physical sensation of performing, such as muscle memory, body mobility while performing, and imaginary vocal chords^[2]. Using this type of critical analysis, I noticed that while I perform, bodily movements often happen unconsciously. It became part of the muscle memory during the process of countless playing through and practicing, which also tells us how important "A Music-making body is being fashioned."

2. Analyse

At the beginning of the piece, the dynamic makings are distinctly demonstrated, as such:

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У Петрушки

Chez Pétrouchka



Figure 1: Beginning of Chez Pétrouchka

Pauses, accents, and fermata separate the clear distinction between forte and piano. It is very easy to interpret such musical gestures in an orchestra: simply arrange the parts for different instruments to play. However, when there is only one instrument, how shall I embody the various instruments. It is challenging without bodily movement. Thus, I freeze my body and all movements after the first measure of striking fortissimo, and with very minimal motion to flow through the slur in the third measure, then freeze once again. This method helps me to lead the audience with my body language and unifies breathing between me and the audience. In the Molto meno, we can see that different layers start to build up.

When an orchestra plays this part, the sting plays the outer frame while the woodwind hums the syncopated middle voice. In my instrument, where all the hammers in the instrument and the wood were built on a 2-definitional frame, it is very difficult to bring different emotions to this specific part. What I did, was to emphasize on the syncopated rhythm, make the second beat slightly later while attacking the keyboard with a different touch to separate the voice. It is all bodily movement; if I do not change the way I touch the keyboard while producing the sound, the layers of the music will not be distinguished, and the music will thus become both boring and pale.



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Figure 1: Middle section

The middle section of this movement comes with tremolo accompanying a highly accented portato melodic line. When an orchestra interprets this part, the drums can play a very easy tremolo with an almost espressivo kind of crescendo. While on piano, what I could do is lift my hands higher to use more body weight to produce more sound and reduce the amount of body weight to make a hairpin expression. I must rethink the concept of the 2-dimensional approach but instead channel my body to help the instrument to achieve 3-dimensional all-in-round expression.

3. Conclusion

As a performer, I tried to not only channeling the physical aspects of view into this work, but also the mentality of theatrical aspect to the music. when there is a forte, I picture what happens in the storyline and interpret it with my body language and imagination. To express and to get involved to the music, one needs to feel the body language. It is very related to Le Guin's point of view. As a performer, it has become necessary to channel our body to express what lies within the work.

References:

- [1] Richard Langham Smith, and Nicholas Williams. "Revised Imagery." *The Musical Times* 133, no. 1797 (1992): 586.
- [2] Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 23.

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