

Varied Repetition and Stravinsky's Compositional Process

by Lynne Rogers

Stravinsky's music, especially that of his Russian and neoclassical periods, is well-known for its use of "varied repetition" in the construction of melodic lines. As exemplified by the famous theme shown below, melodies constructed using this technique initially state a short pattern, then follow it immediately with altered restatements of that pattern.



Example 1: *The Rite of Spring*, rehearsal no. 91. Brackets and numerals marked above the staff identify the varied repetitions.

The improvisatory character of lines exhibiting varied repetition raises questions regarding how Stravinsky composed them, questions that may be answered most fruitfully through study of the composer's musical sketches. Stravinsky's sketchbook for his *Concerto in D* for Violin and Orchestra (1931) contains numerous sketches of lines constructed through varied repetition. Some of these sketches reveal only single versions of such lines, already identical to their final forms, suggesting that the composer probably solved any compositional difficulties at the piano. Other sketches, however, display construction in stages. Of these sketches, one set, for a melody from the Concerto's opening movement, will be investigated here.

The sketches: physical context

The set of sketches appears on a single opening in the sketchbook for the Violin Concerto (Igor Stravinsky Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung). The sketchbook contains 120 lined pages, originally designed for the composition of text and not music.¹ Stravinsky transformed the volume into a musical sketchbook by producing staves in ink, as needed, with a rastral. Other

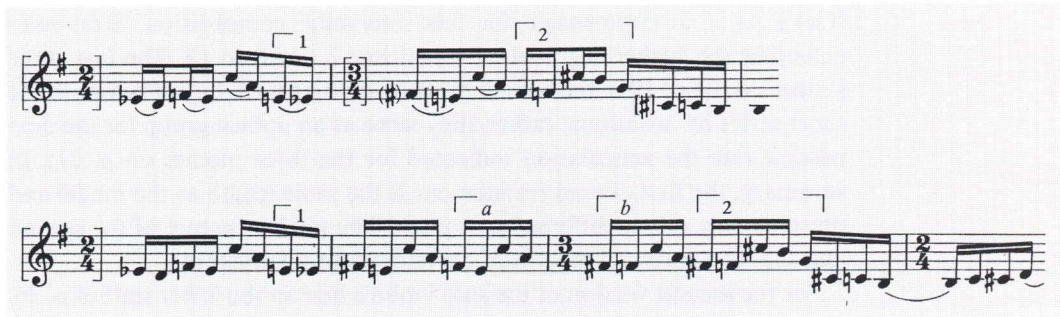
notations are in pencil. Since neither the pages nor leaves of the sketchbook are numbered, the page numbers cited below refer to those assigned in my inventory of the sketchbook.

Dates in Stravinsky's hand, scattered throughout the sketchbook, indicate that Stravinsky filled its openings sequentially. As the composer worked his way through the sketchbook, he devoted a section of it to each of the Concerto's four movements. The section used by Stravinsky for the first movement occupies pp. 1–41.

Analysis of the sketches

The set of sketches to be examined is found on the opening formed by pp. 26–27 of the sketchbook.² As seen in *Figure 1*, Stravinsky made three sketches for the transition that extends from the fourth through sixth bar after rehearsal no. 26 in the published score. Presumably, he started on p. 26 (left-hand page) by sketching two versions of the solo violin's line from the transition. Since Stravinsky typically began higher on a page and worked his way down, we will assume that he composed the shorter sketch on the upper staff on p. 26 first, then used the staff below to create the second version of the line. He incorporated this second version into the fully textured sketch on p. 27 (right-hand page) that also includes small portions of the passages preceding and following the transition.

The first version of the solo violin's line comprises a pattern and two altered restatements of it:



Example 2: Annotated transcription of Stravinsky's sketchbook for the Violin Concerto, p. 26. Brackets, numerals, and letters marked above the staves identify the varied repetitions.

The six pitches of the pattern form two segments of unequal length: the first and registrally lower segment consists of the first four pitches, and the second and registrally higher segment contains the last two. The first varied repetition differs from the model in that its "lower" segment is transposed

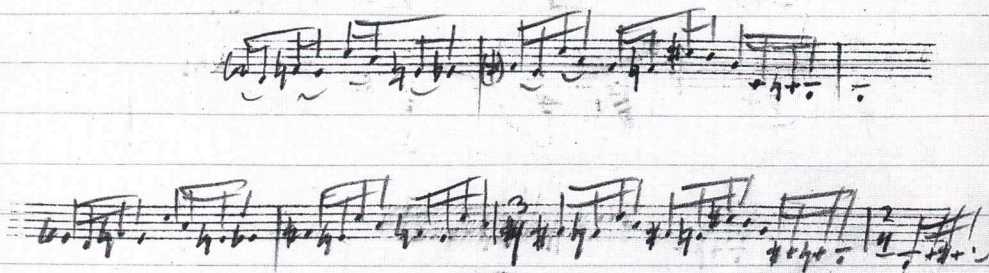
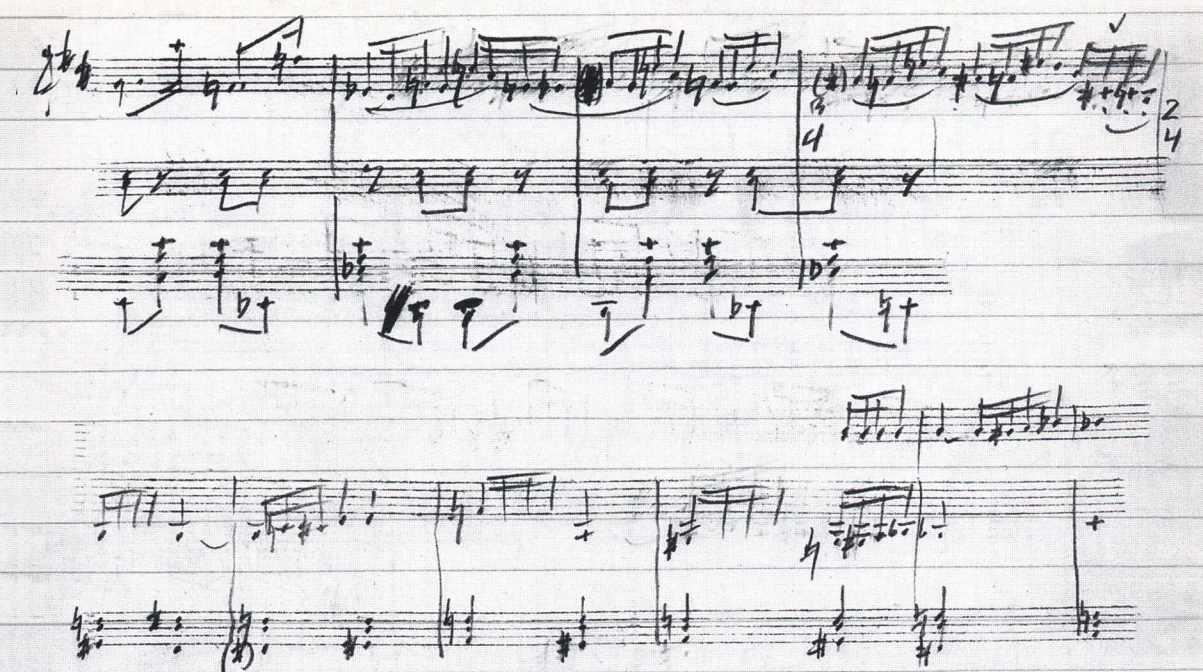


Figure 1: Stravinsky's sketchbook for the Violin Concerto, pp. 26–27 (excerpt).

up by one semitone. Varied repetition 2 begins with the model's first two pitches transposed up by three semitones. It omits the third and fourth pitches and presents the "higher" segment transposed and intervallically altered to form a major second (C#-B) rather than the original minor third (C-A). As if to compensate for this intervallic compression, Stravinsky extended the higher segment of repetition 2 down to G. The last three sixteenths (C#-C-B) in the second measure of this sketch do not belong to the short series of variations; rather, they serve as an upbeat group for the next passage (see the articulation indicated for the three pitches on p. 27). In summary, the first altered restatement is the same length as the model and presents only minor differences in pitch. The pitch structure of the second and slightly shortened repetition deviates more significantly.

For the second version of the solo violin's line on the lower staff of p. 26, Stravinsky retained all of the music introduced in the upper sketch but inserted two additional varied repetitions (labelled *a* and *b* in *Example 2*) between the original first and second restatements. Varied repetition *a* transposes the model's first two pitches up by a whole tone, and skips to a reiteration of the original higher segment, C-A. Varied repetition *b* transposes the model's beginning two pitches up by yet another semitone, and jumps again to C-A. Stravinsky chose this second version of the solo violin's line for the polyphonic setting of the passage on p. 27 and eventually for the published score.



What were the benefits gained from the creation of the additional varied repetitions *a* and *b* for the second, and evidently preferred, sketch on p. 26? First, with its expanded length, the transition separates more effectively the two highly contrasting passages surrounding it. Second, varied repetitions *a* and *b* differ in length from the model and altered restatements 1 and 2. The increased variety in grouping size produces an irregular accentual sequence characteristic of Stravinsky (in sixteenths: 6-6-4-4-5). Third, the shorter repetitions *a* and *b* provide the transition with a built-in accelerando that increases the movement toward the next passage. Fourth, the initial two pitches (F-E) of varied repetition *a* allow the second sketch to complete an embedded chromatic ascent left gapped in the first sketch. The ascent, incorporating the first two pitches of the model and of each varied repetition, takes the following form in the later sketch: E♭-D, E-E♭, F-E, F♯-F, F♯-F. Fifth, the added reiterations of C in the second sketch postpone and thereby highlight the achievement of C♯ by varied repetition 2.

From the five benefits gained through the composition of the second sketch on p. 26, we may infer that when expanding the solo violin's line, Stravinsky responded not only to the structure of the pattern that heads the transition, but also to the organization of the entire bridge and to its function in the context of the movement. The composition of the solo violin's melody thus required more careful consideration than is evident from the apparent spontaneity of its final form. Evidence supplied by other sketches in the

sketchbook for the Violin Concerto suggests that such a compositional approach to lines using varied repetition was not atypical for the composer.

- 1 The pages of the sketchbook measure approximately 8-1/4 by 12-3/4 inches. Fine, blue, horizontal lines spaced approximately 3/8" apart fill most of each page.
- 2 Although neither page bears a date, we can infer from those dates in Stravinsky's hand on nearby pages that Stravinsky composed the music on pp. 26-27 between 17 and 19 March 1931 or on one of those dates. Dates marked by the composer in the sketchbook range from 27 December 1930 (on p. 1, the first page on which writing appears) to 4 September 1931 (on p. 117, the last page on which writing appears).