Introduction

On 1 May 1969 Stravinsky was photographed in the Hotel Pierre, New York, sitting at his desk in Room 1716, 'orchestrating Bach'.[1] The next day he was admitted to hospital. He was eighty-six, almost eighty-seven, and 'in a parlous physical condition'. Over the next two days, according to Stephen Walsh's re-telling,

> he underwent two major operations for the removal of enormous blood clots from the leg. Against all prognostications he survived and promptly went down with pneumonia … It seemed impossible that he would reach his birthday in a month's time. Then just as suddenly, on the 26th of May, like the Emperor in *The Nightingale*, he sat up in bed, bid everyone a bright good morning and demanded to be lifted out to continue work on the B minor Fugue.[2]

Only the previous month Stravinsky had begun arranging four minor-key preludes and fugues selected from *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*.[3] They were to be his final creative act. Bach's scores (in the Czerny edition)[4] and Stravinsky's manuscript sheets had accompanied the composer on his recent journey from Los Angeles to New York (where he would be within reach of superior medical treatment). Such was his recently restored appetite for work that, according to the testimony of Robert Craft and Vera Stravinsky, he would 'get out of his hospital bed five or six times each day in order to add a few measures'.[5] The scene brings to mind lines from Gogol: 'A new feeling began to stir in him. In his soul old impressions that had long remained buried began to awaken [and he] now looked upon the beautiful views with curiosity, as if seeing them for the first time.'[6] Or perhaps Stravinsky was stirred to overcome his infirmity by memories of the closing pages from *The Rake's Progress*: 'Rouse yourself, Tom, your travail soon will end. Come, try!'[7]

While these Bach arrangements – for various permutations of wind and string instruments – were more 'in the nature of occupational therapy than practical work' (at least, in Walsh's estimation), and although, following the presentation of these works at the Berlin Festival six months later, Craft and Nicholas Nabokov agreed that they were 'not performable as they stood' and withdrew them,[8] their very existence is still cause for celebration and wonderment. Irrespective of the concert-worthiness of these remarkable

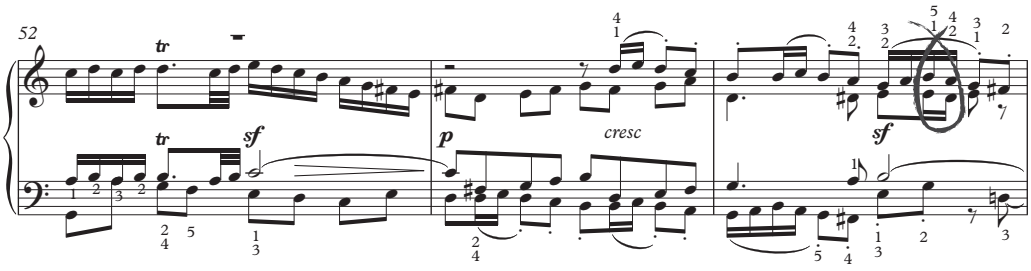
labours, the whole episode confirms one vital and inextinguishable aspect of Stravinsky's creative spirit: his profound admiration for 'the radiant idea of pure counterpoint' (as he had been moved to comment, regarding Bach, in an interview with the Warsaw journal *Muzyka* in 1924).[9] In fact Stravinsky retained an intimacy with counterpoint throughout his life, his first acquaintance of fugues dating from 'about the age of eighteen [when he] began to study … alone, with no other help than an ordinary manual', as he later explained.[10] This 'manual' may well have been, or been complemented by, Lyadov's *Twenty-Four Canons* (1898) for Piano or the Fuga (1893), also for piano – to be discussed in Chapter 1.[11] Stravinsky's initial experience of counterpoint, then, was not merely as an intellectual exercise (in silence); it was also sensed physically (as sound) via the 'digital' and, by all accounts, pleasurable unravelling of textures through his fingertips at the piano. How unusual, indeed, was the response of this keen and self-motivated student compared to that of his peers at the Conservatoire, struggling through their weekly counterpoint assignments!

> The work amused me, even thrilled me, and I never grew tired of it. This first contact with the science of counterpoint opened up at once a far vaster and more fertile field in the domain of musical composition than anything that harmony could offer me. And so I set myself with heart and soul to the task of solving the many problems it contains … It was only later that I realized to what extent those exercises had helped to develop my judgement and my taste in music. They stimulated my imagination and my desire to compose.[12]

The Bach arrangements written seventy-five years later might betray some tremulous handwriting but Stravinsky's final engagement with pure counterpoint shows his mental perspicuity to be virtually undiminished.[13] (According to his close family, 'even during this difficult time [February 1969] Stravinsky worked at the piano for forty minutes each day'.)[14] His personal copy of 'The 48' reveals that his curiosity extended beyond those movements specifically earmarked for his (re)creation. On a distant page (to be precise: at b. 54 of the A minor Fugue from Book I) Stravinsky could not resist circling *in red* a most rare example of the dreaded parallel fifths. It is a deliberate act – worthy of any eagle-eyed music student these past two and a half centuries – that barely conceals a delight, tinged by incredulity, that he had found 'one that got away' even from Johann Sebastian himself. It had somehow slipped, as it were, through 'God's fingers', but not through Stravinsky's (Example 0.1).

Of course, the inner (alto) voice reads, from the beginning of the bar: D, D♯, E, E, D♯ (*not* D natural), E – which would suggest that Bach successfully avoided parallel fifths 'on a technicality', but it is a close call. Stravinsky

Ex. 0.1 J. S. Bach, *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*, Book I (edited and fingered by Carl Czerny), Fugue in A minor, bb. 52–4, with Stravinsky's 'correction' (original in red pencil).



was clearly still intrigued with and even entertained by the challenges of counterpoint. This preoccupation has become especially associated with his neoclassical works and with those combative pronouncements of the early 1920s, made with the dual intention of proclaiming and explaining his stylistic re-invention. However, his regard for eighteenth-century counterpoint (and even earlier forms of polyphony) was not an interest suddenly acquired when he reached his forties.[15] Nor was it then abandoned when, in his seventies, he sought an individual response to the challenges of serialism. Rather, Stravinsky's embrace of counterpoint – on occasion, his apparent dependence upon it, especially in his keyboard works – was an integral part of his life-long *affaire* with music. In his autobiography he even discloses, somewhat astonishingly, that the counterpoint exercises he wrestled with as a young man 'laid the foundation of all my future technique [and] prepared me thoroughly for the study of form, of orchestration, and of instrument [*sic*] which I later took up with Rimsky-Korsakov'.[16] The Bach arrangements provided Stravinsky with one last opportunity to indulge his private relish for such contrapuntal stimuli; to walk along the tramlines of the greatest technician of them all; to sense the constructive, inspirational and healing properties of Bach's radiant perfection – and to savour his occasional edgy 'imperfections'. If Stravinsky was no longer well enough to sit at the piano 'rehearsing the right sounds' (to cite Luciano Berio's poetic 'Adieu', written in 1971)[17] then he could at least simulate that 'desire to compose' by moulding 'The 48' to make them his own. The pedagogical properties of Bach's work as compositional *and* clavier exercises would not have been lost on Stravinsky, for this pair of characteristics effectively defines his own two-pronged approach towards composition and pianism. He may not have conceived his act of Bach-arrangement in this way, but Stravinsky's determination to complete the exercises he had set himself was surely 'guided'

by advice given him in 1902 by Rimsky-Korsakov: that he should dispense with the formalities of St Petersburg's musical establishment and, instead, by his *own* initiative 'acquire complete mastery in the schooling of craftsmanship'.[18] Judging from Stravinsky's self-imposed work routine in May 1969 he still believed in this practice.

Besides the unusually positive attraction of a teenager to the 'science of counterpoint', Stravinsky also developed an early and equally idiosyncratic relationship with the piano. Composing with the aid of this instrument established itself from the outset as his preferred mode of working, as Rimsky-Korsakov immediately recognized and encouraged. His advice to Stravinsky that 'as for you, you will compose at the piano'[19] can now be adjudged not only to be wise counsel, but also a hugely significant act of prophecy.[20] Stravinsky never forsook the habit, and with good reason. This working method represented a process by which he experienced music's parameters – pitch, texture, articulation, chord-spacing, rhythm and intervals (especially intervals) – vividly and elementally. 'I think it is a thousand times better to compose in direct contact with the physical medium of sound', Stravinsky famously declared, 'than to work in the abstract medium produced by one's imagination'.[21]

Stravinsky published these comments at a time when he was also writing chamber works that featured his own participation as a concert pianist: *Duo Concertant*, which Stravinsky toured extensively with the violinist Samuel Dushkin from 1932, and the *Concerto for Two Solo Pianos*, which Stravinsky premiered with his son Soulima in 1935. Performances of these demanding piano parts inevitably required preparation to a professional level and, to ensure this, Stravinsky's technical practice was supported by constant reference to Isidor Philipp's *Complete School of Technic for the Piano*. His personal copy of this volume bears the dates of the lessons when Stravinsky sought the guidance of Isidor Philipp in Paris in the autumn of 1924 – in the midst of touring his newly completed Piano Concerto and composing the *Sonate pour piano* – both works destined to contribute greatly to establishing the composer's identity in his re-invented neoclassical guise.[22] It is instructive to re-consider just how much critical perception of this 'new Stravinsky' was determined by his neoclassical stance. Following the *Octuor* (1923) and his article 'Some Ideas about My *Octuor*' (1924),[23] this new 'image' was projected almost exclusively by piano works – *Concert pour piano et instruments à vent* (1923/4), *Sonate* (1924), *Sérénade en la* (1925) – and by the composer-pianist's own inimitably objective manner of execution. Judging from a 'miniature essay' released by the composer's London-based publishers one can plainly see that Stravinsky's double-barrelled assault, both verbal and musical, provoked an uncomfortable response:

> It is impossible to-day to consider the work of Igor Stravinsky with the detachment that is the first requisite of a judicious appreciation and to avoid taking part in the violent controversy to which it has given rise, a controversy that is in itself a testimony to its vitality, for Stravinsky's music is so characteristic an expression of the artistic tendencies of our time that even those who most dislike it cannot pass it by in silence.[24]

If the piano is to be considered the vessel through which important aspects of Stravinsky's neoclassicism passed, then, in order to explore this hypothesis, one must review fundamental aspects of both neoclassicism *and* pianism (for example, their 'objectivity' and sense of craftsmanship) as complementary aspects of the one creative 'attitude'. If composition derives its craft from counterpoint, fugue and imitative writing generally, then to what does pianism owe *its* debt? In response, it is intriguing to compare the anti-romantic flavour of Stravinsky's 'objective', often contrapuntal piano writing with the 'mechanistic', non-expressive elements of piano methodologies whose didactic focus – exemplified in the literature of studies, exercises and drills – is generally considered to be 'a dry subject useful only for pedagogical purposes'.[25] But it is hardly new science to draw such parallels.

In 2001 Charles M. Joseph proposed that Stravinsky's neoclassical piano works owe much to Philipp's exercises as 'useful models', and that it is 'impossible to miss' such connections.[26] There is no other author in the literature able to combine extensive knowledge of the composer's archive with insights into the composer's pianism gained via direct access to the composer's son. Yet so far Joseph has been averse to tackling the deeper issues that his observations suggest lie beneath the surface of 'Stravinsky's unique compositional approach to the keyboard'.[27] Related topics such as Stravinsky's self-confessed admiration for Czerny, his habit of composing at the piano, his inordinately large hands and (especially) the awkwardness of his piano writing have also remained objects of similarly tangential, superficial reference. Why have these unexpected, unusual and plain uncomfortable unorthodoxies regarding 'Stravinsky's piano' not provoked more coordinated, more musicological, attention? Perhaps the composer's own reluctance to discuss them is at least partially to blame. Compared with his willingness to expound generously on virtually everything else concerning his life and (non-piano) works, Stravinsky's 'silence' has effectively left his pianistic canon vulnerable to neglect. More damaging than neglect, however, has been the hostility directed at the piano repertoire by some within the Anglo-American Stravinsky community. Eric Walter White's early appreciation of Stravinsky's neoclassicism as his 'sacrifice to Apollo' (1930) dismisses the *Sonate* for its 'ungrateful' writing, declaring that 'the sooner

Stravinsky writes a second Piano Sonata the better' and accusing him of 'chromatic sentimentality [in the third movement] that can only be compared to some of the worst Victorian hymn-tunes'.[28] White later shied away from such direct aggression but negativity is never far below the surface, the *Sérénade*'s attributes serving obliquely to condemn both works:

> [It] is perhaps the most satisfactory of all Stravinsky's works for solo piano. In it he showed he was no longer interested solely in the instrument's percussive qualities. It reveals a deeper sensibility than the earlier keyboard works, and a much wider range of texture and timbre. It is also a more grateful work from the pianist's point of view.[29]

White's comments, regarding Stravinsky's 'sole interest' in the piano's percussive qualities, refer principally to certain passages in the outer movements of the Piano Concerto, for he overlooks the Concerto's Adagio and completely misrepresents the predominantly linear character of the *Sonate*. How can White's critique have been left unchallenged, and for so long? Stravinsky had the opportunity to respond via his *Conversations* with Craft but declined. Perhaps his co-author (who set the agenda for these dialogues) was also less than committed – a suspicion confirmed by Craft's observation, published in 1978 with the silent endorsement of the composer's widow, that the solo piano works represent a concession to Stravinsky's limited technique.[30] In 1996 Richard Taruskin's exploration of the Russian Traditions appears too casually to endorse Prokofiev's view of 'the horrifying *Sonate*'.[31] Are these writers reacting – in the *Sonate*, for example – to that pedagogical aura which this volume intends to address? Why would these works provoke such animus? Is it, perhaps, because performance-related or educational issues are regarded, by some, as sub-disciplines of musicology – beyond (or below) its radar? Taruskin's study singularly fails to engage with those traditions of Russian pedagogy or pianism within whose orbit his young subject first became aware of his Russianness – not only from those around him and from those who taught him, but also from those whose reputations formed the cultural heritage that began to engage his attention. Education surely demands that it be considered as a contributory element of civilization and its national characteristics. Within that context pianism and its pedagogy rank amongst those Russian traditions whose influence Stravinsky sensed most keenly. While left unchallenged such bias conveys a censorious message, and unjustly. The issues raised by Stravinsky's piano compositions deserve to be addressed within the same musicological framework as his other works, not least because of the unique contribution they make to the historiographical and hermeneutical enquiry concerning his neoclassicism. Scott Messing, for example, summarizes neoclassicism

in music as a 'sign that accommodated both innovation and tradition'.[32] In response, the present study locates 'Stravinsky's piano' within this broader argument by addressing the innovative manner with which he coopted pianistic, pedagogic traditions for stylistic and aesthetic purposes.

The historical relevance of the early neoclassical solo piano music, in particular, cannot be questioned – if only because of the timing of its emergence. The composition of the Piano Concerto, *Sonate* and *Sérénade* coincides with the publication and aftermath of Stravinsky's first ever article on a musical (or other) topic, 'Some Ideas about My *Octuor*'. This declaration of intent now required implementation through his music via more substantial genres than that provided by the 'occasional' format of eight players. The new works were destined for a more prestigious stage via the piano recital and symphonic concert. That the venue marked for Stravinsky's debut as pianist – and for the premiere of the Concerto – was the Paris Opéra would support the implication behind this reading: i.e. the composer was complicit in engineering a coordinated launch for his new 'brand', and of engaging in thinly disguised musical politics. His re-invention as a concert pianist gave him the ideal means to propagandize his message while also establishing a performance tradition for these works more effectively than via newsprint. Faced with these two objectives he forearmed himself – with a piano – and as 'counsel for his own defence' he set about delivering his message from the concert stage. But his armoury extended far deeper: to the pianism inherent in the very notes themselves which, I suggest, he formulated from pianistic sources whose figurations and gesture derive from those same processes that drive the pianist to laborious study and to public performance – and, even, to inconsequential improvisation. All of these aspects of musical production are presented here as elements accessed by Stravinsky via the long memory of his youth in St Petersburg; and this discourse will inevitably have implications throughout this volume.

Certain readings of the early neoclassical piano works will need to be re-considered: for example, Taruskin's identification of Russian aspects in the *Sonate* and *Sérénade* 'missed by Prokofiev'.[33] However, Taruskin's analysis, thorough as it is, fails to account for the unmistakable signs that these works (as well as the Piano Concerto and *Capriccio*) owe a considerable debt to Stravinsky's synthesis of the methods and materials of Russian pedagogy. In grounding his compositional process upon a pedagogic rhetoric, i.e. by reformulating techniques attributable to the workshop of piano study, Stravinsky would build several neoclassical works upon familiar (to him) 'codes of (piano) practice'. Initially he would construct pianistic and instrumental genres. In due course, elements of this pedagogical re-construction would be utilized in choral, operatic and symphonic contexts: for example

in *Oedipus rex*, in *Mavra* and *The Rake's Progress*, and in the *Symphony of Psalms* and *Symphony in Three Movements*. In this way, the neoclassical canon reflects those disciplines and materials of piano study which Stravinsky first experienced in St Petersburg. In middle age, at the time of his pianistic career, he was to draw upon this early experience and use it as a point of reference – as a template from which to fashion a new idiom characterized by down-to-earth attitudes of work, craft and construction. Alexis Roland-Manuel (writing in 1923) describes the neoclassical Stravinsky as 'a musician who has no longer any concern other than technique, and who accords to *métier* alone the right to resolve all difficulties of the aesthetic'.[34] While such interests were not exclusive to Stravinsky, the manner in which he formulated his neoclassicism from the methodology, repertoire and aesthetic of pianism was unmatched. His international persona, therefore, will also need to be reviewed as a(nother) Stravinskian mask – this one concealing an identity characterized by an inescapably Russian musical education.

Stravinsky's Piano: Genesis of a Musical Language is structured to allow its main arguments to be placed repeatedly under scrutiny – and from various angles. For example, issues identified amid the minutiae of fingerings in 'Stravinsky's piano workshop' (Chapter 3) are anticipated in 'Becoming a Russian musician' (Chapter 1) and will be raised again in subsequent deliberations on the broader questions surrounding neoclassicism. Commentary regarding Stravinsky's late music in 'Departures and homecomings' (Chapter 4) provides the ideal opportunity to revisit these same practical issues from the 'intellectual' perspective of serialism. Similarly, Stravinsky's creative engagement with the learning process is initially considered as another sign of his interest in 'rules' and, even, the disciplined callisthenics of musical craft. Later, this interpretation is reviewed in the context of Stravinsky's neoclassical constructions – as a means to base his objectivity upon composition *and* pianism, i.e. upon the two musical acts which form his musical identity from the early 1920s onwards. The main concern of this volume is an exploration of Stravinsky's compositional processes. From the earliest sketches outlined in St Petersburg to the late works meticulously crafted in America, Stravinsky's substantial catalogue (particularly his canon of piano works) was guided, I propose, as much by a pianistic 'attitude' – which this study endeavours to (re)define – as by any stylistic orientation.

1 Becoming a Russian musician

Stravinsky's piano teachers

In recent years there has been a significant shift in the terms of engagement with which Stravinsky is viewed – away from the enclosed workrooms of formalist analysis and outdoors, as it were, into the wide expanses of boundless Rus'. The stale laboratory air of close analytical musicology – hermetically sealed from risk of hermeneutical contamination (or so it can appear) – has been refreshed by an invigorating blast of cultural studies. Such new readings of Stravinsky have cast fresh light upon the persona that the composer had laboriously constructed as a self-made figure on the international stage who owed little or nothing to his provincial roots – a free spirit, a phenomenon without a past.[1] We may now justifiably suspect that, despite some exile-induced remarks to the contrary, Stravinsky was 'really' a committed and knowledgeable Russianist, an expert and sensitive manipulator of Russian sources, a composer extraordinarily indebted to his own past – and beyond his past. For was not this polemicist of neoclassicism, this reluctant (neo)serialist, firmly rooted in Russian traditions all the while? Less clear, however, is which of those Russian 'attitudes' it was that most guided Stravinsky's international trajectory. Interpretations continue to be formulated regarding Stravinsky's place in late-nineteenth-century St Petersburg from which he emerged, and to which he 'therefore' related. As more information emerges about Stravinsky's childhood and youth one may contemplate his maturity from the perspective of his early musical interests and activities. It is now possible, for example, to regard Stravinsky's neoclassicism less as a gesture of re-invention – precipitated by *affaires de mode* in France, or by his Italian epiphany at the hands of 'Pergolesi' – but rather, to use Alexander Herzen's phrase, as a 'mere continuance of the past'.[2] Herzen gives voice to the precious importance of one's youth and reveals why it is such an attractive, if problematic, phase for historians: 'Childhood and the two or three years that follow are … the most truly our own; and indeed they are possibly the most important part, because they fix all that follows, though we are not aware of it.'[3] To address such specific concerns it is necessary to cast the web of enquiry far and wide. Which (other) aspects of Russia's manifold histories did Stravinsky engage with, and to what extent did he consider his present and future as, merely, a continuance of his

past? Such issues, therefore, become fundamental to this opening chapter. Initially, some form of answer must be sought to the 'simple' yet paradoxically complex question: 'What kind of Russian was Stravinsky?'

In response to such unsettling interrogation one needs to consider not one but two Russias, as Stravinsky himself made clear during the dinner organized in his honour at Moscow's Metropole Hotel in October 1962. Before a gathering of leading composers and Soviet dignitaries Stravinsky rose to his feet to deliver one of the most poignant testaments that any composer has formulated. Such was the emotion at finding himself surrounded once again by fellow Russians after half a century of exile and at hearing his mother tongue being spoken – in his praise, too; this, at least, is Robert Craft's opinion – Stravinsky (like Chichikov before him) 'felt himself to be a true Russian'[4] and was moved to declare: 'A man has one birthplace, one fatherland, one country – one *can* have only one country – and the place of his birth is the most important factor in his life … I did not leave Russia of my own free will, even though I disliked much in *my Russia* and in *Russia generally*.'[5] There is a delicious ambiguity here that invites further examination, for it may illuminate Stravinsky's duality with regard to his past and to his very identity. The terms that Stravinsky employs to describe the locus of his 'home' are perhaps intended to be synonymous; Stravinsky may indeed have a single birthplace/fatherland/country. One *can* only lay claim to one country, as he emphasizes – but still he refers to *two* Russias: 'my Russia' and 'Russia generally'. From this latter term one assumes that Stravinsky is referring to the Russian nation, its cultural and geographical space – where Europe's sun rises, according to the popular saying[6] – incorporating Tsarist Russia and, latterly, the Soviet Union. As for 'my Russia', he surely means St Petersburg and all that Stravinsky's personal experience in that metropolis embraces – for this was 'the place of his birth'. Not literally of course, for he was born fifty *versts* to the west in Oranienbaum (now renamed Lomonosov); but St Petersburg – his home for the first twenty-eight years of his life[7] – was at the very centre (to borrow Philip Bohlman's term) of his metaphysical map.[8] It is this Russia, 'my Russia', which will be observed and re-interpreted throughout this book.

Stravinsky cannot merely be considered a representative of 'Russia generally'. Since when has a citizen born and bred in St Petersburg been anything other than a case apart? The city's very name defines its singularity. It has even been suggested that the original Dutch spelling and pronunciation of *Sankt Pieter Burkh*, its first official title (dating from 1703), exudes 'a certain foreignness which … somehow sounds correct for such a non-Russian town'.[9] Within those palatial, neoclassical surroundings – devised by Peter the Great to symbolize Russia's integration within eighteenth-century