

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon – Poulenc

Poulenc – Life and times

- Francis Poulenc was born into a well-to-do family in Paris in 1899. His father was a director of a chemical company, while his mother, an amateur pianist, gave Poulenc his first lessons. She also instilled in him a love for Mozart, Chopin, Schumann, Scarlatti and Couperin, encouraging him to keep an open mind to every kind of music, particularly that of contemporary composers. Intending their son to be a business man, however, his parents did not allow Poulenc to attend a music conservatory, meaning that he was mostly self-educated musically.
- In 1916 he became a pupil of the pianist Ricardo Viñes, of whom he later wrote: *I owe him everything ... In reality it is to Viñes that I owe my fledgling efforts in music and everything I know about the piano.*
- From 1921-24 Poulenc studied with the teacher and composer Charles Koechlin – in all, a series of 58 lessons, which concentrated on improving his contrapuntal skills.
- A reawakening of religious faith in the mid 1930s led to Poulenc composing liturgical works in a much more serious style.
- In the late 19th century/early 20th century, Paris prided itself as being a leader of the “avant garde”. Impressionism, Symbolism, Pointillism, Fauvism, Cubism and Surrealism had all risen and fallen there. Stravinsky considered Paris in the 1920s as the hub of the musical world.
- In 1918, the designer and playwright Jean Cocteau called for a new kind of music from French composers, urging them to abandon German Romanticism and French Impressionism in favour of a light, tuneful, popular French art, based on the music of the circus, the café-concert and the music hall. He explicitly rejected Debussy: “Enough of clouds, waves, aquariums, ondines and perfumes of the night; we need music with its feet on the ground, a music for daily use”. He encouraged composers to be brief, to favour melody over harmony and counterpoint, to avoid the “caress of strings” and to write accessible music. Satie had already been composing in this new style for several years when Cocteau wrote this, and Cocteau approved of the music of Satie, Auric and Poulenc.
- Poulenc was a member of “Les Six”, a group of six composers who aimed at avoiding any pretentiousness in their music, returning to what was almost a form of classicism. Their works were short, and, in the search for simplicity, they turned to tunes of popular songs; their rhythms were either very simple or exceedingly complex. Their works, except those of Honegger, were strongly tonal. Of “Les Six”, Poulenc was the most consistent in developing and sustaining a style of directness, simplicity, clarity and the inclusion of influences from popular music.

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Musical influences

- **Schubert** – Schubert’s song cycle “Winterreise” was an early influence (1910-11). A trace of this composer’s music is possibly heard in Poulenc’s predilection for major-minor alternations.
- **Chabrier** – After hearing “Idylle” for piano in 1914, Poulenc wrote: *Suddenly a harmonic universe opened up before me, and my music never forgot that first kiss of love.*
- **Satie** – According to Poulenc, *Satie influenced me a great deal, as much spiritually as musically.* Satie was the first French composer to ignore all musical influences of the time, including Wagner, Romanticism, Impressionism and Russian exoticism. His spare, charming music, infused with wit, appealed to Poulenc and influenced his own music.
- **Debussy** – Poulenc’s attitude to Debussy seems to have been ambivalent. He wrote: *Despite an attack of anti-Debussyism in 1917, Debussy has always remained my favourite composer after Mozart. I could not do without his music. It is my oxygen. The reaction of Les Six was directed against the imitators of Debussy, not Debussy himself.*
- **Ravel** – Poulenc’s flowing melodies are similar to Ravel’s. His eclecticism is also similar. Poulenc was not a slave to any compositional “system” and paid little heed to musical fashion of the time. His music is full of subtle borrowings from other composers. In an interview, he said: *I wish to be able to employ at will a chord of Wagner, Debussy, Schumann, or even Franck (whom he disliked) if it more clearly expresses the nuance that I wish to render.*
- **Stravinsky** – Much of Poulenc’s music reflects the neoclassicism of Stravinsky with its unexpected harmonic turns and dissonances. However, Poulenc was conservative to the end and never severed his ties to the 19th century harmony of Schumann, Fauré and Chabrier: *It was without doubt Debussy who awakened me to music, but it was Stravinsky who later served as my guide. On the harmonic plane I owe much to Ravel, enormously to Satie, but more aesthetically than musically. And Chabrier is my grandfather! had in mind as regards the shape (and function) of this movement.*

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Poulenc's Musical Style

- Poulenc's works tend to be fairly short, probably an influence of Satie
- Formal structures are quite conservative and fall in line with the neoclassical tendency to follow 18th century models. Modified ternary and rondo forms are common in the instrumental music. Examples of extended sonata form are rare.
- Poulenc was fond of “cellular” writing, where a 1- or 2-bar motif is immediately repeated before the next idea appears. Mussorgsky, Debussy, Stravinsky and Satie all used this technique. This has also been called “additive” writing – i.e., themes are repeated in a new key and/or appear in new instrumental groupings; or else, Poulenc moves on to a new idea. The first movement of the *Trio* exemplifies this compositional method. Keith Daniel identifies nine distinct tunes or motifs here, with no development, attributing this compositional technique to Poulenc's melodies being so dependent on their accompanying harmonies that it discourages development.
- The texture most associated with Poulenc consists of a melody with chordal accompaniment, particularly in the smaller instrumental works. Counterpoint is found infrequently, though examples do exist in his later vocal music.
- Melody is at the heart of Poulenc's musical style. The American composer Virgil Thomson called Poulenc “the greatest writer of melodies in our time”. Again following Satie and Stravinsky, his melodies tend to be diatonic with occasional chromaticism, often scalic or arpeggio-based. Melodic chromaticism is mostly the result of Poulenc's use of chromatic harmony. His melodies are usually lyric and expansive and constructed in regular phrases, though occasionally a 1-, 3- or 5-bar phrase will upset the regularity.
- Despite some initial experiments in polytonality (e.g., *En avion* from the *Promenades* for piano), the vast majority of Poulenc's music is unambiguously tonal and his harmony is fundamentally diatonic and functional, if sometimes intricate. The critic Clarendon called Poulenc “the best harmonist of his generation”. Intense chromaticism is extremely rare. His chromatic harmonies are usually a means of embellishing diatonic textures. Poulenc's chords are mostly tertian – i.e. built on the intervals of thirds – with quartal/quintal harmony making only rare appearances. Though not a harmonic innovator, Poulenc's harmonies are unique and distinctive. Seventh/ninth chords are used freely, with some phrases containing no plain triads at all. Dominant 13ths are common, particularly at cadences. When used, augmented chords tend to be the result of a raised 5th in a dominant chord; their use tends to be for the purpose of generating tension or ambiguity. (Bars 38-44 of the *Trio*'s 2nd movement provide an example of this use of augmented chords). The end of the same movement exemplifies another typical feature of Poulenc's use of harmony – that of employing a colourful (dissonant) chord as a movement's final chord. These are common in his earlier works in particular and create a feeling of ambiguity. Again, the *Trio*'s 2nd movement provides a good example of this. Polychords are found infrequently – rarely after 1935. Appoggiaturas are abundant; some resolve either unconventionally or not at all. Dominant-tonic (circle of 5ths) progressions are common. Examples of “wrong note” harmonies appear often in Poulenc's music, especially in the earlier works – see “Analysis” later for examples. A favourite device is the use of unprepared modulations. Passages of tonal stability are often interrupted by short phrases of non-functional harmony that may also be of a vastly different character.

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- Poulenc's compositions frequently begin and end in different keys; they modulate frequently, too, with key centres rarely taking on a structural role. The Trio could be a notable exception to this – again, see “Analysis” later.
- Rhythmically, Poulenc was rather conservative, with a strong influence from popular music, particularly dance music, though he was more original as far as metre and phrasing are concerned. He used the standard time signatures with an occasional irregular metre (usually 5 or 7 beats), but what was original was the way in which (and the frequency with which) he used them. In addition, phrase lengths are shortened or lengthened; metre changes are also used for subdividing or combining phrases – see bars 7-9 of the *Trio's* 2nd movement for a typical example.

Poulenc's output is usually divided into four stylistic periods:

- The works of the first period (1917-22) reflect the influence of Satie and Les Six, with their bare, linear simplicity, polytonality and “wrong note” dissonances. Melodies are often simple and diatonic, accompaniments repetitively chordal. The atmosphere often resembles the circus, the café-concert or the music hall.
- Poulenc's second period (1923-35) is his “Stravinsky or neoclassical period”, with its return to earlier composers (including 18th century *clavecinistes*, Mozart and Chopin), generally thin textures, “wrong note” dissonance, ostinato, a use of Classical structures and modest instrumental resources.
- The music of the third period (1936-52) is more lyrical and emotional; it also became more serious and works tended to last longer. The music of this period has been termed “neoromantic”.
- The fourth period (1953-63) was concerned exclusively with serious, sacred works, songs and piano pieces, serene chamber works and two operas. Harmony became richer – sometimes much more chromatic.

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Introductory notes

The majority of Poulenc's compositions include an important part for the piano (his own instrument). He also had a predilection for wind instruments, which is especially apparent in his choice of instruments for chamber works, including the well known set of three sonatas he composed for wind instruments from 1957 onwards. (Poulenc admitted that he found it difficult to write for solo string instruments). The Sonata for Clarinet and Bassoon (1922) was his first important chamber work, while the Oboe Sonata (1962), composed in memory of Prokofiev, was Poulenc's last important composition.

Poulenc worked on the Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon (in various forms) from 1921 to 1926, so it was composed during the time he spent studying with Koechlin and finished a year after the completion of those studies. The work marked something of a turning point in Poulenc's oeuvre and is generally considered his first mature chamber work. Poulenc himself had this to say about the work:

I worked on it a lot. It's in a style new to me yet at the same time very Poulenc.

And also:

I quite like my "Trio" because it comes over clearly and is well balanced. For those who think I don't care about form, I wouldn't hesitate to reveal my secrets here: the first movement follows the plan of a Haydn "allegro", and the final "Rondo" that of the "scherzo" from the second movement of Saint-Saëns' "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra ("Entretiens").

Poulenc referred to the second movement as "very sweet and melancholic", words that actually appear on the score at bar 23 as a musical direction to the oboist (*très doux et mélancolique*). However, interestingly (though disappointingly), he said nothing about the form of the movement – and neither does Wilfrid Mellers in his brief account of the work in his book on the composer. The movement is usually considered an ABA ternary form, but there are several problems in regarding it as such. (These will be discussed later.) It is a categorisation that oversimplifies the overall shape of the movement and misses the subtlety of Poulenc's use of tonality as a means of formulating a structural plan for the movement. It also ignores the movement's function within the work as a whole. With this in mind, rather than starting the analysis in the usual manner with an outline of the form of the entire movement, it might be more beneficial to work progressively through the music itself first to see whether we can better understand what Poulenc might have had in mind as regards the shape (and function) of this movement.

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Analysis

These notes will concentrate a little more than usual on the harmony/tonality of the movement, since a thorough understanding of these aspects is necessary to fully comprehend the music's structure – and Poulenc's use of harmony is one of the most important and unique features of his musical style. It is also an aspect of music that students find difficult.

Included in these notes are questions related to the particular passage just discussed. Some of these provide an opportunity for teachers/students to delve more fully into the matters mentioned in the notes, while others call for those concerned to ponder on musical features that are important but beyond the scope of a brief analysis such as this. These questions can be answered individually or form the basis of group/class discussion.

Bars 1-22

The movement begins firmly in B flat major (with appropriate key signature) with a 4-bar phrase, all over a tonic pedal, which ends with a perfect cadence (bars 3-4). Given that the key of the first movement was A major (introduction in A minor), the choice of B flat here might seem rather surprising. However, the first movement contains a number of instances of Neapolitan harmony (the first as early as bars 7-8). The final movement is in D flat major, meaning that each movement is in a different, seemingly unrelated, key. There is nothing particularly unusual about this, of course, since we are dealing with a Neoclassical rather than a Classical work. (By way of an additional example, the three movements of Poulenc's famous Flute Sonata (1957) are in E minor, B flat minor and A major respectively.) The music in these opening bars has a distinctly Classical feel to it. (Keith Daniel hears a slightly later influence here, citing Chopin and Bellini as alternatives.)

- Which musical features do you consider to be Classical in the opening four bars?
- Which features are more Neoclassical in style?
- Discuss the use of chromaticism, both melodic and harmonic, in these opening bars.

A second phrase (bars 5-8) on bassoon introduces a complementary 4-bar melody that tonicises the dominant – a typically Classical gesture – the opening tonic pedal being resolved in textbook style. The next (4-bar) phrase (bars 9-12) begins a quaver early with the insertion of a 3/8 bar – this, of course, being a characteristic Neoclassical trait. It introduces another new melodic idea and is appended by a new 2-bar phrase (bars 13-14).

- Comment on (i) the melody and (ii) the use of instruments in bars 8-14.

The music quickly moves away from B flat, with brief tonicisations of E flat major (bar 11) and D flat major (bar 12) – notice the sequential harmony – before cadencing in A flat major in bar 14. There are some effective harmonic touches here, with the chord in bar 13¹⁻³ acting as a pivot chord to produce the tonicisation of A flat from D flat. **Ex.1** shows the underlying chords in bars 12-17, which include the subsequent move from A flat to the more remote E minor. Note the use of modal mixture (i.e., chords from the parallel minor key being used in the prevailing major key), where, in bar 13, VI from D flat minor (B double flat-D flat-F flat) also functions as a Neapolitan 6th in A flat major. (For another example of modal mixture, look at the G flat major chord in bar 3¹⁻². You should have mentioned this in your answers to the third question in blue box on page 2.)

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Ex.1



Bar 12

Db: IV6 V6 I(4-3) \flat VI6 V V7 I \flat vi6
 Ab: \flat II6(N6) I6 IV V7 I

(= iv6 in E minor)

Bar 14 begins to repeat the opening melody in D flat major, but in the third and fourth bars there is a sudden switch of harmony, involving yet another chord on the flattened 6th degree, but this time minor rather than major (some theorists call this “double mixture”) – i.e. A-C-E = B double flat-D double flat-F flat – and the phrase cadences in E minor, the key some distance (a tritone) away from the movement’s initial B flat major. The 2-flat key signature disappears at bar 17 and never reappears.

- Compare bars 17-18 with bars 3-4. Other than the tonality, what differences are there?

Up to this point, the focal tonal points have been B flat major → D flat major → E minor, i.e., keys a minor 3rd apart, with the “tonic” key of B flat lasting only 10 bars. After this it is never re-established, its only other noteworthy occurrence (and merely as a triad rather than a key centre) is in bar(s) 41(/42) as part of an ascending sequence of 6/3 chords – see notes later. Can there be a convincing sense of an ABA form when the opening tonic key does not return at the start of the second A section? Remember that form is primarily governed by tonality rather than by thematic material (think of Haydn’s monothematic sonata movements), use of instruments etc.

The oboe presents yet another new 2-bar melody in bars 19-20, though for the most part it copies the rhythms of the bassoon’s previous two bars (17-18), and reaches an imperfect cadence in B major/minor in bars 20-21. There is an interesting harmonic feature in bar 21, one that is intensified in later stages in the movement. Though the C major chord over an F sharp could be thought of as a Neapolitan chord over a dominant pedal, it is best analysed as an octatonic element. Octatonicism was a hallmark of Stravinsky’s music (e.g., *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*), but it was also employed to a lesser degree by composers such as Debussy and Ravel. It is an ingredient of Poulenc’s music, too, heard especially in his later, more chromatic works such as *La Voix Humaine*. Poulenc follows up the octatonic harmony in bar 21 with what is essentially a complete descending octatonic scale in bar 22 (piano RH), which links into the next “section” of the movement. [See **Ex.2**]



Ex.2

Collection III

Bar 21

Bar 22

[Note: Enharmonics can be used freely in octatonic music - e.g., B# = C]

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- Which chords are used in bars 19-20? Explain how Poulenc modulates from E minor to B minor.
- How does Poulenc introduce a Neoclassical element into these two bars?
- Compare the presentation of the melody in bars 15-22 with that in bars 1-8.
- Comment on Poulenc's thematic material in bars 1-22. If bars 1-4 were labeled "a", how would you label the different phrases in bars 5-22?

Those who consider this movement to be in an ABA form see this as the end of the first A section. If this were a classical ternary form, we would expect the section to end in the tonic key with a perfect cadence – i.e., the section would be “closed”, complete in itself. Can this anomaly be explained merely on the grounds of “Neoclassical licence”?

Bars 23-35

Bars 1-22 have been characterised by frequent tonicisations of tonal areas quite remote from the (putative) tonic of B flat major, and all with firm dominant-tonic progressions. By contrast, bars 23-35 remain entirely in B minor but noticeably without any tonic root position chords. In fact, the entire section (in two phrases of 8 and 4 bars respectively (23-30 and 31-34(35)) seems to consist of repeated attempts to reach a firm perfect cadence in B minor, attempts that are constantly denied. (The process actually begins in bar 19.) Tonic chords are all in first (or second) inversion, including the very first chord of bar 23.

Melodic material here (described as “nondescript” by Daniel) is new, but the contrast with previous material is not particularly marked (as would usually be expected in a B section). This deliberate lack of contrast and the 6/3 chord in bar 23 have the effect of making these bars seem more like a continuation of the previous section than the start of a contrasting B section.

- Describe the instrumental writing in bars 23-34. How does it compare with that in bars 1-22?

Throughout, the bass line (piano LH) circles the dominant of B minor, in bars 27-28 in diminution, and so with increased harmonic rhythm. (See **Ex.3**)

Ex.3

Bar 18

octatonic

iv B major/minor viidim7ofV I6/4 V V7 i6/3 iv9 i6/4 ii4/3 viidim7 i6/3 iv9

Tonicisation of $\flat I$ octatonic tierce de Picardie

i6/4 V7ofII $\flat II6/3[N6]$ V7 i6/3 iv9 i6/4 V7 I5/3

The octatonically tinged cadence in bars 21-22 reappears in bars 29-30, but the music is now quintessentially and explicitly octatonic, with (bar 30) an F sharp dominant 7th chord overlaid with a series of descending dominant 7th/German 6th chords on C, A, F sharp and D sharp – i.e., chords in descending minor 3rds, a typically octatonic gesture. All the notes in this bar belong to the octatonic scale given in Ex.2. (The A sharp in the second RH chord is almost certainly a misprint, which is “corrected” when it appears an octave lower on the 4th quaver beat.)

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Together with this harmonic search for a root position tonic chord, the ebb and flow of the dynamics from bar 21→ has created an increasing feeling of tension, and in bars 31-35 the music quickly builds to the movement's emotional (and musical) climax. An octatonically tinged dominant 7th (f→ff) finally leads to a root position tonic chord, but a tierce de Picardie further enhances the effect by turning it into a radiant B major chord (fff).

- Which other musical elements point to bars 35→ being the emotional highpoint of the movement?
- Comment on the oboe's and bassoon's melodic line in bars 35-40.

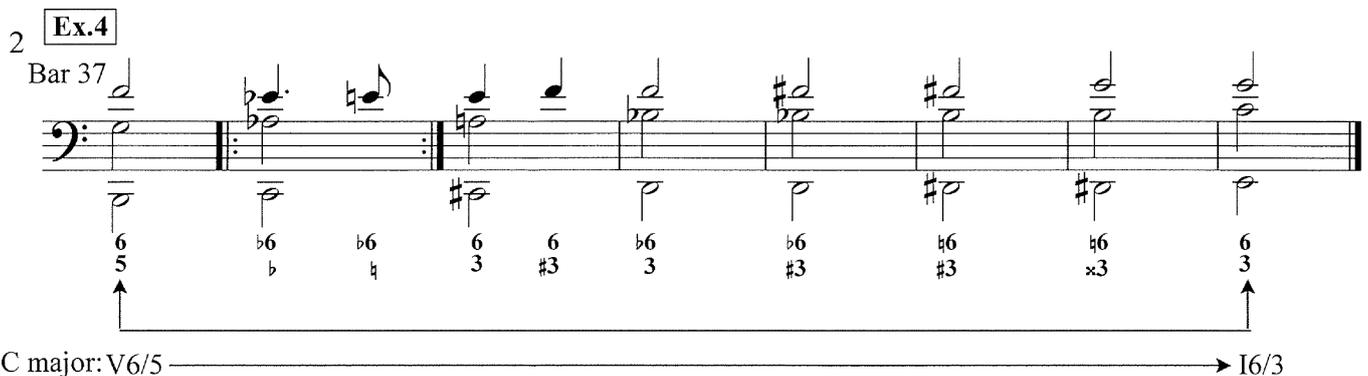
Bars 35-51

Having been attained, B minor/major is soon relinquished. As early as bar 37 the pedal B (present since bar 35) is reharmonised as a dominant/diminished 7th in C minor and a cadence of sorts in this key emerges in bars 37-38.

- How is C major/minor related to B major/minor?

Despite the C bass note, the chord in bar 38 is not actually a C minor chord, but rather a first inversion A flat chord, so making the cadence in bars 37-38 a type of interrupted cadence, with both chords in first inversion. What follows is a passage (bars 38-44) that interpolates a chromatic harmonic sequence between a straightforward V6/5→I6/3 progression in C major/minor. **Ex.4** illustrates this.

2 **Ex.4**
Bar 37



6 5
b6 b
b6 b
6 3
6 #3
b6 3
b6 #3
b6 #3
b6 #3
6 3

C major: V6/5 → I6/3

There are several other features of interest in these bars. The sequence is irregular, with the chord on C sharp lasting just one bar rather than two (as do those on C, D and D sharp). For this reason, the melodic content is not entirely sequential. But it is interesting. The melodic idea on the bassoon in bar 40 is similar to the movement's opening melody, and in bars 41-42 the oboe restates the first two bars of this theme, repeating it sequentially in the next two bars. The movement's "principal" melodic idea has thus been recalled over a "tonic" chord in bars 41-42. This does not, however, equate with a reprise of the A section material in the tonic key. Note Poulenc's use of so-called "wrong notes" in bars 41-44 (LH – E-E flat-E sharp-E natural). This, of course, is typical of Neoclassical writing in general.

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- Outline the various ways in which the oboe and bassoon parts in bars 45-51 correspond with those in bars 23-30.
- Comment on the piano part in both passages.
- Analyse the harmony in bars 45-50, using roman numerals.

Just as bars 23-24 seemed to be searching for a tonic B minor root position chord, bars 37→ apparently seek closure on a root position C major chord, the music in bars 45-48 being entirely diatonic. The harmony becomes slightly more chromatic in bars 49-50, with tonicisations of IV (V6/5 of IV→IV, bar 49) and ii (a more intense viidim7th of ii→ii, bar 50). (Note the increased harmonic rhythm here together with the insertion of a 2/8 bar.) All this strongly suggests a V-I progression will follow to clinch the move to C major. However, the dominant chord never materializes. G does appear as expected, but it supports not a dominant (7th) chord in C but a half-diminished 7th (a supertonic chord) in F major/minor, and the ii-V-I cadence materialises not in C major but in F major (bars 51-52). **Ex.5(a)** shows what Poulenc leads us to expect; **(b)** shows what he actually writes.

Ex.5 (a) Expected cadence (b) Poulenc's cadence

C major: V6/5 of IV IV5/3 viidim7 of ii ii5/3 V7 I5/3

F major: V6/5 of IV IV5/3 viidim7 of ii F major:vi5/3 ii7^(b5) V7^(b9) I5/3

Bars 52-64

Those who perceive this movement as an ABA form regard this part of the movement as the final A section. Again, there are some anomalies with this view. The first is the key – F major (the dominant) rather than the tonic B flat (assuming B flat to be a functioning tonic key). Secondly, its length (and some include a short coda as part of these bars, too) seems rather short, especially in relation with the considerably longer “B” section of 29 bars. Thirdly, apart from two bars (59 and 61), the entire section is over a pedal, so making the harmony essentially static for most of its duration. As a result, the section appears to function more like a coda than a reprise of its earlier “counterpart”. And what should we make of Poulenc’s rather enigmatic ties/slurs after the final crotchet, which are actually linked to nothing in particular in the third movement?

Bars 51-55 repeat the movement’s opening phrase very closely.

- Other than tonality, what differences are there between bars 51-54 and bars 1-4?

The answering phrase, however, introduces several differences, for instance:

- the harmony is altered
- necessitating changes to the bassoon melody
- the tonic pedal persists for a further bar
- the perfect cadence on the dominant in bars 7-8 is not reproduced here. In fact, the oboe’s 2-bar melody (58-59) sounds more like the start of a new phrase than a completion of the bassoon’s phrase in bars 56-57.

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Bars 58-64 consist entirely of tonic and subdominant harmony and so make an extended plagal cadence. The subdominant chord in bar 59 introduces dissonance (in jazz terms this is a “B flat m6/maj7th” chord) along with a hint of F minor. The second subdominant chord (61) (a half-diminished 7th) is still more chromatic and minor-sounding, while the final chord is an F minor chord (62-64²). A dissonant major 7th (E natural) is introduced in the second half of the last bar. In fact, apart from the final C in the piano’s LH at 64³⁻⁴, bars 61-64 are entirely octatonic – see **Ex.6**. (C, the 5th of the Fm chord, is omitted in bars 62-64² because it is not part of the octatonic scale. When the major 7th is added in bar 62³⁻⁴, however, Poulenc does add a C, making the final chord more complete. The C also acts as a kind of leading-note to the final rondo’s D flat tonic – see Ex.6.)

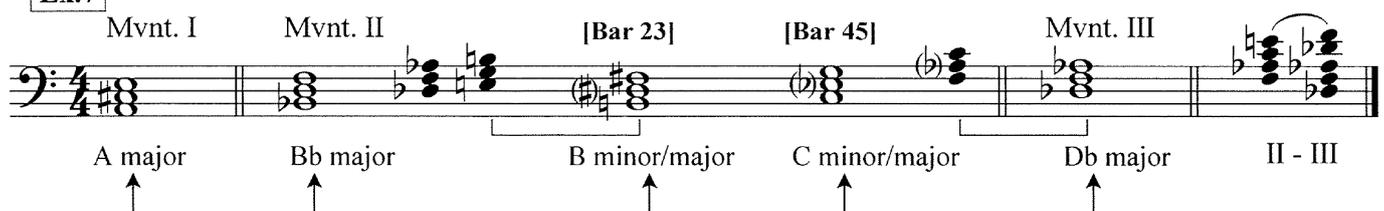
Ex.6

Collection I



So what exactly is the form of this second movement? An argument could be made for considering the movement as being in three parts: bars 1-22, 23-51 and 52-64. Describing these sections as ABA, however, would be slightly misleading since it does not seem to explain sufficiently the function of these sections. Taking the first and third movements into consideration could give us a clue as to Poulenc’s intention. **Ex.7** shows the “tonal trajectory” of the second movement along with the keys of the framing movements. From this we can see that the focal tonal centres of the movement rise in semitones (Neapolitan relationships abound here!) from the first movement’s A major to the third movement’s D flat major. F major/minor functions as an “intermediary” tonality, with the final F minor (four flats) requiring only a slight adjustment to become D flat major (five flats). It also makes a convincing musical/tonal link with the opening B flat major. (Compare the way in which E minor prepares for the modulation to B minor in bar 23.)

Ex.7



Viewed in this way, the second movement forms a type of “tonal transition” between the outer movements. This could account for the lack of contrasting melodic material in what some hear as the movement’s B section. Rather, Poulenc, like Ravel in the second movement of his G major Piano Concerto, maintains a similar atmosphere throughout the entire movement. Both movements work towards a “climax” in the B section, before subsiding into a return of opening material – though Ravel has a full reprise of the main theme in the tonic key. Did Poulenc intend to show this in his otherwise seemingly inexplicable use of slurs/ties between the two movements? As such, they act as a visual clue to a connection between the two movements. The bar numbers given for B and C major/minor in Ex.7 are those for the first appearance of a tonic chord (in first inversion) in those keys. If these bar numbers are taken as the focal points of the two keys concerned, the important structural tonalities in the second movement appear at exactly equal distances of 22 bars (1, 23, 45). The next important tonality, D flat major, arrives in the third movement after 20 bars.

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- Discuss Poulenc's use of form in the 2nd movement. To what extent do you agree with the "models" given above?
- Do you interpret the form in a different way? If so, give valid musical reasons.
- If time permits, listen to/study the first movement of the Trio. Is Poulenc's reference to the form as following "the plan of a Haydn allegro" as straightforward as it sounds?

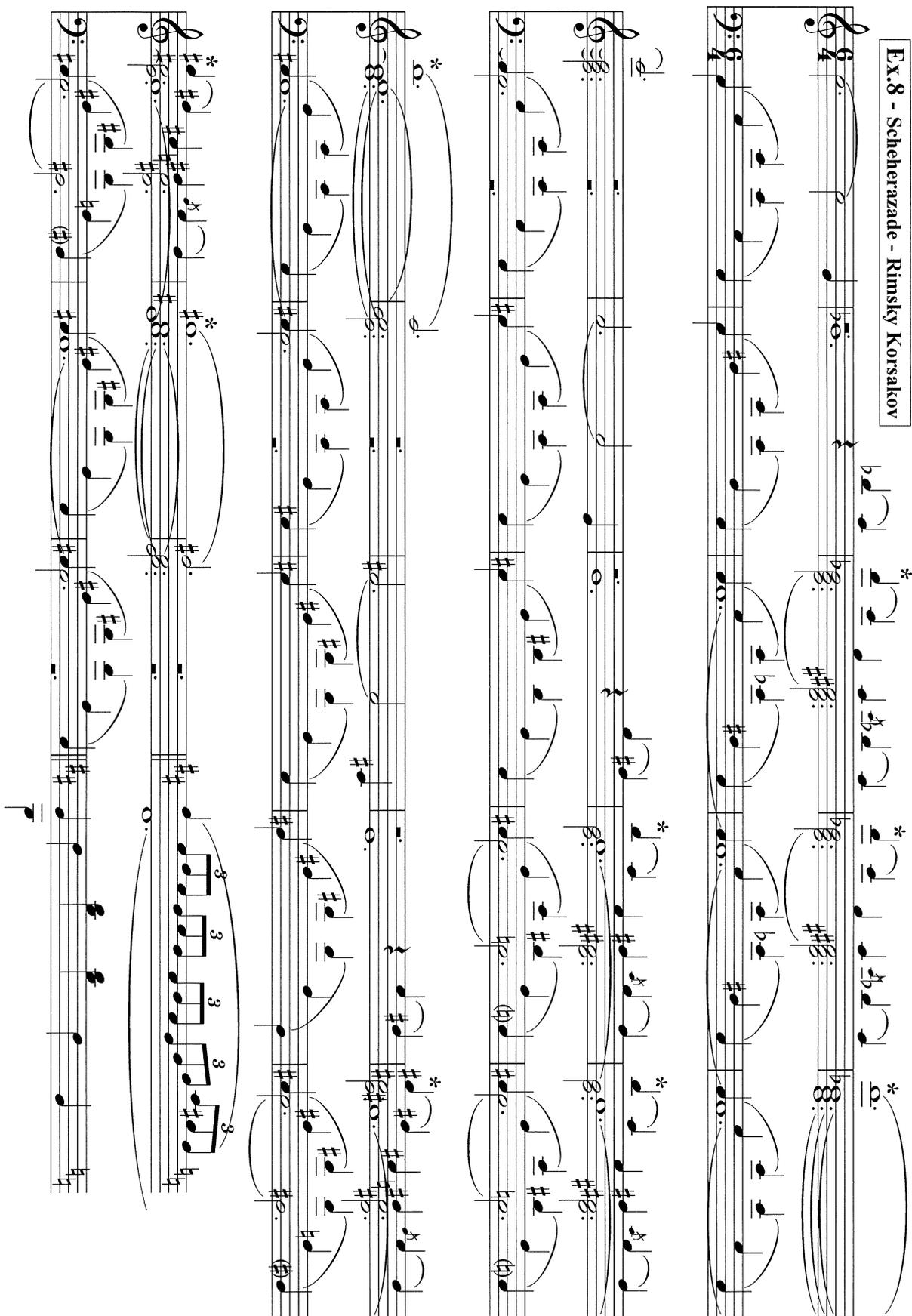
The octatonic scale - a brief note

The octatonic scale consists of eight steps of alternating semitones and tones (or vice versa). Despite traces of octatonic writing having been identified in the music of Liszt (1811-86) (and even, amongst others, Bach and Schubert!), octatonicism is initially most closely associated with the Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). In his stage works in particular, Rimsky tended to use the octatonic scale for magical or supernatural elements, while the human world was characterized by a more diatonic or folk-like style. Stravinsky, Rimsky's most famous student, followed his example in both *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*.

Composers have been drawn to the octatonic scale (especially the semitone-tone ordering) because of the wide range of musical possibilities it affords - from tonal to bitonal to dissonant, almost atonal, harmonic colourings. **Exs.8-11** give some idea of these possibilities. As in tonal music, octatonic writing can use "chromatic" decoration in the form of appoggiaturas, passing notes etc., as in **Ex.8** (from Rimsky's famous *Scheherazade*). This can make octatonic passages more difficult to identify and analyse, particularly when, as was often Rimsky's practice, one form of the scale (semitone-tone ordering) is used for the harmonies while the other (tone-semitone ordering on the same note) is used for the melodies - enabling the use of all 12 notes of the chromatic scale within an octatonic framework. Unlike major and minor scales, the octatonic scale is symmetrical, meaning that its interval pattern is regular. Just as a whole-tone scale can only be transposed once (C to Db, for example), transposing an octatonic scale more than twice will result in the same set of notes, though starting on a different pitch. The octatonic scale is the second of Messiaen's (1908-92) so-called *modes of limited transposition* - see **Ex.11**. As such, the scale is often partitioned (grouped) into harmonies separated by minor 3rds or tritones (either vertically or horizontally). **Exs.8, 9, 11, and 12** all demonstrate this. Music based on the octatonic scale integrates well with a tonal idiom, since it contains both major and minor chords (sometimes with the same root), as well as dominant 7ths, added 6ths etc. Indeed, in terms of harmony, the characteristic octatonic sound is formed by combining triads (or dominant 7ths) either a tritone or minor 3rd apart - as in the famous "Petrushka chord", which combines two major triads a tritone apart (C and F#). The octatonic scale is also used in modern jazz, where it is known as the diminished scale - see **Ex.12**.

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc

Ex.8 - Scheherazade - Rimsky Korsakov

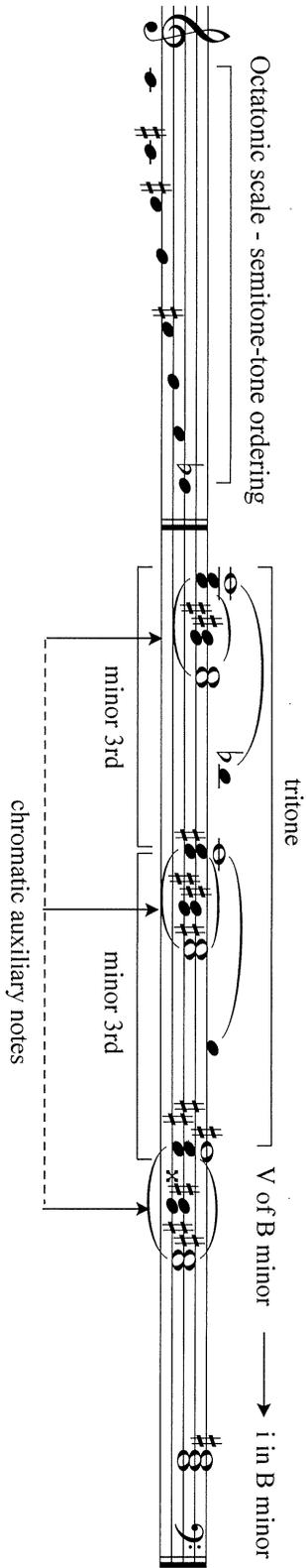


The image displays a musical score for a piano trio, featuring staves for Piano, Oboe, and Bassoon. The score is divided into two systems. The first system begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The piano part (bottom staff) features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed eighth notes. The oboe and bassoon parts (top staves) have a more melodic line with some rests. The second system continues the piece, showing a change in the piano part's texture with triplets and a more active bass line. The oboe and bassoon parts continue their melodic development. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp* and *fp*. There are also asterisks and slurs indicating specific performance techniques or phrasing.

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc

2

Harmonic reduction of Ex. 1 showing typical partitioning of the octatonic scale into minor 3rds



Octatonic scale - semitone-tone ordering

tritone

minor 3rd

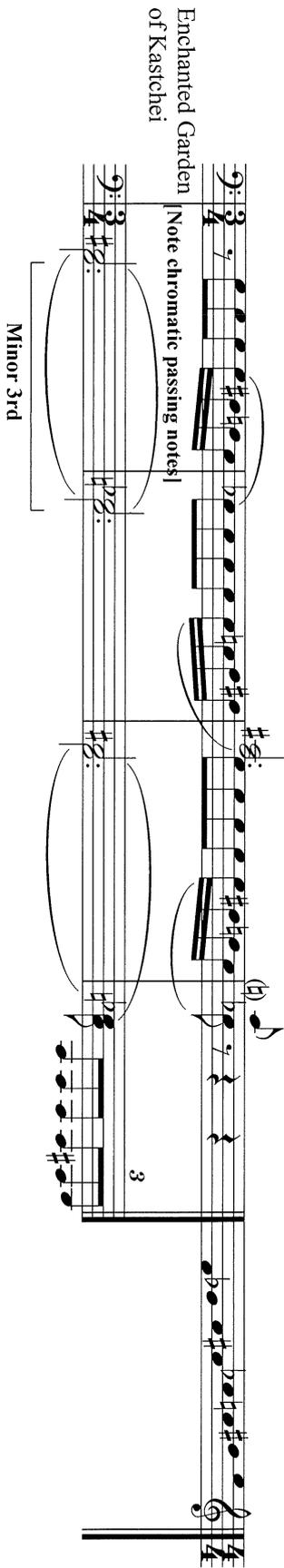
chromatic auxiliary notes

minor 3rd

V of B minor → i in B minor

Detailed description: This musical example shows an octatonic scale in G major (G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G) with a semitone-tone ordering. The scale is partitioned into two tritones: G-B and C-E. Each tritone is further divided into two minor 3rds: G-B and A-C; C-E and D-F. Chromatic auxiliary notes (A-flat and C-flat) are shown between the tritones. The final note of the scale is G, which is identified as the V of B minor, leading to the first note of the B minor scale (i).

Ex.9 - The Firebird - Stravinsky



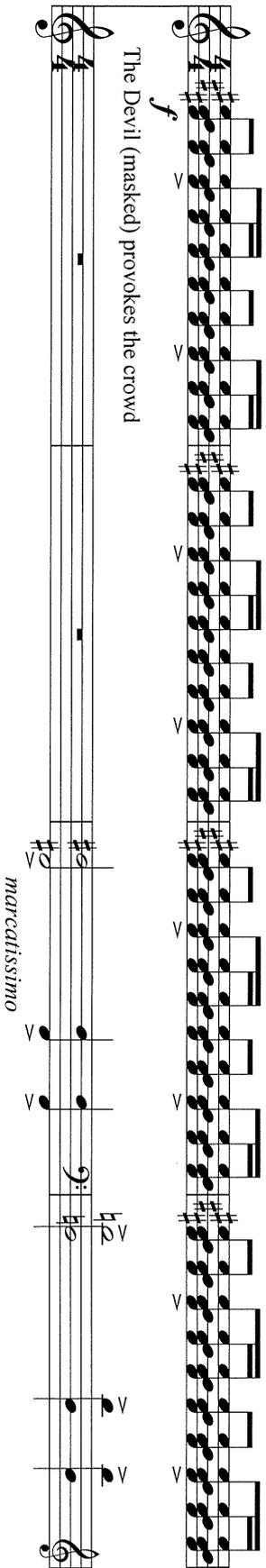
Enchanted Garden
of Kastehei

Note chromatic passing notes

Minor 3rd

Detailed description: This musical example shows a passage from 'The Firebird' by Stravinsky. It features a melodic line with chromatic passing notes and a bass line. A specific interval of a minor 3rd is highlighted with a bracket. The music is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Ex.10 - Petrushka - Stravinsky



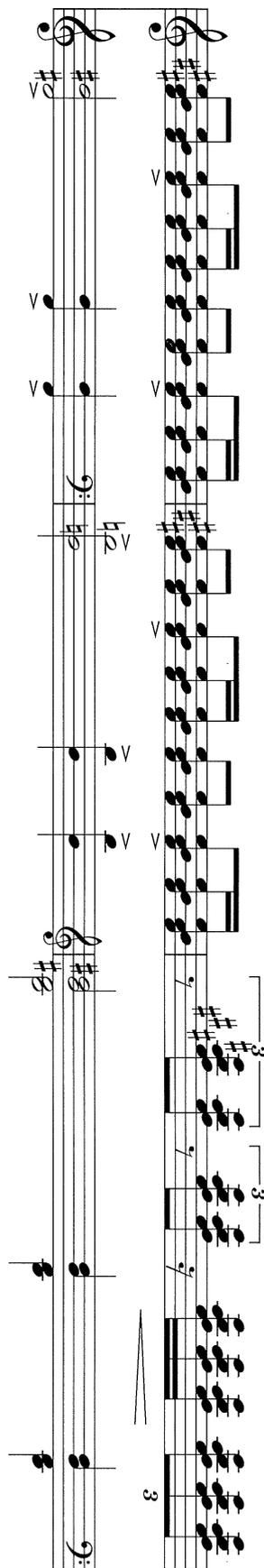
The Devil (masked) provokes the crowd

f

marcatissimo

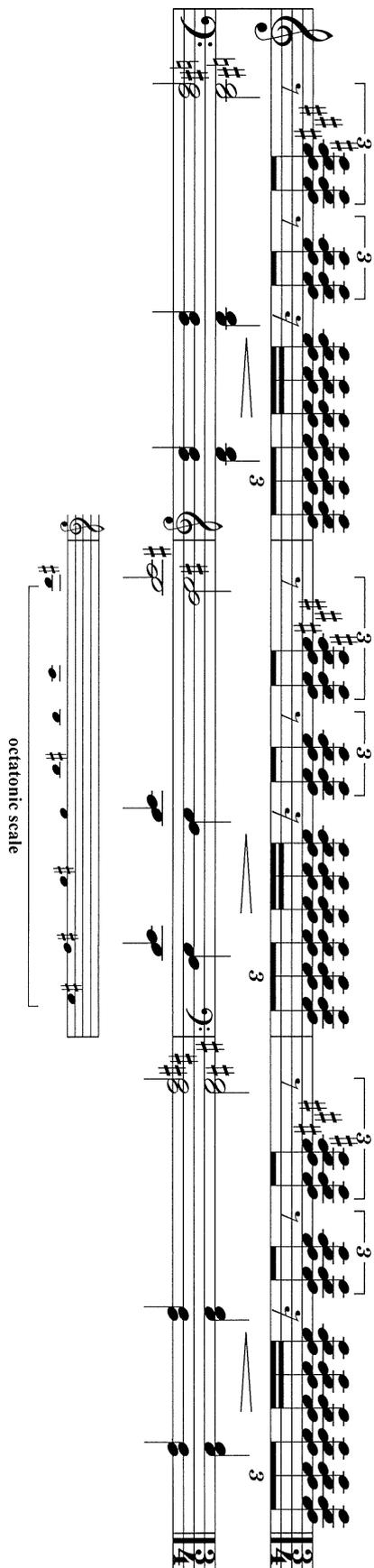
Detailed description: This musical example shows a dense, rhythmic passage from 'Petrushka' by Stravinsky. It features a complex texture with many notes in both the treble and bass staves. The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The dynamic marking is *f* (forte) and the tempo marking is *marcatissimo*. The passage ends with a key signature change to one flat (F major) and a tempo change to *4/2*.

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc



Musical score for Oboe and Bassoon. The score is written in treble and bass clefs. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is marked with 'V' and '3'.

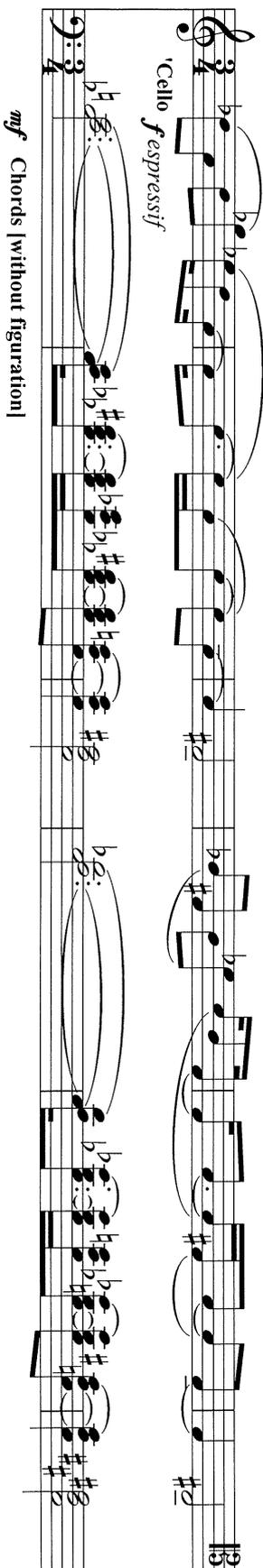
3



Musical score for Piano. The score is written in treble and bass clefs. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is marked with '3' and '7'. Below the main score, there is a separate line for the octatonic scale.

octatonic scale

Ex. 11 - Quatuor pour la fin du temps - Messiaen



Musical score for Cello. The score is written in treble clef. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is marked with 'p' and 'f espressif'. Below the main score, there is a separate line for the chords without figuration.

mf Chords [without figuration]

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc

Messiaen's mode 2

Ex. 12 - Typical use of diminished scale in jazz harmony

F7(b9)

Am7

D7(b9)

Gsus

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon

- Poulenc

William Mathias seems to have been drawn to the octatonic scale, possibly because a number of its constituent elements, such as the variable minor/major 3rd and diminished 5th were already features of his own musical style. **Exs.13&14** are taken from Mathias' Flute Concerto (1992). It has become the practice to refer to the various forms of the octatonic scale by the three "Collections" designated by Peter van den Toorn in his book on the music of Stravinsky, and it is this form of nomenclature that has been used in these notes – see **Ex.15**.

The octatonic scale was also used by French composers such as Debussy, Ravel and Poulenc, sometimes only briefly. In the final bars of his *La désinvolture et la discrétion* from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, Poulenc, for comic effect, briefly interrupts a mostly diatonic passage with a 2-bar octatonic fragment. Note the typical minor 3rd partitioning of the scale (E flat → F sharp → A → C), as well as the rhythmic dislocation and contrasting pitch content with the surrounding music. Also note the pedal direction, which blurs the whole of the "chromatic" 2-bar phrase. All notes belong to Collection II. See **Ex.16**.

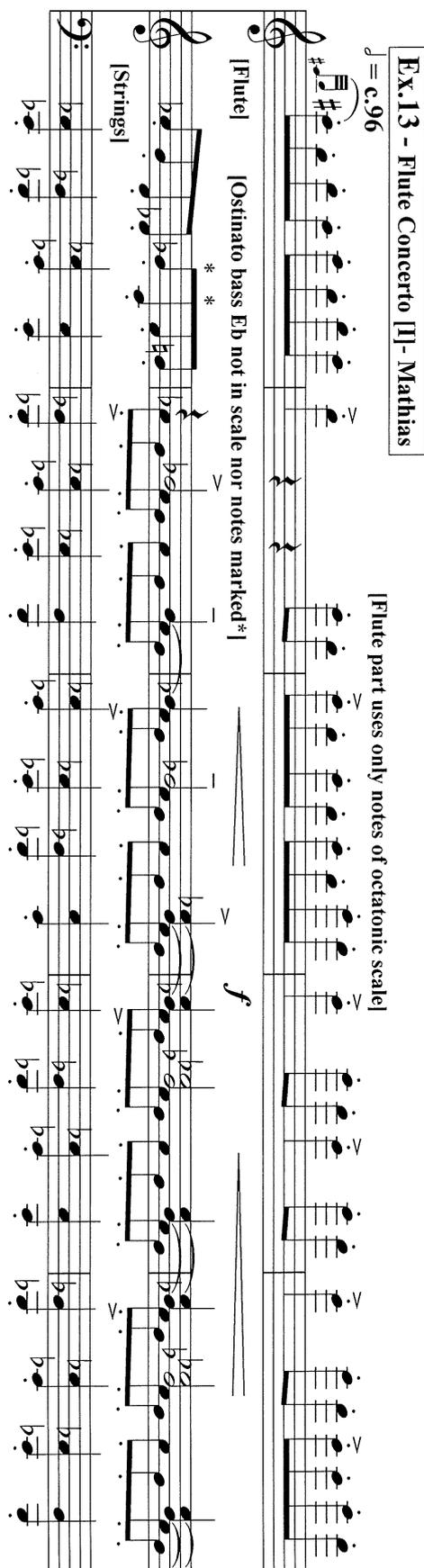
Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc

Ex. 13 - Flute Concerto [I] - Mathias
♩ = c.96

[Flute part uses only notes of octatonic scale]

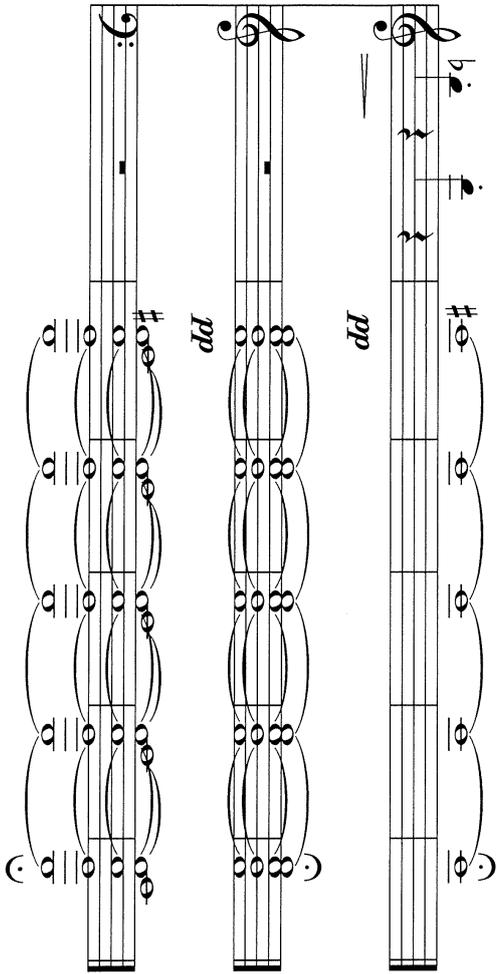
[Flute] [Ostinato bass Eb not in scale nor notes marked*]

[Strings]



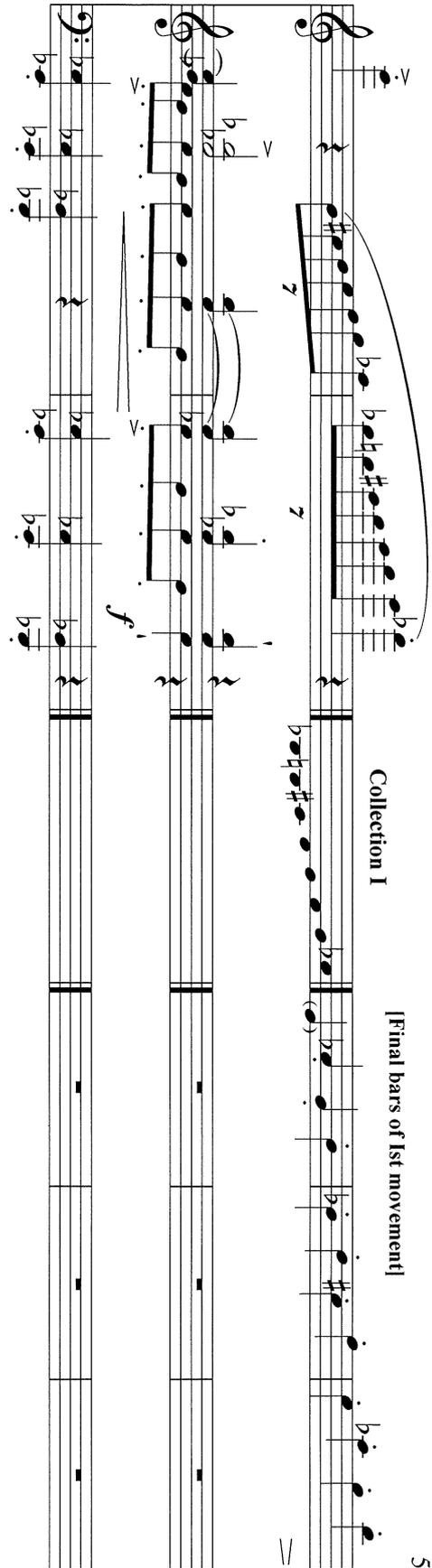
f

Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc



dd

dd



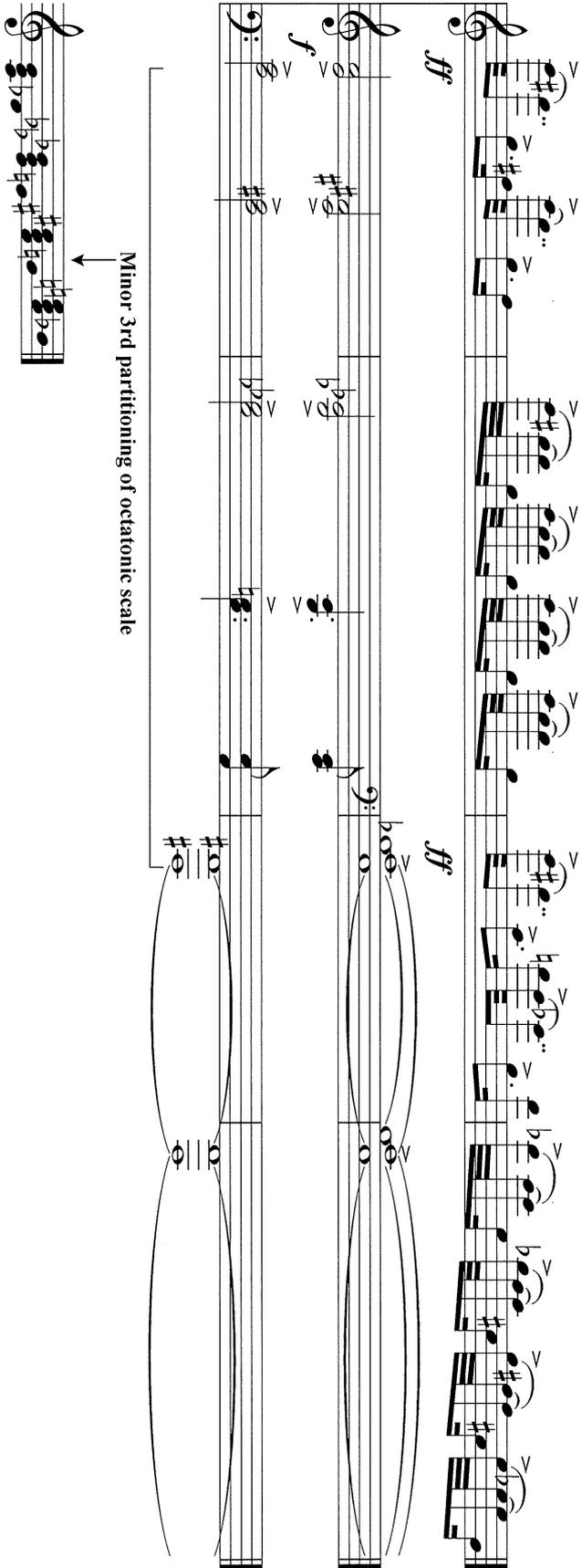
Collection I

[Final bars of 1st movement]

5

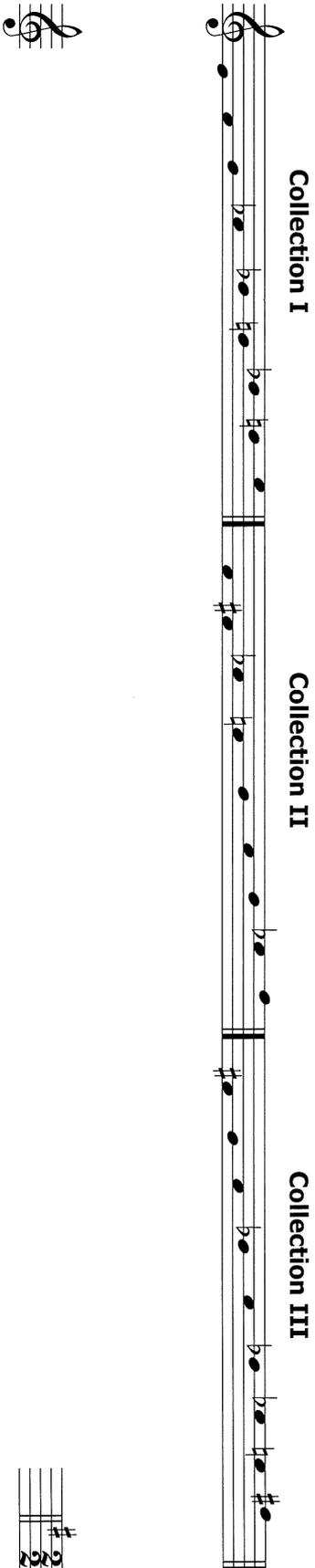
Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - Poulenc

Ex.14 - Flute Concerto [III]- Mathias



The musical score for Ex.14 consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with notes marked with accents and dynamics such as *ff* and *f*. The middle staff is in treble clef and contains a series of chords, some marked with *f*. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a series of chords, some marked with *f*. A bracket labeled "Minor 3rd partitioning of octatonic scale" spans across the bottom two staves, indicating the relationship between the notes in the chords.

Ex.15 - van den Toorn's three octatonic Collections



The musical score for Ex.15 shows three octatonic collections, labeled Collection I, Collection II, and Collection III, each on a separate staff in treble clef. Collection I starts with a G natural and follows the sequence: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Collection II starts with a G sharp and follows the sequence: G#, A, B, C, D, E, F, G#. Collection III starts with a G natural and follows the sequence: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Below the main staff, there are two smaller musical notations: a treble clef staff with a G natural and a bass clef staff with a G sharp.

