

## Stravinsky's "Full Fathom Five"

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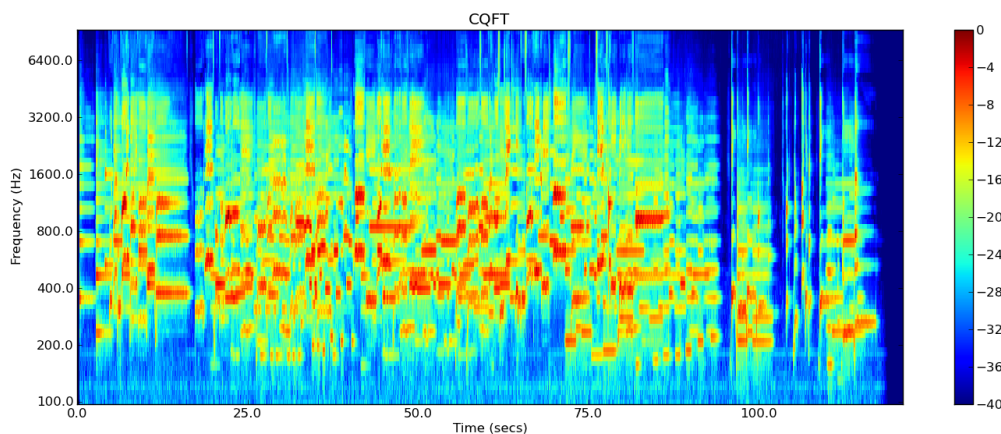
Stravinsky's "Full Fathom Five" from *Three Songs on William Shakespeare* is emblematic of the composer's idiosyncratic approach to serialism. It is significant for its formal structure, its recurring motives, and its intervallic content. Standard serial transformations such as inversion, retrograde, transposition and diminution are used throughout. Despite being a 12-tone work the composer favors the minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, and minor 7<sup>th</sup>, leading to a distinct semi-diatonic musical language.

Structurally, the piece is divided into three short sections. These divisions follow logically from the meaning of the text. This structure is apparent in a spectrographic image of the piece.

Full fathom five, thy father lies...

Of his bones are Corrall made;  
Those are pearles that were his eies,  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a Sea-change  
into something rich and strange:  
Sea-Nimphs hourly ring his knell.

Ding dong, ding dong  
Hearke now I heare them;  
ding dong bell.



“Full fadom five, thy father lies...” the piece begins. Musically and textually this serves as a declamation. The piece then moves into an elongated middle section which describes the father's decaying body in the sea. The last section comes to life with the evocative sounds of the fathers death knell.

Returning to the first section, the declamation is characterized by fricatives more so than any other section of the piece. The rhythmic texture is relatively homogeneous- all three instruments support the voice directly. There is an intervallic motif shared between all four parts. Numbering intervals chromatically from 0 for the unison to 11 for the major 7<sup>th</sup>, the first section is characterized by the succession of intervals: 5,7,10. I will call this succession motive A. This is repeated twice in a row in the voice, flute, and clarinet. The viola part has a variation of this. It displays the pattern: 7,5,2,7,5. Considering 7 and 5 to be interchangeable and 2 to be the inverse of 10, this is a diminished and inverted presentation of the intervallic motif 5,7,10. Lending credence to this, the five pitches of the viola part share the exact pitch names with the first five notes of the vocal part, specifically: F, B-flat, E-flat, D-Flat, A-Flat. While the flute and clarinet play in unison (a significant pairing in that Stravinsky is essentially treating the wind instruments together as one voice), the voice and viola parts both present their material at different speeds and with different inflections. Additionally, the winds begin their presentation a fifth higher than the vocal and viola parts, C5 a fifth above F4. Beginning in the middle of the text at “thy”, there is an interesting contrary motion displayed between the voice part and the winds- as one moves up, the other tends to move down. Considering all voices in sum, there are distinct pitch classes voiced in this introduction: B-flat, C-flat, C, D-flat, E-flat, F, G-flat, and A-flat. This is significant and as we will see, this pitch set is maintained throughout the piece in the vocal part with the later addition of G to the set.

## II. Full fadom five

Igor Stravinsky  
1953

Tempo: ♩ = 112

Voice: Full fa - dom five thy Fa - ther lies,.....

Flute: *p*

Clarinet (sounds as written): *sf*

Viola: *fp* *fp* *sim.*

As the piece progresses the paring of wind instruments is undone, creating a more varied texture. Stravinsky introduces a motif which is heard 14 times in this middle section: motive B. The motif is defined by moving between two adjacent pitches, an interval of 1, on subsequent 16<sup>th</sup> notes. For example, the motif is first heard in the voice on the word Corral with the pitches: B-flat, C-flat, B-flat- C-flat.

Cor - rall

This motif is actually itself one part of a larger motif which is at play throughout all of the instruments during the entire middle section. This larger, intervallic motif serves as the primary generating cell for the entire middle section. It's characteristic interval succession is: 10,7,1,5,1,3. I will refer to this as motive C. It first appears in the vocal part as well during the text “Of his bones are Corral made...”.

Beginning with only the vocal part, this theme is first reversed (3,1,5,1,7,10). Then it's starting pitch is moved up an octave to E-flat-5 and the original interval succession is voiced in the opposite direction, in other words the first leap of 10 moves downwards, instead of upwards, and so forth.

Motive C Inversion and Transposition

Next the reversed (3,1,5,1,7,10) theme is restated, also upside-down. Its final “10” interval serves as both the end of this motivic statement and the beginning of a restatement of the original motive, C, in its original direction, and at its original pitch location. Following this, as before, the motive is shifted up an octave and stated upside-down.

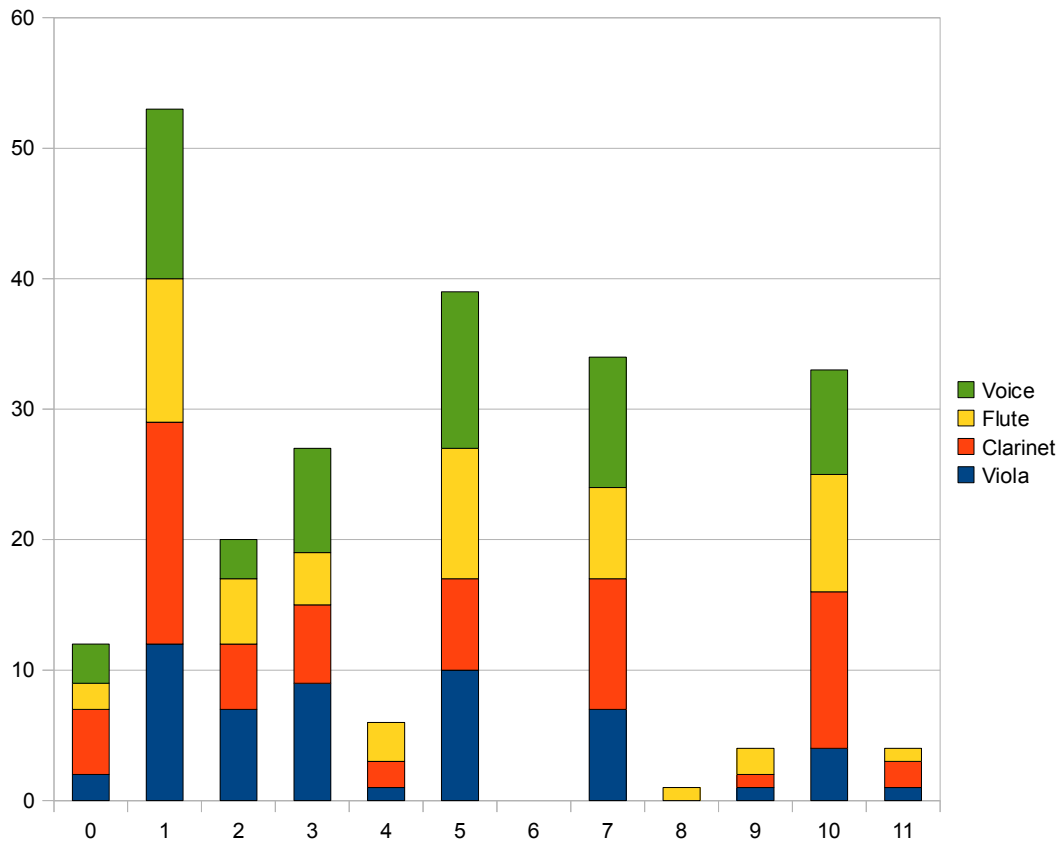
When one examines the instrumental parts, motive C appears in even more guises. Stravinsky begins to play with the equivalence of certain intervals. He substitutes 5 and 7, 3 and 9, and 11 and 1 for each other to create variants of the motif. Here is a list of some of the numerous guises in which Motive C appears:

### Motive C & Variations

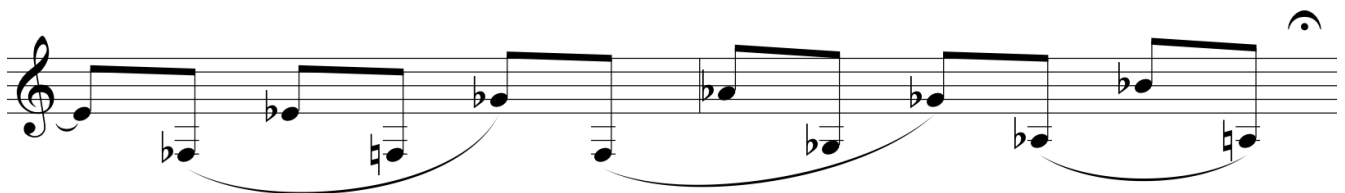
When one analyzes every successive interval in the entire piece in each of the four parts some striking trends appear. For instance, not once does Stravinsky incorporate the tritone, in other words, the 6 interval. Ultimately this is a 12 tone piece (the clarinet plays all 12 pitches eventually) but the absence of the tritone gives this piece a distinct character. Of all the parts, the voice part is the most limited in its intervallic and pitch content. It contains the fewest total number of pitch classes, 9, and also the least intervallic variety- it contains no 4's, 6's, 8's, 9's, or 11's. One might consider the vocal part, which is surely the focal point musically, for most listeners, as the distilled base around which the accompaniment is built. Summing all of the intervals in all of the parts, the interval of 1 is most used, owing to it's primary role in Motive A, and the repetitive nature of the motive. This interval serves an ornamental role, embellishing the larger intervals which have a greater effect on the overall harmony of the piece. Next are the 5, 7, 10, and 3- in that order. This should not be surprising given their prominence in Motive C. If one considers 5 as the inversion of 7, then these prominent intervals can be reduced to 3, 7, and 10- a minor seventh chord. Perhaps this explains why the piece, despite using all twelve tones, maintains the ghost of a familiar tonal character.

Instances per Interval Class

	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Viola</b>	2	12	7	9	1	10	0	7	0	1	4	1
<b>Clarinet</b>	5	17	5	6	2	7	0	10	0	1	12	2
<b>Flute</b>	2	11	5	4	3	10	0	7	1	2	9	1
<b>Voice</b>	3	13	3	8	0	12	0	10	0	0	8	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	53	20	27	6	39	0	34	1	4	33	4



Musically, the different intervals play different roles. As stated above, the 1 acts as an elaboration throughout the piece to add dynamic interest. The 5, 7, and 10 provide the piece with its leaping quality. The vocal line and all of the instrumental parts tend to leap broadly, sketching out the musical space in large swaths. This is particularly noteworthy in the clarinet part after the word knell- it seems to leap about and expand across the musical space painting a broad sound image of a slowly tolling death knell.



It is here also that the viola introduces it's only vertical sonorities of the piece- with intervals of 1 and 7. This creates a striking moment at the end of the second large section of the piece.

The last section of the piece is distinct. In terms of orchestration, Stravinsky here introduces the pizzicato effect in the viola part, perhaps symbolizing the impact of hammer on bell with it's noisy spectral output. The interval content in this section also seems to fall apart. 11, 2, 4, and 8 are all introduced in the various parts. In all it makes for a strikingly different character. It is worth noting that here, as the death bell tolls, the vocal part descends to its gravest point, a low B-flat below middle C, on the word “dong”. This is perhaps the darkest moment of the piece. The sounds of the text go well with this. We have moved away from the hissing fricatives of the introduction and conclude with the very round sounds of “ding, dong, bell”, stopped plosives and ending on a liquid- eerily fitting for an underwater death knell.

The image shows a musical score for the final section of a piece. It consists of four staves: a vocal line and three instrumental lines (Flute, B♭ Clarinet, and Viola). The vocal line is in G major and 7/8 time, with lyrics: "Ding dong,.... ding.... dong,.... Hearke now I heare them; ding..... dong... bell.....". The tempo markings are *poco più mosso* and *a tempo*. The instrumental parts include dynamics like *pp* and performance instructions such as *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco) for the Viola.

Works Consulted:

Cross, Jonathan, ed. *The cambridge companion to stravinsky*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Stravinsky, Igor, and William Shakespeare. *Three Songs from William Shakespeare: 1953, for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, and viola*. Boosey & Hawkes, 1954.