

Two "Mistakes" in Stravinsky's *Introitus*

During the 1950s and 60s, Stravinsky learned, mastered, and significantly transformed a musical language that was, for him, entirely new—the language of twelve-tone serialism. As the abundant compositional sketches from this period in the Paul Sacher Foundation make clear, this process was not always an easy one for Stravinsky. Indeed, the sketches show him groping for solutions to basic compositional problems, including particularly the problem of creating meaningful vertical harmonies from the essentially linear nature of the twelve-tone system.

One of Stravinsky's series-charts for *Introitus*, a requiem written in 1965 to the memory of T.S. Eliot, is shown at the bottom of this page. The prime ordering of the series is written across the top row of the chart and surrounded with a box drawn in red pencil. The series is divided into its three tetrachords, labelled with the Greek letters alpha, beta, and gamma. On the second, third, and fourth lines of the chart, each tetrachord is systematically rotated and then transposed so that its first note is always the same. The diagonal lines trace the rotations. Within each of the twelve tetrachords on the chart, one note is circled in red pencil. For the alpha and beta tetrachords, the circled notes follow the main diagonal. For the gamma tetrachord, the circled notes were apparently chosen on a more *ad hoc* basis. As we shall see, Stravinsky planned to use these circled notes to make chords.

Introitus begins with three chords in harp and piano. Stravinsky's manuscript, shown in the middle of the facing page, describes their

The image shows a handwritten musical manuscript titled "Introitus". At the top, the word "Introitus" is written in cursive. Below it, a series of twelve notes is written across four staves. The notes are grouped into three tetrachords, labeled with the Greek letters alpha, beta, and gamma. Each tetrachord is rotated and transposed so that its first note is always the same. Diagonal lines trace the rotations. Within each of the twelve tetrachords, one note is circled in red pencil. The circled notes for the alpha and beta tetrachords follow the main diagonal, while the circled notes for the gamma tetrachord are chosen on an ad hoc basis.

rest of the piece. The rotation of the gamma tetrachord is incorrect from a systematic point of view, but from a musical point of view must be considered simply a creative decision.

Neither of the two mistakes discussed in this article admits an unambiguous solution, although if I were performing the piece, I would be strongly tempted to change the alto note of the third chord to C. At the same time, they tell us a good deal about Stravinsky's compositional process during this period. They reveal, above all, the tentative and experimental nature of Stravinsky's work within the twelve-tone system. In each new work, he struggled anew to find secure pre-compositional bases and musically satisfying realizations. Mistakes creep in, but they are overshadowed by the strangely moving spectacle of a great master at the height of his compositional powers grappling, as if for the first time, with the basic materials of his art.