

# Igor Stravinsky and Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz

## A Study of Their Artistic Collaboration for *Histoire du soldat* (1918)

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*Histoire du soldat . . . reveals itself as the true focal point of Stravinsky's work in that, in the composition of the Ramuz text, the score leads to the very threshold of consciousness of the state of affairs expressed in the text.*  
—Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1973)

### Circumstances Surrounding the Collaboration

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) and the Swiss writer Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz (1878–1947)<sup>1</sup> became acquainted during the years Stravinsky lived near Lausanne, Switzerland (1914–20). In his *Autobiography*, Stravinsky wrote about his collaborations with Ramuz:

I saw a great deal of Ramuz at this time, as we were working together at the French translation of the Russian text of my *Pribaoutki*, *Berceuses du Chat*, and *Renard*. I initiated him into the peculiarities and subtle shades of the Russian language, and the difficulties presented by its tonic accent. I was astonished at his insight, his intuitive ability, and his gift for transferring the spirit and poesy of the Russian folk poems to a language so remote and different as French.<sup>2</sup>

Ramuz helped Stravinsky with the French translation of texts for other vocal works, as well as for the ballet/cantata *Les Noces* (short score 1914–17). (In 1929, Ramuz would record his memories of Stravinsky in *Souvenirs sur Igor Strawinsky*.)<sup>3</sup>

In 1917, Stravinsky, Ramuz, and some members of their circle of friends—specifically, the conductor Ernest Ansermet (1883–1969) and the painter René Auberjonois (1872–1957)—planned an artistic collaboration that would result in a small theater piece capable of being transported easily for performances at different locations. Werner Reinhart (1884–1951) of Winterthur provided the financial support that these struggling artists needed. Stravinsky and Ramuz developed a scenario that limited the number of participants to a small ensemble of seven musicians, two actors, and three narrators, thus making it practical for a touring group.<sup>4</sup>

About his work on *Histoire du soldat*<sup>5</sup> during the early part of 1918, Stravinsky recalled in his *Autobiography* that “my uninterrupted collaboration with Ramuz was the more precious to me because our friendship, growing closer and closer, helped me to bear the difficult times through which I was living, sickened and, as a patriot, desperately humiliated, as I was by the monstrous Peace of Brest-Litovsk.”<sup>6</sup> The outcome of their artis-

tic efforts culminated in a performance of *Histoire du soldat* at the Théâtre Municipal de Lausanne on 28 September 1918, conducted by Ansermet.

*Histoire du soldat* is “Stravinsky’s pivotal work”<sup>7</sup> because it reflects his continued preoccupation with his past while at the same time foreshadowing compositional techniques he would develop in later works. One retrospective feature involves the dramatic adaptation of a Russian folktale; other traits are associated with stylistic allusions to his earlier works, such as the *Pastorale* (1907), *Three Easy Pieces* (1914–1915), and *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (1914).<sup>8</sup> In spite of Stravinsky’s tendency to muse over aspects of his Russian heritage or to use earlier previous compositional techniques as he was writing *Histoire*, he nevertheless shaped and reshaped his musical vocabulary in a more linear fashion that prefigures his approach in such later works as the *Octet* (1922–23), *Oedipus Rex* (1926–27),<sup>9</sup> and *Duo concertant* (1932). But the uniqueness of *Histoire du soldat* results from the distinctive ways in which Stravinsky used musical means to illustrate the soldier’s struggle between two worlds.<sup>10</sup> Stravinsky’s musical imagination is fueled by the interaction with Ramuz, but neither collaborator overpowers the other. Because the text is narrated rather than set to music, composer and author both retain their artistic autonomy. The musical results would have been much different had Stravinsky underlaid the entire text. By maintaining their artistic autonomy, each of the artists was free to experiment.

As Ansermet has pointed out, the theatrical basis for *Histoire* “is diametrically opposed to the Wagnerian theory of blending various forms of art.” He concluded that although the author and the composer combined certain elements of the story with the music, they never really mixed these elements.<sup>11</sup> In his unedited “Petit avertissement,” which was reprinted in the program that accompanied the seventieth-anniversary performance of *Histoire du soldat* in 1988, Ramuz differentiated between linguistic sounds and musical sounds.<sup>12</sup> It is as though the collaborators were weaving two strands, the spoken text and

# Table of Sketches Organized by Grouping

The musical origins of *Histoire du soldat* are intertwined with the preliminary musical sketches for “Antony and Cleopatra,” a collaboration between Igor Stravinsky and André Gide that was abandoned. Stravinsky did not follow a logical sequence within the 263 sketch pages, and it seems likely that he moved back and forth among groups of sketch pages. Had he used larger sheets of paper, he might have employed the kaleidoscopic approach found in the sketching process for earlier pieces such as *Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring* and for later works such as *Perséphone* and *Orpheus*.

What follows is a description of each facsimile page. An explanation of the “Criteria for Establishing the Ordering of

the Sketches” is given in the Introduction (pp. 10–11). The columns of the following table include: (1) Figure numbers; (2) Group or Title; (3) Description of entries on sketch page; (4) Chester 1987 edition, page, measures; and (5) English translations of multiple languages that are found on the sketch pages, including comments about the literary sketches by Alain RoCHAT of the Centre de recherches sur les lettres romande, Université de Lausanne [CRLR]. In that column, translations are given within quotation marks and enclosed in square brackets; other editorial comments are enclosed in square brackets.

Fig.	Scene or group	Description of entries on sketch page	Chester 1987 edition		Translations and comments
			Page	Mm.	
1.1–1.46	Group 1	“Antony & Cleopatra,” separate pages and some bound pages; 46 images (PSS)			
1.1	Marche du soldat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The passage for “3 TROMBE” (3 trumpets) with percussion suggests orchestration that could have been intended for “Antony and Cleopatra.”</li> <li>An earlier sketch for this melody appears in Fig. 1.5 with a primitive sketch at the bottom of the page starting on D.</li> <li>A further evolution of this melody occurs in Fig. 1.10 in two voices, at the bottom of the page, transposed to A.</li> </ul>	5	71–80	C. Cl. [Caisse Caire, “Snare Drum”] Gr. C. [Grosse Caisse, “Bass Drum”]
1.2	Valse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is one of the earliest sketches for the opening measures of the “Valse.” A more primitive sketch, also entitled “Valse,” appears in a file associated with sketchbook IV, Fig. 7.2, that could be related to <i>Histoire</i>.</li> </ul>	54	1–9	
1.3	Marche triomphale du diable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the bottom of this page is a passage from the opening measures of the “Marche triomphale du diable.” The melodic line sounds a minor third lower than the printed edition (scored for trombone and violin). Other fragments occur in different layers and predict the “Danse du diable.”</li> </ul>	75	1–3	



Fig. 1.15. Petits airs au bord du ruisseau. Recto. 23 cm x 17.8 cm

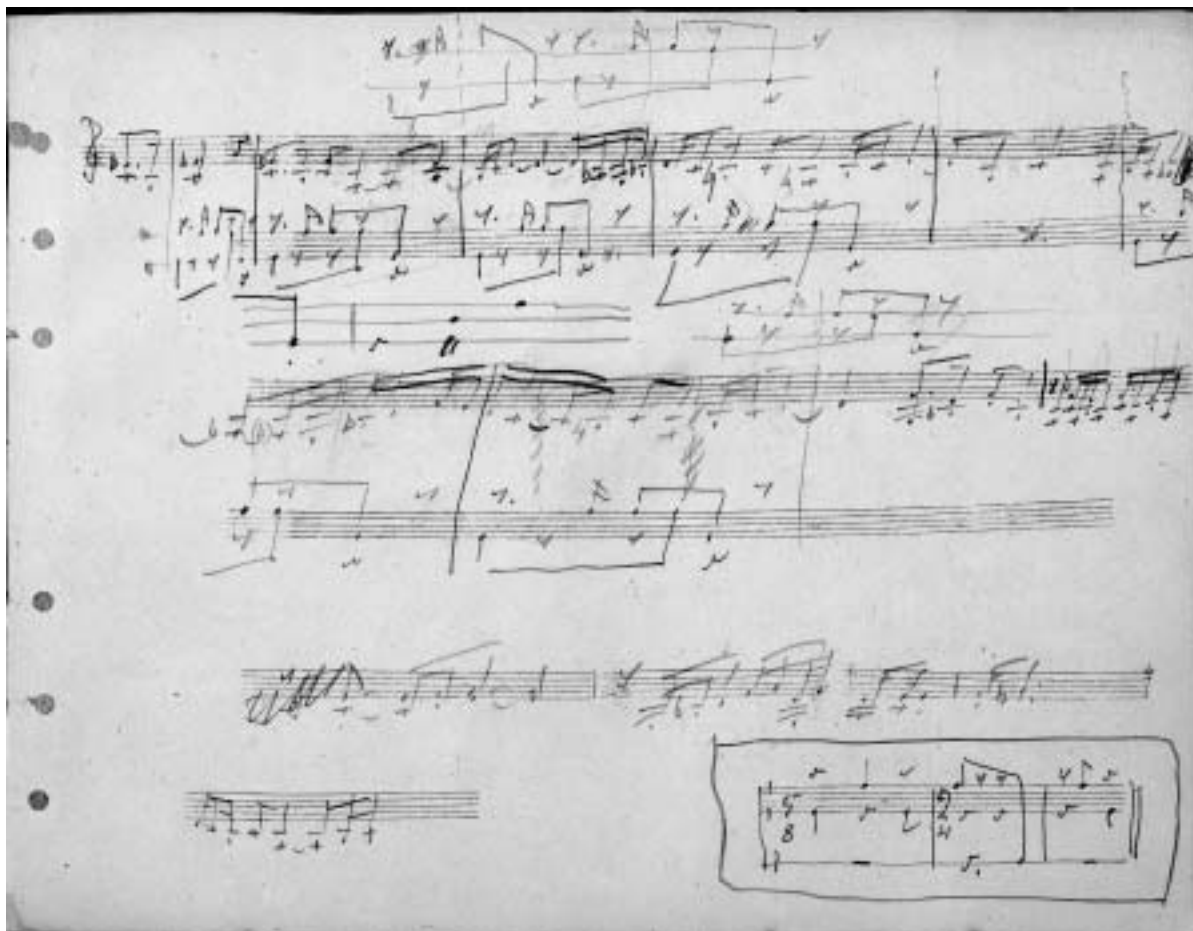


Fig. 1.17. Tango. Recto. 22.9 cm x 17.8 cm