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Abstract

Echoes of an Offering: Bach's Influence on the Creative Process for the *Symphony of Psalms* Fugue

"I salute you, Johann Sebastian Stravinsky."

—Francis Poulenc

In his recent biography of Stravinsky, Jonathan Cross suggested a strong echoic relationship between the head motive of the second movement fugue in *Symphony of Psalms* and, perhaps the most famous fugue subject of all, that of Bach's *Musical Offering*. Stravinsky's choice of setting the fugue in C minor also could well have been a reference to the Bach fugue.

Stravinsky's "musical idea" for the second movement of *Symphony of Psalms* can be thought of as two minor thirds separated by a minor second (C + E-flat / B + D in the published score) that create the intervallic profiles of the first subject's head motive.

Curiously, a primitive sketch of the subject begins a half-step lower on B (B + D / A-sharp + C-sharp); Stravinsky then iterated on these pitches through m. 5, moving toward a G-sharp harmonic goal (m. 7, beat 2). In this approach, he would once again reorder these intervals to arrive at A to G enharmonically functioning as an augmented sixth (A – F-double sharp) that resolves to G-sharp.

The apparent answer on G-sharp is truncated. The harmonic goal here is E-flat, confirmed at the bottom of this sketch with the subject appearing on E-flat. The upper voice begins with the second subject theme.

It is possible that Stravinsky immediately continued to refine the first subject by further truncation and establishment of the new harmonic goal of F-sharp, keeping the same

intervallic pattern as earlier (also follows the scheme of fugues from Bach's *WTC*). F-sharp may have provided a more logical answer to his first statement of the subject on B than the initial one on G-sharp. It is also possible that Stravinsky was considering the statement on G-sharp enharmonically as a tonic subject and the brief statement on E-flat to be the dominant answer, preserving the traditional subject/answer relationship.