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Stravinsky and His World is a collection of twelve essays dealing with diverse topics concerning Igor Stravinsky’s life and works that spans 368 pages, and involves Stravinsky scholars from all over the world. Tamara Levitz serves as editor, co-author, author, and translator of the several articles in the book. The collection covers topics that fall into three main topics: Stravinsky’s life and the challenges he faced; his relationship with Russia and Spanish-speaking countries; and his works, including compositions and writings. In the introduction Levitz draws the reader’s attention to several questions: Did Stravinsky’s fame shape his career? Was his celebrity something he created deliberately through interviews, scandals, and his status as exile? Did he purposefully craft his photos, interviews, and words to a specific end? And “What happens to musical meaning when compositions begin to circulate globally”(x)? She also boldly claims that “the efforts of Stravinsky scholars have been doomed to fail, because they ignore the role and impact of celebrity and scandal in Stravinsky’s music”(x).

In her preface Levitz mentions previously published collections of articles, including Jann Pasler’s Confronting Stravinsky (1986) and Jonathan Cross’ Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky (2003) as inspirations for Stravinsky and His World. In her own edited collection she tells the reader she intends “to give evidence of the road travelled in Stravinsky scholarship since these volumes” (xi-xii). Her two main objectives are “to shift priorities in the scholarly community” and “to formulate new questions about
Stravinsky’s life and works” (xii). She sets the ambitious goal of pushing the boundaries of traditional Stravinsky research and in this she succeeds.

One of the strengths of the book is the ordering of the articles. The opening piece by Jonathan Cross is entitled “Stravinsky in Exile” and begins by looking back at Stravinsky’s death, a choice that has a very dramatic effect. The condolences expressed by high-level international officials from several countries follow this opening creates a unique perspective for the rest of the volume. Additionally, the last article of the book, by Leon Botstein, beautifully summarizes and reflects on many topics that occurred in previous articles, such as the Stravinsky-Craft relationship, the influence Jacques Maritain had on Stravinsky, some of Stravinsky’s works such as *Mavra*, *Poétique Musicale*, and Stravinsky’s situation in exile and his relationship with Russia. This last article provides a comprehensive digest of the previous discussions, and in doing so invites the reader to rethink the intersections of the scholarship contained within the book.

In the first article Cross opens a wide window to Stravinsky’s career by analyzing the composer’s late period, and investigating his relationship with Russia and America. Cross provides valuable insight into the difficulties Stravinsky faced after being separated from his loved ones and from Europe and masterfully handles the complicated period from Stravinsky’s exile to his time in America to his return visit to Russia in 1962. According to Cross, Stravinsky attempted to adopt different personas such as that of the authentic Russian during his early period, and the neoclassical Greek and Western European during the interwar years. Cross argues, however, that Stravinsky’s Russian mask “keeps appearing across his music marked by musical signs of nostalgia and mourning. This was Stravinsky’s wound” (17). The article focuses on this notion of the composer’s “wound,” how it emerged in Stravinsky’s music, and how it affected his creativity and life choices. Cross convincingly shows that, although Stravinsky attempted to both “embrace new cultures” and “distance himself” by means of trying on different masks, the mourning for his homeland always penetrated his music beneath the surface (17).

In the last article of the book, Botstein investigates the relationship between Stravinsky and Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov. Botstein explains the common artistic approaches shared by these two artists and their conflicting political views and explores their contrasting opinions on Russia. Botstein wonders why these two great artists ignored each other. Why, a reader might ask, is it important to seek a connection or lack thereof between these two men? After all, many artists are not connected. Botstein convincingly shows, however, that the question is important because of the parallel lives lived by Nabokov and Stravinsky: both shared the same birthplace, both were Russian exile artists, both lived in Europe at the same time and both arrived in America within two years of each other. Under these circumstances, it seems surprising

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they did not meet. Yet, according to Botstein they might have actually avoided each other deliberately.

Botstein argues convincingly that their “shared parallel premises and prejudices in their views on art, and their respective places in the history of modernism bear comparison” (321). According to the author, despite many parallels in their lives and artistic endeavours, their differences were even greater. These conflicts manifested themselves first in politics: where Nabokov hated fascists, Stravinsky admired Mussolini; and secondly in religion: Stravinsky was committed to Russian Orthodoxy, but for Nabokov, organized traditional religion was foreign and he was more committed to scientific observation. Russia, for Nabokov, was his past; when he moved to the United States, the scenes and characters in his writing moved with him. Stravinsky on the other hand always remained connected to “his Russia” at a deep and primarily hidden level, and although he tried to suppress it, his nationality came out in his music. Here Botstein agrees with Cross about Stravinsky’s continuing Russianness, but he disagrees about Stravinsky’s intentions. Where Cross argues that Russianness manifests itself in Stravinsky’s music as an unhealing “wound,” Botstein tends to claim that Stravinsky consciously used his heritage to his advantage.

One of the main issues discussed in the book is how Stravinsky represented himself as a Russian exile after 1917. Authors who have written on this subject come from various backgrounds with varied approaches depending on their geographical location, including Jonathan Cross from the United Kingdom, Svetlana Savenko from Russia, and Leon Botstein from the United States. They exhibit contradictory and even opposing opinions about questions such as: What was Stravinsky’s lasting connection to Russia? How strong was his sense of belonging to Los Angeles? What kind of relationship did he have with other Russian émigrés? How was his music received in Russia in various periods of his life? The variety of standpoints provided by prestigious scholars allows the reader to observe “the exile” from numerous, intriguing perspectives.

Another highlight of the book is the inclusion of excerpts from and a consideration of the role played by Spanish-speaking newspaper interviews, in which Stravinsky presented himself as a transnational subject. In this arena, two key issues are presented in the book: the first is by Tamara Levitz “Igor the Angelano: The Mexican Connection” and the second is “Stravinsky Speaks to the Spanish-Speaking World” with collaboration by Leonora Saavedra, Tamara Levitz, and Mariel Fiori. In the first article Levitz pictures Stravinsky’s relationship with the Spanish-speaking world from his Spanish tours in his early years to visits to Argentina and Mexico in his later years, especially after he moved to Los Angeles. Here she takes us on a tour of Stravinsky’s relationship with elite artists and intellectuals in these countries. Stravinsky’s meticulously organized photograph album provides windows into his tours and
friendships. We also learn about his choices, connections and life during his Los Angeles years. This dense article presents Stravinsky’s relation with Spanish speaking countries in fluid narration. The second article includes an introduction and supporting documents translated from Spanish publications. The interviews Stravinsky gave in Spanish speaking countries reveal him changing his mind frequently and often conflicting himself. These two articles provide well-framed details regarding the impact Spanish-speaking countries and their cultures had on Stravinsky’s music, as well as long-neglected aspects of his career related to these countries.

One of the intriguing connections the book draws appears through the dialogue of two articles, one by Levitz and the other by Botstein. In the introduction of “Stravinsky’s Cold War: Letters About the Composer’s Return to Russia, 1960-1963,” Levitz states that “Stravinsky mostly kept a public silence about his homeland” (273) in the early years of his exile. Botstein, in contrast, states that in his American years “Stravinsky exaggerated his vanished social distinction,” implying that Stravinsky attempted to profit from his situation (321). The opposition of Levitz and Botstein does little to reconcile this contradiction and, in total, their work suggests that the transformation of the composer from his silent early years to exaggerated American years is worth further study.

Svetlano Savenko’s article, “Stravinsky: The View from Russia,” examines Stravinsky’s relationship with Russia, and Russia’s relationship with Stravinsky. Her main question is: “How did Stravinsky shape compositional trends in Russia in the twentieth century? And in what way did he remain intellectually and musically rooted in Russian tradition” (325)? The comparison offered here between Russian and Western perceptions of Stravinsky is well worth the read. Furthermore, the discussion about the nature of folkloric and liturgical material used by Stravinsky is mesmerizing, furthering Richard Taruskin’s work elsewhere.  

The second article of the book, entitled “Who owns Mavra? A Transnational Dispute,” deals with another engaging topic. The premiere of Mavra ignited strong debates about expressionism, modernism, and neo-classicism among many of the important names of the day: Francis Poulenc, Paul Coaller, Darius Milhaud, Vladimir Mayakovski, and Alexis Roland-Manuel. Stravinsky’s reactions to reviews differed; for example, where he chose to keep communication open with Roland-Manuel, he rejected Schloeser’s criticism. Levitz notes in her insightful introduction that Stravinsky’s intention at the time was ambivalent; he was trying to embrace the cultural implications


of France and at the same time present himself as a European composer and claim a connection to the Russo-Italian tradition. Levitz’s introduction to the article is a fantastic read for those interested in discovering more about Mavra, a piece that “belonged in the ambiguous geographical and stylistic space of modernity” (24).

In her article, “Stravinsky’s Russian Library,” Tatiana Baranova Monighetti opens a window into the composer’s mind. The article contains four sections entitled “Heirlooms,” “Marginalia,” “Ephemera,” and “Dedication,” respectively. In these pages the reader learns about which books the composer valued and carried with him from his father’s library for his whole life. An engaging examination follows about Stravinsky’s notes and the comments found in the margins of the books in his library. These notes include harsh criticisms, positive comments, corrections of examples and spellings, and all provide insight into his ideological and aesthetic thinking. Under “Ephemera” Monighetti provides varied bits and pieces within the archives that “offer glimpses into the composer’s intimate, human presence,” including newspaper excerpts, invitations that were used as bookmarks, essays written or translated by the composer, and even a Russian Orthodox prayer in his first wife’s handwriting (67). Dedications, signed books, and gift books that were sent by friends and even by former enemies are mentioned here and each tells another story.

There are two articles in the book related to each other: one written and the other introduced by Klara Moricz: “Symphonies and Funeral Games” and “Arthur Lourié’s Eurasianist and Neo-Thomist Responses to the Crisis of Art,” respectively. Both articles focus on Arthur Vincent Lourié, a close companion of Stravinsky’s for about a decade. In both articles, Moricz’s writing reflects substantial knowledge of her subject matter, however, in some parts of both articles frequently-used quotations considerably disrupt the flow of the text. Both essays are engaging if the reader has an interest in the philosophy and compositions of Arthur Vincent Lourié, but they do not present any intriguing view or critique of Stravinsky, nor do they ask fresh questions. Consequently, they do not fit with the rest of the articles in this volume, though both of Moricz’s texts do make the reader curious about Lourié’s music.

“The Futility of Exhortation: Pleading in Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex and Orpheus” by Gretchen Horlacher, on the other hand, is an extremely exciting analytical article. In clear and fluent language, Horlacher guides the reader through the dramatic constructions of the two works mentioned in the title. She not only presents a clear picture of unfortunate characters in Oedipus Rex and Orpheus, but also identifies and discloses their musical counterparts. Horlacher analyzes how Stravinsky develops his characters through the music, focusing on the compositional styles of the works, and their melodic and harmonic structures. She then examines the result generated by their continuous change-repetition balance, as well as the symbolic futility created in the
music in both cases, which parallels the futility of Orpheus and Oedipus. She closes with an elegant conclusion that readers will enjoy discovering.

Another stimulating article in this volume is “The Poétique Musicale: A Counterpoint in Three Voices” by Valerie Dufour. The article is about the writing process behind Stravinsky’s Poétique Musicale: In the form of Six Lessons that he wrote for the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. Dufour provides the historical background behind these lectures and reveals the details of the collaboration between Pyotr Suvchinsky, Roland Alexis Manuel Levy, and Stravinsky. Through the analysis of correspondence between the three men she concludes that the term “ghostwriter,” which “implies certain fraudulence,” does not reflect the truth about the process. She also points out Craft’s rejection of Suvchinsky’s involvement in the process. This is a very informative and valuable reading, especially for those who have doubts about the origin of Stravinsky’s Poétique Musicale.

Overall Levitz is very successful in compiling and organizing these disparate and sometimes conflicting articles. This collection of texts fulfills the expectations established in the preface by its editor: it is a captivating and vivid read with some of the contributors’ contradictions being not only inspiring but also provocative. The book addresses fresh questions about Stravinsky and expands our knowledge of the composer in various directions. If the reader is a Stravinsky scholar, a student, or even someone from outside academia interested in Stravinsky, she or he will find these arguments very inviting and stimulating.

For further reading:


