

THE LATE CHORAL WORKS OF IGOR STRAVINSKY:  
A RECEPTION HISTORY

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by  
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The undersigned, as appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined  
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THE LATE CHORAL WORKS OF IGOR STRAVINSKY: A RECEPTION HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Despite his preeminence in twentieth-century music, the late works of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) remain in relative obscurity: seldom performed, inadequately recorded, poorly understood, and frequently disparaged. The troubled reception of these works stands in remarkable contradiction to the composer's ever-increasing renown; few contemporary composers can rival Stravinsky in terms of popular acclaim, concert performances, recordings, or continuing influence. Stravinsky's late pieces were the subject of enormous controversy in the 1950s and 1960s. Written using the fractious twelve-tone method of Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), these scores represent perhaps the most astonishing change of style ever undertaken by a composer of comparable stature. This thesis will survey the reception of Stravinsky's major late vocal works in England and America, including *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* (1954), *Canticum sacrum* (1956), *Threni* (1958), *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* (1961), *The Flood* (1962), *Introitus* (1965), and *Requiem Canticles* (1966). The reception of each piece will be traced chronologically, beginning with responses to première performances and progressing to contemporary scholarship.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF STRAVINSKY'S LATE WORKS

Despite his preeminence in twentieth-century music, the late works of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) remain in relative obscurity: seldom performed, inadequately recorded, poorly understood, and frequently disparaged. The troubled reception of these works stands in remarkable contradiction to the composer's ever-increasing renown; few contemporary composers can rival Stravinsky in terms of popular acclaim, concert performances, recordings, or continuing influence. In recent decades scholars have canonized the eternally chic Russian composer, electing him to a deified clique of artists who have come to personify their respective eras, notably Josquin Desprez (c.1440-1521), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), and Richard Wagner (1813-1883). Unlike others in this rarified company, however, Stravinsky's eminence is based exclusively on compositions from his early "Russian" and middle "neoclassical" style periods, particularly *L'oiseau de feu* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), *Le sacre du printemps* (1913), *Les noces* (1923), *Octet* (1923), *Oedipus Rex* (1927), *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), and *The Rake's Progress* (1951). While the late works of other masters, such as Bach's *Das musikalische Opfer* (1747) or the *Missa solemnis* (1824) of Beethoven, are universally lauded, Stravinsky's last compositions remain dubious. The reception afforded Stravinsky's late works represents an extraordinary incongruity to the composer's international celebrity and a significant blight on his legacy.

Numerous aspects of Stravinsky's life and music remain enigmatic. For decades scholars have endeavored to make sense of his oeuvre, with its chameleon-like transformations of genre, language, medium, and style, all of which belies its deeper unity. Even more riddles stem from the composer's voluminous statements and misstatements concerning his biography, his music, and the music of fellow composers. Stravinsky's words, received initially as gospel, have frequently proved contradictory, self-serving, and even obfuscating. Consider, for example, the composer's charge concerning compromises he found in the late music of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). This critique was delivered during a pivotal series of lectures at Harvard University, while his championship of neoclassicism was at its height.

Think how subtle and clinging the poison of the music drama was to have insinuated itself even into the veins of the colossus Verdi.

How can we help regretting that this master of traditional opera, at the end of a long life studded with so many authentic masterpieces, climaxed his career with *Falstaff* which, if it is not Wagner's best work, is not Verdi's best opera either?<sup>1</sup>

Hindsight has shown the colossal irony of Stravinsky's indictment.<sup>2</sup> Verdi's adaptation of the ideas of Wagner presaged an even more astonishing transformation late in Stravinsky's creative life: a decade and a half after his censure of Verdi, Stravinsky embraced twelve-tone serialism, the fractious compositional system of his own rival, Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951).

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 63. Scholars have since brought to light that these lectures were ghostwritten by Stravinsky associates Roland-Manuel and Pierre Souvtchinsky.

<sup>2</sup> Stravinsky, perhaps realizing the irony of this earlier statement in light of his own artistic conversion, later qualified his criticism of Verdi. See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 83; and Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 3.



Stravinsky's turn to serialism in the 1950s sent shock waves through the world of contemporary music, a world polarized between the competing schools of neoclassicism, of which Stravinsky had been the standard bearer, and the twelve-tone serialism of Schoenberg. Stravinsky's neoclassicism had dominated European music for three decades, offering to its many adherents a sense of order after the chaos of World War I by returning to the forms, genres, and expressive values of the eighteenth century and before. Kept in the shadows by the hegemony of neoclassicism, the dedicated followers of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method developed their music in relative obscurity. It was only in the aftermath of World War II that Schoenberg and his followers emerged as the predominant faction in contemporary music. A potent new generation of musicians, inspired by Anton von Webern (1883-1945), rejected the conservative tradition of neoclassicism in favor of an intensified strain of serialism. Stravinsky, having exhausted his neoclassic urge with his Mozartian opera, *The Rake's Progress*, fell under the spell of Webern as well. Soon after Schoenberg's death, Stravinsky began to experiment incrementally with serial methods, developing a unique brand of dodecaphonic serialism that he would employ for the rest of his creative life. A dedicated minority, serial composers celebrated Stravinsky's adoption of Schoenberg's methods, realizing that the Russian composer's celebrity and respectability would help bolster their beleaguered cause. In contrast, many Stravinsky loyalists, heavily invested in the neoclassical style, felt a deep sense of personal betrayal and worse: that the composer had betrayed his own creative genius.

Finding fresh ammunition with which to accuse the composer of academicism and emotional miserliness, old enemies attacked Stravinsky's serial works as slick, cerebral

exercises. Many suspected that the composer's change of methods represented the pitiable effort of an old man desperate to remain in the vanguard of musical fashion. Some detractors even accused the composer of dotage. The *Saturday Review's* Irving Kolodin (1908-1988), one of the most widely read critics of the day, sadly pronounced Stravinsky's late works "a mere trickle from the old fountainhead."<sup>3</sup> Stephen Walsh (born 1942), Stravinsky's foremost biographer, has characterized the general perception of the composer's late works during the 1950s and 1960s: "They were an odd bunch of works, dislikable to many, to others evidence of failing powers and technical epigonism: the works of a master, no doubt, but masterworks, hardly."<sup>4</sup> Even when Stravinsky's critics were not openly hostile to his late serial music, many still expressed a sense of disappointment. As the composer Sir Michael Tippett (1905-1998) remarked, "Stravinsky's works of these two periods (the 'Russian' and the 'neo-classical') are the real substance of his oeuvre. The late 'dodecaphonic' works are the extras."<sup>5</sup>

Critics served a role of unprecedented importance in shaping the reception of Stravinsky's late music. By the middle decades of the twentieth century, critics functioned more than ever before as intermediaries between trailblazing composers and often bewildered listeners. Stravinsky and his contemporaries had set a blistering pace of innovation for half a century, striving for significant advances in musical language and technique with each new work. Unable to keep pace with musical developments, audiences looked to critics for help in understanding this increasingly difficult music.

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<sup>3</sup> Irving Kolodin, quoted without documentation in Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 252.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 523.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Michael Tippett, "Stravinsky: A Composer's Memorial," *Perspectives of New Music* IX/2 (1971), 34.

Never had critics possessed more power to predispose or prejudice listeners. “You know, in the beginning is the work,” the composer Milton Babbitt (born 1916) observed, “and these days in the beginning with the work is the word about the work. Music is talked about before it is listened to, while it’s listened to, and instead of being listened to.”<sup>6</sup>

In the forty years that spanned the premières of *L’oiseau de feu* and *The Rake’s Progress*, critics had collectively devised a number of durable, repeatable maxims to respond to Stravinsky’s ever-changing musical modes. The English scholar Rollo H. Myers (1892-1985), himself a critic for the *London Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, summarized a great deal of critical opinion in his entry on the composer for the 1954 edition of *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*:

The almost wholly “impersonal” character of Stravinsky’s music...this almost inhuman detachment from the ordinary joys and sorrows of humanity can be looked upon as a quality or a defect according to temperament. It has of course given rise to the reproach that Stravinsky’s music is lacking in human interest and appeals to the intellectual rather than to the heart.<sup>7</sup>

Olin Downes (1886-1955), the powerful critic of *The New York Times*, had long dismissed Stravinsky’s music for similar reasons, charging that the composer’s works were “empty of the impulse of beauty and feeling.”<sup>8</sup> A persistent misgiving heard among Stravinsky’s critics held that his works were the tricks of a master musical illusionist:

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<sup>6</sup> Milton Babbitt, “The Unlikely Survival of Serious Music,” *Milton Babbitt: Words About Music*, ed. Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Rollo H. Myers, “Stravinsky, Igor Feodorovich,” *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 9 vols., ed. Eric Blom (London: Macmillan, 1954), VIII, 141.

<sup>8</sup> Olin Downes, quoted without documentation in Mark N. Grant, *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music Criticism in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 269.

slick, flashy, a bit tawdry, and devoid of genuine musical merit.<sup>9</sup> Many critics also repeated the notion, beginning as early as the 1930s, that he had already exhausted his inspiration and had “written himself out.”<sup>10</sup> Hand in hand with the charge that the composer’s creative well had run dry was the suspicion that he continually compensated for his lack of true inspiration by an increasing reliance on technique and cerebration.<sup>11</sup>

Stravinsky detested the influence critics exercised over the reception of his music. The composer’s merciless contempt for such commentators was rivaled only by his disdain for many celebrity conductors; in either case he could not abide exterior comment on his music, whether it came from the interpretive baton or the critical pen. In his colorful, idiosyncratic English, Stravinsky described his critics as “uncompetent” and their reviews as “eulogious.”<sup>12</sup> The composer’s responses to critics were often vicious, as was his retort to a review by the eminent *New York Herald Tribune* critic and *Musical Quarterly* editor Paul Henry Lang (1901-1991), whom Stravinsky dubbed “H. P. Langweilich.”<sup>13</sup> “The only blight on my eightieth birthday,” he raged, “is the realization my age will probably keep me from celebrating the funeral of your senile music columnist.”<sup>14</sup> Even his dedicated proponents, such as Eric Walter White, were not above the composer’s

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Walsh, “Stravinsky and the Vicious Circle: Some Remarks about the Composer and the Press,” *Composition – Performance – Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Wyndham Thomas (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), 139.

<sup>10</sup> Rollo H. Myers, *Grove’s Dictionary*, 140.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Walsh, “Stravinsky and the Vicious Circle,” 141.

<sup>12</sup> Igor Stravinsky, quoted without documentation in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 385.

<sup>13</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, “Slightly More of a Plague on One of Their Houses (A Comparison of Two Critics),” *Expositions and Developments* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), 172.

<sup>14</sup> Igor Stravinsky, “Stravinsky Aims, Fires,” *New York Herald Tribune* (24 June 1962), quoted in Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 458.

wrath.<sup>15</sup> Archival studies have revealed that the composer vigorously collected press clippings, journal articles, and monographs devoted to his person and his music. The composer poured over these texts, often rebuffing critical judgments with carefully written annotations in the margins.<sup>16</sup> Stravinsky meticulously ferreted out factual inaccuracies and rebutted any negative assessments with tremendous venom and verve.

The composer's literary works are peppered with direct and oblique references to the ignorance, arrogance, and malice of critics and to the fundamentally misguided nature of music criticism. "Critics," Stravinsky protested, "misinform the public and delay comprehension. Because of critics many valuable things come too late."<sup>17</sup> Further lamenting the influence of critics, he asserted "It is my conviction that the public always shows itself more honest in its spontaneity than do those who officially set themselves up as judges of works of art...the less the public was predisposed favorably or unfavorably toward a musical work, the more healthy were its reactions to the work and the more propitious to the development of the art of music."<sup>18</sup> Stravinsky professed particular irritation when, following the première of one of his works, a critic would praise or deride the performance, rather than attempt to assess the work itself. "How can the critic know," asked the exasperated composer rhetorically, "whether a piece of music he does not know is well or ill performed?"<sup>19</sup> To be sure, first performances of Stravinsky's late works

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<sup>15</sup> Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out*, 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 119.

<sup>18</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 119.

were not always given under ideal circumstances, as commissions often dictated less than ideal venues, incompetent performers, and inadequate rehearsal time.

What then, did Stravinsky regard as the proper function of criticism, if anything? The composer was largely silent in this regard, choosing more often to berate his critics and their methods rather than suggest alternatives. The ideal role of criticism, he suggested, lay in educating the audience, teaching listeners to understand and love the “new reality” that was a piece of his music.<sup>20</sup> He desired critics and scholars who could help bridge the gap of understanding between composer and audience. “When I compose something,” he wrote, “I cannot conceive that it should fail to be recognized for what it is, and understood. I use the language of music...my grammar will be clear to the musician who has followed music up to where my contemporaries and I have brought it.”<sup>21</sup> Stravinsky was certainly aware of the gulf between contemporary audiences and composers, having noted years earlier: “Of course, the instruction and education of the public have not kept pace with the evolution of technique.”<sup>22</sup> Never did he need sympathetic critics to instruct and encourage his audience more than when he embarked on his last compositional phase.

In the decades since the composer’s death, the largely negative perception of Stravinsky’s late works has remained relatively unchanged. The works have remained in obscurity as critics, composers, theorists, and historians have constructed competing narratives of their meaning and value. Two principal strains of thought have emerged, each of which contends to be the last word on the late music.

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<sup>20</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics*, 37.

Expert theorists and composers of serial music have forged the most influential and durable narrative for understanding Stravinsky's late works. In the half-century following the composer's incorporation of serial techniques, academic specialists in serial theory, led by Milton Babbitt and Claudio Spies (born 1925), have dominated late Stravinsky studies, producing a highly influential body of analytical literature devoted to the scores. This enormously specialized and technical scholarship, still regarded as seminal in theoretical circles, greatly increased the prestige of its authors and the university programs they represented. The new supremacy of serial theorists in late Stravinsky studies represented a dramatic reversal of fortune for these musicians. Previously, serial composition had been a segregated province, relegated to the shadows of the musical establishment and peopled only by those devoted enough to master its unique musical and intellectual challenges. The exposure that Babbitt, Spies, and other scholars received in the 1950s and 1960s, due in large part to Stravinsky's sympathies, helped bring their own music briefly into the mainstream of academic life in the years that followed.

Babbitt and Spies advantageously cast Stravinsky's late music in a light that promoted serial composition. These scholars and others have, in effect, drawn the Stravinsky of the late 1950s and 1960s into their own, highly exclusive, serial sphere. Richard Taruskin (born 1945), one of the preeminent Stravinsky scholars on the current scene, has argued that in Babbitt's landmark essay, "Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky"<sup>23</sup> the Princeton theorist effectively absorbed Stravinsky's adoption of serialism into the commonly accepted narrative of Schoenberg's own compositional development. Babbitt presented Stravinsky's works after *The Rake's Progress* as incremental

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<sup>23</sup> Milton Babbitt, "Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky," *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1972), 165-85.

steps on a journey that culminated in his adoption of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. Taruskin posited that Babbitt's scholarship:

effectively turns the story of Stravinsky's late career into a teleology, a quest narrative, and in so doing it assimilates the story to yet another myth, one of the great myths of the twentieth century, that of the general teleology according to which the structure of music, and the compositional practices that produce that structure, have been said to evolve by stages, and inevitably, from tonal to atonal, finally to serial.<sup>24</sup>

The enormous influence of Babbitt's scholarship is apparent in the universal labeling of Stravinsky's final creative period as his "serial" period, this despite the fact that the names of his other creative periods—Russian and neoclassical—reflect the composer's sources of inspiration, not a technique.

Not only have Babbitt and his colleagues established the accepted narrative for Stravinsky's late development, they also ordained that detailed serial analysis was the most appropriate mode for illuminating these works. Even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, elaborate analysis of serial methods forms the majority of the scholarship devoted to Stravinsky's late music. This literature is extraordinarily specialized, positivistic, and scientific in tone, reflecting Babbitt's ideal of the expert composer/theorist whose intellectual rigor is on par with leading minds in other humanities and sciences of academia. This fixation on analysis has filtered down into music programs at colleges and universities; generations of graduate students have contributed to the analytical literature devoted to Stravinsky's late music. Of the over 600 Stravinsky theses and dissertations catalogued by James R. Heintze, over sixty are devoted to the

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Stravinsky and Us," *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 275-76.



serial analysis of the composer's late works.<sup>25</sup> Less than twenty studies focus on issues other than serial analysis.

In his widely read critical survey, Roman Vlad (born 1919) offers arguments that supported Babbitt's view.<sup>26</sup> An Italian serial composer, pianist, and writer of Romanian birth, Vlad came to maturity during the serial vogue of the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> Vlad's focus on the serial works of Stravinsky, as well as his writings on Schoenberg, Webern, and Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-1975), betray his considerable interest in dodecaphony. Like many young serialists of his generation, Vlad was dismissive of Stravinsky's neoclassical music. For him, the composer's exploration of neoclassicism served as necessary preparation for his adoption of serialism, a change that represented a distinct break with the traditions of the past:

Stravinsky felt the need, before deciding to take the decisive step towards the adoption of dodecaphony, for a long period of empirical simplification, a return to a less complex exploitation of tonal relations.... He seems to have realized instinctively that he could not take the final step over the threshold of a tradition before he had made it really his very own and had relived its fundamental values in his own creative experience. The implication was that once this process had been completed, he too would adopt the twelve-note system.<sup>28</sup>

Like Babbitt, Vlad presented Stravinsky's works after *The Rake's Progress* as steps on a journey leading to his repentant conversion to serialism, "a step which implied among

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<sup>25</sup> James R. Heintze, *Igor Stravinsky: An International Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations, 1925-2000*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Frederick Fuller (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> Roberta Costa, "Vlad, Roman," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXVI, 848-49.

<sup>28</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 273.

other things the recognition that the path opened by Schoenberg was indeed the main road of twentieth-century music.”<sup>29</sup>

Today’s leading authority on Stravinsky’s late style, Joseph Straus has continued the approach pioneered by Babbitt and Spies. In numerous articles from the past two decades and in his monograph on Stravinsky’s late music, Straus has retained Babbitt’s analytical focus and much of the positivistic tone of his Princeton predecessors, addressing issues of expression only apologetically. Straus has reinforced Babbitt’s conceptual model for understanding Stravinsky’s serial music, framing the late music in a quest narrative: “Listening to and studying these works engenders a sense of courageous discovery. Here is an aging composer at the height of his eminence turning away from familiar habits to try something new, not just once, but again and again, searching restlessly, and creating works of unsurpassed beauty and power.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike his predecessors, however, Straus has placed greater emphasis on Stravinsky’s atypical approach to serial technique, his extensions of Schoenberg’s methods, and the novel character of the resulting works:

His change of style was in an obvious sense a repudiation and a rejection of what he had done before. The late music is really new, shockingly so, to Stravinsky and to the world...neither he nor anyone else had written music like this before.... At the same time, of course, the stylistic break is far from complete, nor did Stravinsky seek to make a complete break. But as he matured as a serial composer, the links to his own earlier music became more and more tenuous. His familiar compositional habits—the harmonies, melodies, and rhythms that define his earlier style—gradually recede and almost disappear over the course of the late period.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Other scholars, including Richard Taruskin and Mikhail Druskin (1905-1991), have argued exactly the opposite point, finding that late in Stravinsky's career his works powerfully recalled the gestures of his early, Russian works.

The durability of Babbitt's widely accepted narrative remains evident in Straus's contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*.<sup>32</sup> This compendium of contemporary scholarship offers a survey of Stravinsky's works, broken down by commonly accepted periods, each penned by a leading scholar. The title given to each of these stylistic divisions is telling; scholars in turn explore "Stravinsky's Neoclassicism," and "Stravinsky's Theatres," only in the end turning to Straus's contribution, "Stravinsky the Serialist." The distinction is subtle but striking. Scholars of Stravinsky's earlier style periods recognized that, in adopting various modes, the Russian composer's essential personality always remained in ascendance, producing a unique brand of neoclassicism and theater distinctively Stravinskian. Straus's chosen title, "Stravinsky the Serialist," as opposed to a hypothetical alternative, "Stravinsky's Serialism," reflects a distinctly different point of view on behalf of its author. In adopting serialism, Stravinsky was joining a discrete school of specialized composition, surrendering—to a greater extent than ever before—his own identity and values for those of a small, highly defined cadre of composers and theorists. Straus's title implied that serialism dominated Stravinsky or exerted at least a coequal force with the Russian composer's creative urge.

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<sup>32</sup> Joseph N. Straus, "Stravinsky the Serialist," *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149-74.

Writing in 1966, William Austin (1920-2000) protested the analytical focus of Stravinsky scholarship.<sup>33</sup> Austin concluded his controversial survey,<sup>34</sup> *Music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: From Debussy through Stravinsky*, with an ardent critique of the literature devoted to Stravinsky's serial music. Austin argued that the attention paid by scholars was significantly misdirected: focusing on dry, technical analysis of twelve-tone methodology, while losing sight of the composer's larger artistic ideas and expressive agenda.

If [critics] studied the scores, it was chiefly to trace the "serial" technique and the "advance" from one work to the next in the use of this technique. Though Craft, Mason, Keller, Cone, Vlad, and other close students of the scores agreed that the technique was properly subordinate to the ideas, and that Stravinsky was as individual a genius as ever in his latest phase, still they could not forbear to discuss at length the manipulation of the series, and they were rarely able to show the connection between this and the individual harmony and rhythm, or to show convincingly how the series served the form and the idea.... The unbalanced emphasis of the apologists naturally tended to confirm hostile views.<sup>35</sup>

Udo Kasemets, himself a composer of the dodecaphonic school, also noted the illogic of the single-minded approach analysts brought to bear on Stravinsky's late scores. "To make the observations of the treatment of the tone-row the *only* point of departure in criticism," Kasemets reckoned, "would be similar to judging Beethoven's creations solely on the basis of his harmonic thinking."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> William W. Austin, "Stravinsky to His Eightieth Birthday," *Music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: From Debussy through Stravinsky* (New York: Norton, 1966), 523-37.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Wuorinen, "Book Reviews," *Perspectives of New Music* V/1 (Fall 1966), 142-47.

<sup>35</sup> William W. Austin, *Music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 524-25.

<sup>36</sup> Udo Kasemets, "Recent Works of Igor Stravinsky," *The Canadian Music Journal* IV/2 (Winter 1960), 63.

A second model for understanding Stravinsky's late music was first postulated by Edward T. Cone (1917-2004), a musicologist who, like Babbitt and Spies, served on the faculty at Princeton University. Cone suggested a model for understanding Stravinsky's many, chameleon-like style changes by first emphasizing that transformation was a vital aspect of the composer's creative drive, and second, by recognizing key stylistic constants that underlay each transformation. This theory sought to make sense of the many jarring changes in Stravinsky's work, from his folk-inspired Russian ballets, to the abstract neoclassical instrumental works, to his late scores that incorporated serialism. Cone first expressed this point of view in two seminal essays, each first published in 1962: "The Uses of Convention: Stravinsky and His Models"<sup>37</sup> and "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method."<sup>38</sup>

For many years it was fashionable to accuse Stravinsky, like Picasso, of artistic inconstancy: of embracing a series of manners instead of achieving a personal style. Today it is becoming increasingly clear that Stravinsky, like Picasso, has been remarkably consistent in his stylistic development. Each apparently divergent phase has been the superficial manifestation of an interest that has eventually led to an enlargement and a new consolidation of the artist's technical resources.<sup>39</sup>

The essence of Stravinsky's art, Cone posited, lay in his exceptionally creative rethinking of preexisting materials and styles, not in the generation of pristine musical ideas. As the composer himself famously admitted, "My instinct is to recompose.... Whatever inter-

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<sup>37</sup> Edward T. Cone, "The Uses of Convention: Stravinsky and His Models," *The Musical Quarterly* XLVIII/3 (1962), 287-99.

<sup>38</sup> Edward T. Cone, "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, revised ed., ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1972), 155-64.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

ests me, whatever I love, I wish to make my own (I am probably describing a rare form of kleptomania.)”<sup>40</sup>

Many critics had taken Stravinsky to task for this trait, believing that his sticky musical fingers pointed to the ultimate vacuity of his art. Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956), the eminent Baltimore critic, alleged that “So far as I can make out, Stravinsky never had a musical idea in his life—that is, in the sense that Schubert and Mozart had them.”<sup>41</sup> The musicologist Paul Henry Lang (1901-1991) was also highly critical of this trait, charging that “with every one of his conversions it becomes clearer that Stravinsky is not willing to face the higher moral issues confronting the artist, and is constantly looking for ready-made tracks upon which to launch his marvelous musicianship.”<sup>42</sup> Others remained intrigued by audible, yet somehow indefinable, properties that made Stravinsky always sound like Stravinsky, no matter what stylistic mask he may have been wearing.

Proponents of Cone’s view have endeavored to show that changes in Stravinsky’s style were largely superficial. Under the veneer of each new work lay powerful factors that made the music undeniably Stravinsky. Several have sought to identify these perennial traits, including the English scholar Jonathan Cross. In *The Stravinsky Legacy* (1998), Cross wrote of the music that “composers have begun to look beyond the attractive surface...and have examined more deeply the ways in which in all of his works,

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<sup>40</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), 110.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Louis Mencken, *American Mercury* (December 1925), quoted in Mark N. Grant, *Maestros of the Pen*, 156.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Henry Lang, “Dodecaphony,” *Musicology and Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 107.

Russian, neoclassical and serial, Stravinsky found original solutions to the problems presented by modernism.”<sup>43</sup> Cross examined these important stylistic elements, notably Stravinsky’s use of inorganic block forms, static harmonies, repetition, broad historical references, and a perennial reliance on an impersonal, ritual tone. With such constants in place, the unity of the composer’s oeuvre was assured, despite changes of surface gestures or deeper changes of technique. No longer the primary hallmark of Stravinsky’s style, technique was now a matter of choice for the composer, an aspect that he could alter significantly with each late work.

One of the most enlightening and refreshing looks at Stravinsky’s oeuvre, Louis Andriessen (born 1939) and Elmer Schönberger’s *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky* (1989), presented the composer’s music in a fashion in line with the thoughts of Cone and Cross. Andriessen, a Dutch composer and Stravinsky devotee, offered a highly democratic collection of unconventional essays that confronted many aspects of Stravinsky’s works. Andriessen and Schönberger looked at Stravinsky’s music with a leveling eye, presenting Stravinsky’s neglected works alongside his popular blockbusters, while minimizing the traditional musicological distinctions of Russian, neoclassical, and serial. The message of Andriessen has been that Stravinsky’s essential legacy was his eclectic attitude, and in that regard, he has maintained that “The true influence of Stravinsky has only begun.”<sup>44</sup>

Other important studies of Stravinsky’s music, including those by Eric Walter White (1905-1985), André Boucourechliev (1925-1997), Mikhail Druskin, and Stephen

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 6.

Walsh, can be aligned with the model of Cone and Cross. The product of over forty years of study,<sup>45</sup> White's classic survey of Stravinsky's output offered a detailed description of each work in the composer's catalogue.<sup>46</sup> White's step-by-step approach avoided broad stylistic pronouncements and like Andriessen and Schönberger, de-emphasized traditional distinctions of Russian, neoclassical, and serial. A dedicated student, White asserted that the sound of Stravinsky's music remained remarkably consistent, despite the composer's adoption of serial techniques, and that the composer never abandoned his tonal foundations.<sup>47</sup> What is more, White argued that by the 1950s, serialism had achieved sufficient antiquity for Stravinsky to acquire its techniques as a historical style.<sup>48</sup>

A French composer and musicologist of Bulgarian birth, André Boucourechliev came of age during the heyday of serial composition. His youthful attendance of summer courses at Darmstadt, as well as the inclusion of his own compositions as part of the Domaine Musical of Pierre Boulez (born 1925), proves his intimate knowledge of serial composition.<sup>49</sup> Despite this interest, however, Boucourechliev argued articulately for an integrated view of Stravinsky's works:

Here, then, I believe, is the final key to his whole work, the revelation of his unity as a man and the continuity of his career as an artist. When we

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<sup>45</sup> David Scott, "White, Eric Walter," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXVII, 338-339.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Walter White, *Igor Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 559.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 560.

<sup>49</sup> Jeremy Drake, "Boucourechliev, André," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), IV, 91-92.



listen to *Canticum Sacrum* and *Oedipus Rex*, *Les Noces* and *Threni*, *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Requiem Canticles*, it is the conceptual similarities and symmetries of which our ears and our minds should be aware, not the contradictions and the ‘breaks’ between one manner and another.<sup>50</sup>

He further pointed out a curious paradox of Stravinsky’s serialism, namely the irony that, in adopting such methods, the composer began once again producing music that, unlike some of his neoclassical works, sounded unmistakably Stravinskian.<sup>51</sup>

An integrated view of Stravinsky’s serial period is also supported by the writings of Russian pianist and musicologist Mikhail Druskin, a student of the celebrated Stravinsky scholar Boris Asaf’yev (1884-1949).<sup>52</sup> In regard to the stylistic diversity of Stravinsky’s music, Druskin wrote, “beneath all these differences of manner we are aware of a single personality, a unity in complexity and a specifically Stravinskian vital sensibility, the manifestation of which changes with each new work.”<sup>53</sup> Druskin refuted those who had claimed that Stravinsky’s adoption of serialism was “fortuitous” or an effort to stay on top of current music trends.<sup>54</sup>

The paramount Stravinsky scholar on the current scene, Stephen Walsh began his career as a freelance critic for top English periodicals in the 1960s, when serialism was

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<sup>50</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meie, 1987), 23-24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>52</sup> Lyudmila Kovnatskaya, “Druskin, Mikhail Semyonovich,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), VII, 618-20.

<sup>53</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works, and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

largely regarded as a spent force.<sup>55</sup> Walsh has consistently pointed out significant peculiarities in Stravinsky's approach to serialism, features that strongly differentiate the Russian composer's late music from that of Schoenberg and his school:

Where for Schoenberg serialism was a way of sustaining the organic forms of German classicism and the harmonic and structural unity of music that was at the same time intricately varied in detail, it seems to have been the closed system itself that interested Stravinsky. His serial treatments typically make capital out of the fact that twelve-note rows are in essence repetitive.... By nearly always preferring bold linear forms, Stravinsky throws this property of serialism into relief, making us at least subconscious of the fact that the various twelve-note form are no more than different routes through the whole field, like so many changes in a peal of bells.<sup>56</sup>

Not only has Walsh argued that Stravinsky's late music differs significantly from that of Schoenberg, the scholar has also identified many similarities among the Russian, neoclassical, and serial periods of the Russian composer.

From the point of view of Cone and Cross, Stravinsky's adoption of serialism is to be understood as more a journey of exploitation, rather than exploration. His conversion was not due to failing creative powers or a pitiable desire to jump on a new compositional bandwagon; it was simply another step in a creative life marked by significant but ultimately superficial transformations, the latest episode in his annexations of available styles. This Cross-Cone model for understanding Stravinsky's late music offers mixed benefits for performance and promotion of these serial works. One particular problem is the general avoidance of detailed confrontation and discussion of the late music. Cross focuses primarily on Stravinsky's early, most popular pieces, which are held up as para-

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<sup>55</sup> Stanley Sadie, "Walsh, Stephen," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXVII, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 233.

digms of essential Stravinsky traits. In this light, progressively later scores are seen as further illustrations of established practices and are not considered directly for their own uniqueness. Furthermore, this view confirms a well-worn reproach of Stravinsky's music, namely that the composer's most original and valuable ideas are found in his early work, with the later scores offering little in the way of original ideas.

### Methodology

This study will survey the critical reception of Stravinsky's major late vocal works in England and America. The reception of each work will be traced chronologically, beginning with responses to première performances and progressing to contemporary scholarship. Initial reviews, appraisals, and analyses appeared in a number of American and British periodicals: major newspapers, general periodicals, popular musical magazines, and scholarly journals of musicology and music theory. In addition, a wealth of secondary literature, in the form of analyses, essays, and monographs, published steadily since the composer's death, represents continuing criticism of Stravinsky's serial music. A host of professional critics, composers, performers, music historians, and music theorists have authored criticism of the composer's late works. Considered herein will be critical reactions to *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* (1954), *Canticum sacrum* (1956), *Threni* (1958), *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* (1961), *The Flood* (1962), *Introitus* (1965), and *Requiem Canticles* (1966).

Sacred choral works form the preponderance of the music under scrutiny. Considered as a whole, Stravinsky's choral music, both sacred and secular, is unrivaled in the twentieth century. As Walsh has remarked, "the size, significance and diversity of his

existing choral oeuvre speaks for itself, and represents beyond doubt the greatest individual contribution in this century to the repertoire of this transcendental yet in many ways recalcitrant medium.”<sup>57</sup> The human voice was a clear preoccupation of Stravinsky’s final years, just as dance occupied his Russian phase and abstract, absolute instrumental works had been the primary focus of his neoclassic period.

This repertory dates from the early 1950s to the cessation of Stravinsky’s creative faculties in 1966. After the international success of his opera, *The Rake’s Progress*, regarded as the apex of his neoclassic style, he turned incrementally to a style marked by increasing economy, stark contrapuntal textures, and serial pitch organization. Characteristically, Stravinsky composed these works for a remarkable variety of media, from the full orchestra of *Agon* (1957) to many novel chamber ensembles, such as the Venetian-inspired antiphonal strings and brass of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*. Of the major late works, all but three feature the human voice or voices in combination with instrumental ensemble. Each presents an eclectic amalgamation of historical styles, employing antiquated stylistic features from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and Classic Eras. The music is highly concentrated, featuring a greater number of ideas per bar than works from previous decades. As Stravinsky acknowledged, “I know that portions of *Agon* contain three times as much music for the same clock length as some other pieces of mine.”<sup>58</sup> Many of the works follow the lead of the composer’s *Mass* (1948), exploring Judeo-Christian themes, from the creation story of Genesis to the evangelistic proclamations of the Gospels. As such, Stravinsky’s final works become, more than ever, con-

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen Walsh, “The Choral Music,” *Tempo* 81 (1967), 51.

<sup>58</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 23.

cerned with the written word. True to his statement that “musically speaking, Babel is a blessing,”<sup>59</sup> Stravinsky set texts from many sources and languages in his final years, ranging from contemporary English poetry and the Hebrew of the Pentateuch, to the Chester Miracle Plays of medieval England and the Latin of the Vulgate Bible. Finally, the late works are deeply preoccupied with death, a feature conspicuously evident in their elegiac dedications; Dylan Thomas, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, T. S. Eliot, and Aldous Huxley each received memorial tributes from the composer.

The three major exclusively instrumental works are each exceptional in terms of Stravinsky’s overall late style. One of the greatest popular successes of his career, *Agon* (1957) represented the composer’s last collaboration with George Balanchine (1904-1983). Set to Balanchine’s acclaimed choreography, *Agon* was the final ballet in a triptych based on Greek mythology, with *Apollo Musagetes* (1928) and *Orpheus* (1948). It is the only work of Stravinsky’s final years written specifically to be danced, and its exceptional vitality and rhythmic vigor is due to this fact. No doubt the success of the ballet stems from its brilliant orchestration, which inspired nostalgia for Stravinsky’s early scores. Despite its success, however, the path of *Agon* was not one the composer chose to follow. Stravinsky’s only concerto from his last years, *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* (1960), was also exceptional in terms of the composer’s late style. Unlike his *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments* (1924) or *Capriccio* (1929), both of which had been conceived as concert showpieces for Stravinsky himself to appear as soloist, *Movements* was never performed by the composer. This last concerto was instead inspired by a substantial cash offer from Karl Weber, a wealthy Swiss industrialist, as a gift

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

for his wife, herself an amateur pianist.<sup>60</sup> *Movements*, widely acknowledged to be one of the most difficult and abstract works of Stravinsky's final phase, was unlike anything else the composer ever wrote. Its initial reception in New York's Town Hall was cool; plans to repeat the work on the same concert were abandoned because of the tepid audience reaction.<sup>61</sup> Stravinsky's last purely instrumental work, *Variations* (1965), was not commissioned, being a work of his own creative initiative. It was dedicated to Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), a member of the composer's inner circle of Hollywood friends, on the author's death. The world première took place in Chicago to meager national press. The first New York performance occurred only as a result of Balanchine's choreography for the score, an event that went largely unnoticed by music critics.<sup>62</sup>

I will begin with a brief retelling of the artistic crisis that brought about Stravinsky's conversion to serialism. Two controversial works, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* and *Canticum sacrum*, provided ample fodder for the press as the composer shifted musical language in front of the eyes and ears of the world. His experimentation then gave way to a fully dodecaphonic work, *Threni*, only to be greeted with the incessant critical complaint of austerity. A few years later, *The Flood*, Stravinsky's musical morality play, was broadcast across America by CBS television in primetime. The results were disastrous: what potentially could have been the composer's greatest triumph and a high point for music of the twentieth century was an embarrassment. As his musical language became more and more abstract, interest grew less and less, so much so that

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<sup>60</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Second Exile*, 378.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Salzman, "Current Chronicle—United States—Princeton," *The Musical Quarterly* LIII/1 (January 1967), 80.

his last premières, *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles*, were received with only a shadow of the hoopla that greeted his works just a few years before.

### The Nature of Relevant Literature

Stravinsky's celebrity, the result of the veneration of his early scores, guaranteed a substantial measure of attention was paid to the composer's late works, despite the unpopularity of his serial idiom. The literature pertinent to the late scores is substantial, although not nearly as vast as that devoted to earlier works. Premières garnered reviews in the American popular press, notably in *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Saturday Review*, and *The New Yorker*, as well as in a number of popular periodicals of music, such as *Etude*, *High Fidelity*, *American Record Guide*, and, most importantly, the long-running *Musical America*. Critiques of the late works, as well as important studies of the composer's oeuvre, are found in *The Musical Quarterly*, long regarded as the preeminent chronicle of American musicology. Journals of music theory have also offered a reliable forum for studies of Stravinsky's late music; important analyses have appeared in *Perspectives of New Music*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, and *Journal of Music Theory*.

Although Stravinsky was a citizen of the United States during his final creative period, British musicians arguably paid greater attention to the composer's late works than did their American counterparts. Many popular English periodicals of music featured reviews of his premières, especially *Musical Opinion*, *Musical Courier*, *London Musical Events*, *The Music Magazine*, and *The Musical Times*. Leading journals of British musicology, including *The Music Review* and *Music & Letters* featured important scholarship devoted to the late works. Analyses were published in journals of music

theory, including *The Score* and *Music and Musicians*. *Tempo*, a journal of contemporary music issued by Stravinsky's publisher Boosey & Hawkes, contained a number of reviews and analyses of the composer's late scores. What is more, opinions from *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*,<sup>63</sup> have set the tone regarding reception of Stravinsky's late works for over half a century.

Significant works of scholarship have often marked milestones and anniversaries in Stravinsky's life. Important criticism by Paul Henry Lang and others was featured in a landmark issue of *The Musical Quarterly* that honored the composer's eightieth birthday.<sup>64</sup> The composer's death elicited a landslide of tributes, most importantly a memorial issue of *Perspectives of New Music*.<sup>65</sup> A number of significant monographs were published in the years following Stravinsky's death: biographical studies by Paul Horgan and Lillian Libbman, as well as new and updated critical studies of his work by Eric Walter White, Roman Vlad, Neil Tierney, and Francis Routh.<sup>66</sup> Less than a decade later, the composer's centennial prompted still more scholarship, including a landmark analyti-

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<sup>63</sup> See Rollo H. Myers, "Stravinsky, Igor Feodorovich," *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 9 vols., ed. Eric Blom. London: Macmillan, 1954, VIII, 137-43, Eric Walter White and Jeremy Noble, "Stravinsky, Igor," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), XVIII, 240-65, and Stephen Walsh, "Stravinsky, Igor," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXIV, 528-67.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Henry Lang, "Editorial," *The Musical Quarterly* XLVIII/3 (1962), 362-71. Reprinted as *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: Norton, 1963).

<sup>65</sup> "Stravinsky: A Composer's Memorial," *Perspectives of New Music* IX/2 & X/1 (1971).

<sup>66</sup> Paul Horgan, *Encounters With Stravinsky: A Personal Record* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972). Lillian Libbman, *And Music at the Close: Stravinsky's Last Years* (New York: Norton, 1972). Neil Tierney, *The Unknown Country: The Life of Igor Stravinsky* (London: Robert Hale, 1977). Francis Routh, *Stravinsky* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1975), Master Musicians Series, ed. Sir Jack Westrup, unnumbered volume.



cal study by Pieter van den Toorn.<sup>67</sup> That same year, numerous scholars offered papers at conferences honoring the composer at the University of Notre Dame and the University of California, San Diego.<sup>68</sup> The 1980s also saw publication of aforementioned monographs by André Boucourechliev, Mikhail Druskin, and Stephen Walsh.

In the 1990s scholars made great strides in understanding the Russian origins of Stravinsky's music. The view of the composer as perennially Russian, made ubiquitous among the listening public through the overwhelming popularity of the early ballet scores, was given eloquent advocacy by the American scholar Richard Taruskin. Through his epoch-making study of the composer's Russian roots, Taruskin has established himself not only as one of the most elite scholars on Stravinsky, but as a leading figure in American musicology as well. *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*,<sup>69</sup> Taruskin's mammoth two-volume work, has revolutionized critical understanding of Stravinsky's familiar early music by undertaking a detailed study of the long neglected Russian sources for these much-loved masterworks. Not only has Taruskin's work served to identify the folk traditions that were Stravinsky's initial inspiration, he has persuasively argued that the composer's fundamentally Russian traits became critical components for musical modernism, thereby further elevating the composer's status in the overall history of twentieth-century music.

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<sup>67</sup> Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>68</sup> Ethan Haimo and Paul Johnson, ed., *Stravinsky Retrospectives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) and Jann Pasler, ed., *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

The 2000s have seen the rise of Joseph Straus and Stephen Walsh in Stravinsky studies. Beginning in the late 1990s, Straus published a series of studies in major journals of musicology and music theory, a history of publication that coalesced into his landmark monograph of 2001, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, the first and only book-length study of this repertory. The highly-anticipated publication of Walsh's two-volume biography of the composer, as well as his contribution to the second edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, has assured his influence will remain for decades.<sup>70</sup>

Considering the incredible volume of literature devoted to Stravinsky's life and works, reception histories of the composer's music remain comparatively rare. A few illuminating works, nonetheless, have demonstrated the rich potential for Stravinsky and reception history. Boris Schwarz provided an early look at the reception of the composer's work in Soviet Russia. This timely essay coincided with Stravinsky's return to Russia in 1962, after an absence of nearly fifty years. Schwarz showed that "Soviet evaluations of Stravinsky range from wholehearted approval in the 1920s through cautious reappraisal in the 1930s to rigid rejection in the 1940s and 1950s."<sup>71</sup> Walsh, in his study of the St. Petersburg circle of Stravinsky's youth, has demonstrated how the composer's Russian peers turned on him out of jealousy of his international fame and how these mu-

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<sup>70</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring, Russia and France, 1882-1934* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), and "Stravinsky, Igor," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXIV, 528-67.

<sup>71</sup> Boris Schwarz, "Stravinsky in Soviet Russian Criticism," *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: Norton, 1963), 74.

sicians looked on ballet with disdain.<sup>72</sup> Further, Walsh found the roots of some consistent themes in Stravinsky criticism in the English and New York press of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Press reviews color his massive, two-volume account of Stravinsky's life, as well. Of particular value to American readers are Walsh's translations of Swiss and Italian accounts of important late Stravinsky premières. Joan Evans, in her essay on Stravinsky's reception in Nazi Germany, demonstrated that, despite his work being labeled "Entartete Musik," the composer's neoclassical scores played a more significant role in Nazi Germany than has been assumed, creating the necessary groundwork for his postwar popularity in that country.<sup>73</sup> Stuart Campbell, in "Stravinsky and the Critics" from *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, gives a brief survey of themes expressed by critics throughout the composer's career.<sup>74</sup> Campbell's focus is primarily on themes applicable to Stravinsky's Russian and neoclassic eras, with scant mention of the composer's serial years. In terms of reception of the late choral music, the only work on the subject is that of Charles M. Joseph. In his multi-faceted study, *Stravinsky: Inside and Out*,<sup>75</sup> Joseph delved into the Stravinsky archives, offering revealing insights into the composer's private reactions to his critics. Joseph paid particular attention to *The Flood*, perhaps the most dubious of the composer's late works. Not only has Joseph illuminated

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<sup>72</sup> Walsh, "Stravinsky and the Vicious Circle: Some Remarks about the Composer and the Press," *Composition–Performance–Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Wyndham Thomas (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), 132-44.

<sup>73</sup> Joan Evans, "Stravinsky's Music in Hitler's Germany," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* LVI/III (Fall 2003), 525-594.

<sup>74</sup> Stuart Campbell, "Stravinsky and the Critics," *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 230-47.

<sup>75</sup> Charles M. Joseph, "Television and *The Flood*: Anatomy of and 'Inglorious Flop'" *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 132-61.

the genesis of the work, but he also explored the press fiasco that came in the wake of the work's première on national television.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “A BAD BOY ALL THE WAY”: STRAVINSKY’S SECOND COMPOSITIONAL CRISIS

The stylistic transformation undertaken by Igor Stravinsky in the 1950s has been called “arguably the profoundest surprise in the history of music.”<sup>1</sup> Four decades after the riotous première of *Le sacre du printemps*, the once radical young Stravinsky had achieved the venerated status of a septuagenarian. As the composer’s protégé Robert Craft (born 1923) recalled, “Suddenly, with his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, Stravinsky was going, from then on, to be one of the grand old men, a Schweitzer...and, of course, he determined to be a bad old boy all the way.”<sup>2</sup> One can imagine such an artist retiring on his well-earned laurels, taking quietly to pasture, emerging to accept an occasional honor or to appear at a festival concert, and slipping gently into that good night. Such was not the case for Stravinsky. He proved to have saved his greatest surprise for last, finding yet another way to shock the public and puzzle his critics. The key biographical facts surrounding Stravinsky’s adoption of serialism are well known. Vital questions remain, however, as to the composer’s personal motivation and the extent of influence by colleagues and his Southern California milieu.

Never one to rhapsodize over internal artistic struggles, Stravinsky left only a brief passage in reference to his serial transformation, co-authored by Craft as part of their series of conversation books.

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Keller and Milein Cosman, *Stravinsky Seen and Heard* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Craft, recorded interview for “Program VIII: The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

I have had to survive two crises as a composer, though as I continued to move from work to work I was not aware of either of them as such, or, indeed, of any momentous change. The first—the loss of Russia and its language of words as well as of music—affected every circumstance of my personal no less than my artistic life, which made recovery more difficult. Only after a decade of samplings, experiments, amalgamations did I find the path to *Oedipus Rex* and the *Symphony of Psalms*. Crisis number two was brought on by the natural outgrowing of the special incubator in which I wrote *The Rake's Progress*.... The period of adjustment was only half as long this time, but as I look back on it I am surprised at how long I continued to straddle my “styles.” Was it because one has to unlearn as well as to learn, and at seventy the unlearning is more difficult?<sup>3</sup>

Well aware of his own stylistic trajectory, Stravinsky drew a parallel between his serial conversion and his earlier shift from his Russian-inspired style to neoclassicism. Each represented, according to him, an unconscious struggle that played out as he moved from work to work. In each case he remained hard at work, finding an incremental path to a new style through daily composition. But as is to be expected, Stravinsky's brevity leaves critical aspects of the story untold.

By the 1940s Stravinsky's career as a composer of international standing was already in its fourth decade. Exiled from his native Russia by the Bolshevik Revolution, the blue-blooded Stravinsky had been a citizen of France, Europe, and the world. The composer's fortunes, however, were perilously vulnerable to the political upheavals and conflagrations of the twentieth century. He had weathered the tumultuous years of the Second World War in the United States, living among other prominent émigré artists and intellectuals in Hollywood, California. His years in America had seen a dramatic turn in the composer's fortunes. As a new refugee in 1940, Stravinsky faced cultural isolation and financial difficulties due to limited conducting engagements and dwindling royalties

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<sup>3</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 23.

from Europe.<sup>4</sup> He was now willing to accept commissions for works of more popular appeal than artistic merit, resulting in such dubious creations as the *Circus Polka* (1942) for Barnum & Bailey's elephants and the *Scherzo a la Russe* (1944) for the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. In 1945 Stravinsky became a citizen of the United States. That same year saw the beginnings of a partnership with the British music publisher Boosey & Hawkes, an alliance that protected not only his new works but also earlier "Russian" compositions in newly revised editions.<sup>5</sup>

Robert Craft, Stravinsky's controversial amanuensis, interpreter, advocate, and literary collaborator, entered the composer's life in 1948. A recent graduate of the Juilliard School, the impetuous young conductor boldly approached Stravinsky for help in obtaining some of the composer's more neglected scores for performance. This contact sparked a professional association and personal friendship that was to last for over twenty years. Craft became a critical ingredient in Stravinsky's renewed fortunes. Initially, his presence helped the thoroughly European composer assimilate the culture and language of America. As their association deepened to friendship, the young musician's skills as a conductor and promotional savvy aided Stravinsky at the podium, while his progressive musical interests proved crucial in expanding the composer's musical horizons. From the madrigals of Don Carlo Gesualdo (c.1560-1613) to the works of Anton von Webern, Craft's interest in very old and very new music mirrored Stravinsky's own tastes. Craft also assisted with the drudgeries of correspondence and increasingly provided the literary voice of the aging composer. Furthermore, Craft became something of

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Walsh, "Stravinsky, Igor," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 Vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXIV, 548.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 124.

a creative enabler to Stravinsky, suggesting projects and ideas that inspired the master. As Walsh has speculated, “but for Craft, [Stravinsky’s] creative life might well have ended when he was seventy.”<sup>6</sup> Craft’s influence in Stravinsky’s late life and music cannot be overestimated, despite his being vilified by many who distrusted his sympathy for the avant-garde.

The day 11 September 1951 saw the première of *The Rake’s Progress*, a watershed event in Stravinsky’s creative life. The centerpiece of the Venice International Festival of Contemporary Music, the opera became one of the composer’s greatest artistic and popular achievements. Not only was it proof of the turnaround in Stravinsky’s fortunes since his immigration to America, *The Rake’s Progress* would prove to be the finale of the composer’s neoclassicism, a style that had occupied him for nearly three decades. As Craft recalled:

A turning point in Stravinsky’s life was when he went to Europe for *The Rake* in 1951. He’d been living in California, after all, for a dozen years and he went back to Europe for the première of this huge work. The first thing, was that he was greeted much more warmly and with far more enthusiasm from everyone—all age groups—than he had ever been greeted in the United States, or at least, so it seemed to him...it was, really, an extraordinary effect in him, to arrive in a city and find—Milan, I’m referring to—and find that the streets were all roped off and there were police, because 100,000 people perhaps had turned out, it was in the newspapers, that he was arriving...<sup>7</sup>

Throughout his career it was success as much as failure that inspired transformation in Stravinsky. Never content to repeat a triumph, he instead struck out in new directions. After the success of *The Rake’s Progress*, Stravinsky was indeed primed for change.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 421.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Craft, “The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.



Many young European musicians were seeking new directions as well. Dismayed by the horrors of the Second World War, a new avant-garde reacted vehemently against the use of tradition represented by neoclassicism. A new generation of French musicians, led by Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) and his pupil Pierre Boulez, sought new ways to build order out of the chaos of war. To Boulez and many of his contemporaries, *The Rake's Progress*, with its use of eighteenth-century Mozartian operatic conventions, represented a reworking of ideas of a failed European cultural tradition. The way forward, Boulez argued, was the twelve-tone serialism pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg (1885-1935), and especially Anton von Webern.

According to Craft, a few of these young musicians seized the opportunity to share their appreciation for Schoenberg and his Second Viennese School with Stravinsky while he was in Europe for the première of *The Rake's Progress*:

The second thing is, though he went for the première of his opera and though it was, comparatively, well-received, what happened to him, really, is that he discovered that everything was going in another direction.... Scherchen [Hermann Scherchen (1891-1966)] was doing a memorial concert for Schoenberg and was playing the *Orchestra Variations* and the "Dance of the Golden Cafe," *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, and so on. Stravinsky didn't hear this concert, but he saw the programs and he saw the interest in that music. People asked him, right away, "What do you think of Schoenberg?" So, he was, perhaps, somewhat embarrassed that he didn't know and he was certainly embarrassed that he'd never, in all those years together in California, managed to make any contact with Schoenberg.<sup>8</sup>

To Boulez, Schoenberg's ideas were of enormous significance: "For with Schoenberg, we witness one of the most important upheavals that the language of music has ever been

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

called on to undergo.”<sup>9</sup> Boulez believed the serial procedures of Schoenberg’s school so important, he issued the famous edict, “It is not leering demonism but the merest common sense which makes me say that, since the discoveries of the Viennese School, all non-serial composers are *useless*.”<sup>10</sup> To such young composers, Stravinsky’s neoclassicism was music of the past. The French composer had even demonstrated his objections to neoclassicism by leading a chorus of boos at a Paris concert of Stravinsky’s music in 1945.<sup>11</sup>

Like Stravinsky, Schoenberg was a refugee in Hollywood, teaching at the University of California-Los Angeles from 1936 and taking up residence just ten miles away from his Russian rival.<sup>12</sup> Although Craft maintained contact with Schoenberg at the composer’s Brentwood Park home, Stravinsky and the aging Austrian composer never met. The death of the famously triskaidekaphobic Schoenberg on 13 July 1951 came as a great shock to Stravinsky. As Craft recorded in his diary the next day, “Schoenberg’s death ends a uniquely tangential relationship, a *coincidentia oppositrum*, the only bond between the two composers being the forty-year antinomical coupling of their names. Apart from this, they knew practically nothing about, yet were deeply interested in, each other.”<sup>13</sup> According to Craft, Stravinsky felt Schoenberg’s death more deeply than that of

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<sup>9</sup> Pierre Boulez, “Schoenberg is Dead,” *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 209.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> Alex Ross, “Prince Igor: Reexamining Stravinsky’s Reign,” *The New Yorker* LXXVI/33 (6 November 2000), 91.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Stein. “Schoenberg and ‘Kleine Modernsky,’” *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 314.

<sup>13</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 411.

his closer associate, Serge Koussevitzky (1874-1951). A sympathetic telegram was dispatched to Schoenberg's widow from the Stravinsky household; the composer remained silent for the entire day.

But while Stravinsky acknowledged the genius of Schoenberg and grieved at his death, the Russian composer's musical affinities remained far removed from his deceased adversary. As Claudio Spies observed, "He [Stravinsky] never acknowledged, and never wanted to acknowledge, and had, perhaps, absolutely no reason to acknowledge any influence from Schoenberg. Because, in fact, he didn't like Schoenberg's music."<sup>14</sup> The construction of the Stravinsky-Schoenberg dichotomy, which for many had become a paradigm for understanding twentieth-century music, was about more than musical language. More than atonality versus tonal centrality, Stravinsky and Schoenberg represented opposite expressive poles. Stravinsky, with his cool detachment, rhythmic verve, diatonicism, and concern for form, was widely recognized as an Apollonian artist. An extension of the Romantic tradition, Schoenberg's Dionysian music was marked by formal distortions, tempo rubato, chromaticism, and a seismic emotional intensity that would always remain alien to Stravinsky.

It was not Schoenberg, but one of his students, the little known Austrian composer, conductor, and early music scholar Anton von Webern, who would prove to be Stravinsky's primary serial influence. Webern had been dead less than a decade when Stravinsky came to Venice for the first performance of *The Rake's Progress*. Although he died in relative obscurity, a new generation of avant-garde composers, led by Boulez

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<sup>14</sup> Claudio Spies, recorded interview for "Program VIII: The Serial Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103-15 Sound Discs).

and Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007), had raised Webern to the status of a cult icon. Of particular interest to these young composers was total serialism, a compositional system in which Schoenberg's ordering principles were extended to all aspects of composition, including pitch, duration, dynamics, timbre, and articulation.

Craft recalled how members of this European avant-garde set about exposing Stravinsky to Webern's music, while the Russian composer was still in Europe for the première of *The Rake's Progress* in the autumn of 1951:

But the real change came when he went to Germany, specifically Baden-Baden. There was a kind of propaganda effort to expose him to a lot of new music on the part of Strobel [Heinrich Strobel (1898-1970)] and also on the part of Rosbaud [Hans Rosbaud (1895-1962)]. Now, Rosbaud was one of the conductors most esteemed by Stravinsky. Stravinsky was taken off, every day—three or four hours—he was there about ten days, to listen to a whole school of music of which he hadn't an inkling, so, that is where, I would say, he made the big, sort of, conversion to Webernism, was effected in Baden-Baden.<sup>15</sup>

The efforts of Strobel and Rosbaud effectively piqued Stravinsky's interest, for on the same trip he was observed seeking more information about Webern. Craft further reported that Stravinsky set about questioning Karl Amadeus Hartmann (1905-1963), a pupil of Webern, about his former teacher.<sup>16</sup>

Webern soon became Stravinsky's musical darling. The Russian composer was usually notoriously stingy in his praise for his contemporaries, but not for Webern. Craft matched Stravinsky's interest in Webern, by studying, performing, and eventually recording the Austrian's complete works. Webern's persona and music appealed to Stravinsky on multiple fronts. His piety mirrored Stravinsky's own growing artistic

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Craft, "The Serial Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

preoccupation with Christian themes. The composer talked of Webern in religious tones, calling him, “a perpetual Pentecost for all who believe in music.”<sup>17</sup> Commenting on Webern’s correspondence, he observed, “The Webern of the letters is, first of all, profoundly religious, and not only institutionally...Music is a mystery to him, a mystery he does not seek to explain. At the same time, no other meaning exists for him but music.”<sup>18</sup> Stravinsky was also deeply inspired by Webern’s musical objectivity, in his exceptionally cool, cerebral, impersonal compositions. The composer considered Webern as “the discoverer of a new distance between the musical object and ourselves and, therefore, of a new measure of musical time; as such he is supremely important.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, the two composers shared a love of self-imposed limits, as well as an abiding belief in the importance of compositional unity. In Webern’s music Stravinsky found “always the same thing in a thousand different ways...the meaning is always the same, however different the means.”<sup>20</sup> Although he generally avoided the extremes of compression and abstraction found in Webern’s works, the Austrian’s influence on Stravinsky’s late scores was profound.

In addition to the music of Webern, Stravinsky heard other new and challenging works in Germany after the first performance of *The Rake’s Progress*. In Baden-Baden he was played a recording of the Donaueschingen première of Boulez’s *Polyphonie X* (1951). As Craft remembered, it was the “nose-thumbing force of the work that im-

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<sup>17</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), 98.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

pressed the composer of *Le sacre du printemps*, who may have been reminded of his own 1913 premiere, for *Polyphonie X* was at times all but drowned out by the laughter, shouts, hoots, and whistling.”<sup>21</sup> Much has been made of the rocky relationship that Stravinsky would soon initiate with the controversial Boulez, whom he admired for his impressive intellect and fresh ideas. While Boulez was in awe of Stravinsky’s celebrity and lavish lifestyle, the young Frenchman was unenthusiastic about the senior composer’s new works. Stravinsky did not, as some assumed, whole-heartily embrace, much less seek to imitate, the music of Boulez. While Stravinsky praised *Le Marteau sans Maître* and *Éclat*, he was critical of *Pli Selo Pli*, observing that, although it was “pretty,” it was “a piece with no balls.”<sup>22</sup> Nor was Boulez’s music beyond Stravinsky’s comprehension. The percussionist William Kraft, commenting on the difficult preparations for an early performance of *Le Marteau sans Maître*, noted that “In my recollection, of several prominent composers who attended rehearsals, Stravinsky was the only one to turn the score pages at the right time.”<sup>23</sup>

Returning to Hollywood after the triumph of *The Rake’s Progress*, Stravinsky brought back a renewed sense of his musical status and new questions regarding Webern and serial composition. The effect of these European experiences was soon made manifest in an artistic crisis. Craft, by now a close confidant of the composer, witnessed Stravinsky’s crisis first-hand:

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Craft, quoted without documentation in Joan Peyser, *Boulez* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1976), 96.

<sup>22</sup> Igor Stravinsky, quoted without documentation in Joan Peyser, *Boulez*, 145.

<sup>23</sup> William Kraft, quoted by Lawrence Morton, “Boulez in Los Angeles: Recollections and Tributes,” in conference booklet, *From Pierrot to Marteau*, ed. L. Stein (Arnold Schoenberg Institute, University of Southern California School of Music, 14-16 March 1987), 55. Reprinted in Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 168.

Stravinsky came back from that European trip, arrived back on a nice sunny day, a Rose Bowl day, from that long trip. All the music that he'd heard, the experience with *The Rake*, he'd suddenly seen himself in a different light: as a world figure, and realized also that people were looking very closely to him to see what he was going to do next. His crisis came in the spring of 1952. I can remember two weeks where Stravinsky was very troubled, he was unable to compose. We took a drive, one day, up into the Mojave Desert. And for the first time since I had known him, which was about five years then, he was very frank and started asking me all sorts of questions about the Schoenberg school, about how certain things were done, what he could read and study. What interested him was the connection between new and old music: between these new procedures of Schoenberg's and music of the very distant past.<sup>24</sup>

Craft's recollections are likely as close as one will come to witnessing any conflict that the composer endured. Elsewhere, Craft expanded his remembrance of this critical episode, noting that Stravinsky actually wept in response to his crisis and was only consoled by his wife Vera.<sup>25</sup> Despite the uncharacteristic emotional display, however, the composer's instincts remained true, as he was already expressing interest in the task that was to occupy the remainder of his creative life: the fusion of new serial techniques with the musical practices of the past.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Stravinsky had the opportunity to hear a number of forgotten works from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque Era at the "Evenings on the Roof" and "Monday Evening Concerts" in Los Angeles. The Monday Evening Concerts provided a major platform for the conducting career of Craft, whose importance in the early music movement is evidenced by his pioneering recording of madrigals by Don Carlo Gesualdo. Dorothy Lamb Crawford, author of a history of the

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Craft, "The Serial Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Craft, "Influence or Assistance?," *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (London: Lime Tree, 1992), 38-39.

Monday Evening Concerts, has observed, “With his wealth of energy, ambition, and brilliance Robert Craft supplied many of the ideas for and performances of early music in the fifties.”<sup>26</sup> Crawford goes on to cite Lawrence Morton (1904-1987), musicologist and Stravinsky familiar, who observed that Craft brought to the concerts “repertoire ideas that were far more interesting than anyone else’s.... Bob Craft and I were having a sort of holiday with the music of Schütz, Bach, Monteverdi, some Gabrieli and other early Baroque, late Renaissance composers.”<sup>27</sup> Stravinsky supported Craft’s exploration by attending all of his protégé’s performances and even many rehearsals, for which the composer offered his Hollywood home as practice space.<sup>28</sup> The Monday Evening Concerts presented not only early music but the neglected modern masterworks of Charles Ives (1874-1854), Béla Bartók (1881-1945), and Schoenberg, and the latest scores by contemporary composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen.

The stimulating effect of these concerts on Stravinsky’s late music has gone largely unexplored by Stravinsky scholars. It is likely that Stravinsky, always ready to absorb new ideas, borrowed significantly from these programs that have not been identified. For example, in regards to *Agon* (1957), one of the most admired of Stravinsky’s late works, the conductor Michael Tilson Thomas has observed:

*Agon* is a portrait of a season at Monday Evening Concerts. It begins with fanfares, strongly influenced by the antique brass instrument music that was being played at Monday Evening Concerts. And then there’s Stravinsky’s impression of

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<sup>26</sup> Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof*, 273.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Morton, “Monday Evening Concerts,” transcript of 1966 oral history, interview by Adelaide Tusler (Department of Special Collections, University of Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, 1973), 158, quoted in Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof*, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof*, 273.



a piece of Boulez; a piece of Webern; of early Renaissance dances; of some music of Schütz; of some Schoenberg; the whole season of music at Monday Evening Concerts in these little gem-like pieces that form together the ballet of *Agon*.<sup>29</sup>

In its mix of old and new music, the Monday Evening Concerts provided patrons a unique opportunity to hear music offered virtually nowhere else, with the lone exception of the *Domaine Musical*, a Parisian concert series of the 1950s ruled over by Boulez.<sup>30</sup>

Early music was to become a focus of Stravinsky's daily musical study during the California years. He had been interested in neglected works from previous eras for decades, beginning with his recomposition of music then attributed to the eighteenth-century master Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736) for his ballet *Pulcinella* (1920). In his late years Stravinsky's tastes became even more eclectic, befriending musicologists such as Morton and Edward Lowinsky (1908-1985) and taking advantage of their latest discoveries. As Stravinsky admitted to Craft, "The rules and restrictions of serial writing differ little from the rigidity of the great contrapuntal schools of old."<sup>31</sup> The composer called Heinrich Isaac (c. 1450-1517), who had been the subject of Webern's own doctoral dissertation, "my hobby, my daily bread. I love him. I study him constantly."<sup>32</sup> The composer Lukas Foss (born 1922) further recalled, "He was studying, really like a student, like a scholar, he was studying the music of Josquin Desprez.... He studied all that

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Tilson Thomas, interview with Dorothy Lamb Crawford, 1 July 1988, quoted in Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof*, 255.

<sup>30</sup> Joan Peyser, *Boulez*, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 22.

<sup>32</sup> Igor Stravinsky, quoted from interview with Jay Harrison, *New York Herald-Tribune* (21 December 1952). Reprinted in Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 252.

music at the same time in which he studied Webern. So he took both of these expressions and amalgamated them and turned them with that jeweler's instinct that he had into Stravinsky."<sup>33</sup> As with his many other revisionist essays in musical history, Stravinsky took only what he needed from his various influences. From both early music and from Webern, Stravinsky drew a deep sense of Christian devotion, rigorous contrapuntal textures, a profound sense of order, and a limited expressive demeanor. These various influences would soon coalesce in Stravinsky's next gem, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*.

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<sup>33</sup> Lukas Foss, recorded interview for "Program VIII: The Serial Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

## CHAPTER THREE

### AFTER THE BOMB: *IN MEMORIAM DYLAN THOMAS*

The experience of lean finances, whether from unsettled politics, a needy extended family, or an apathetic public, made a pack rat of Stravinsky. He was known to carefully save bits of fine paper, ribbon, envelopes, or any other scrap of what might become the raw materials for later use.<sup>1</sup> Musically, he was the same, leaving little in the way of unused material. There are few major works embarked upon by the composer that did not come to fruition; unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky left no fragmentary *Jacob's Ladder* or *Moses und Aron*. There was, nonetheless, a doomed operatic collaboration between the composer and the poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953). Stravinsky and Thomas were to have created a theatrical account of the regeneration of mankind after a nuclear holocaust, focusing on the rebirth of language.<sup>2</sup> The project was cut short by the untimely death of the alcoholic Thomas, with whom the composer had met only briefly. Despite the brevity of their relationship, however, Stravinsky developed an intense affection for the late poet and was inspired to compose *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* as a memento of their doomed collaboration.

The remarkable chamber work for tenor, string quartet, and a quartet of trombones, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* was first heard under the direction of Robert Craft at one of the Monday Evening Concerts in the Los Angeles County Auditorium on 20 September 1954. The posthumous contribution of Thomas was the poem, "Do Not Go

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<sup>1</sup>Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 387.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between the composer and poet, see Robert Craft, "Stravinsky and Dylan Thomas," *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (London: Lime Tree, 1992), 52-60.

Gentle Into That Good Night,” which Stravinsky set as the centerpiece of the work. This central song for tenor and string quartet was buttressed by two “dirge-canons” for string quartet and a quartet of trombones. The curious, seemingly capricious instrumentation for *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* was, in fact, an instance of opportunism, as a quartet of trombones had already been engaged for a performance of “Fili mi, Absalon” of Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672), which was to be heard on the same program. This pragmatism proved to be a common occurrence for the many late chamber works that received first performances at the Monday Evening Concerts. The musicologist Lawrence Morton, Stravinsky’s friend and the director of the Monday Evening Concerts, notified the composer of the instrumentation available for upcoming programs—and for potential Stravinsky premières—months in advance.<sup>3</sup>

Stravinsky’s memorial to Thomas stands apart not only for the novelty of its performing ensemble, but for the composer’s new approach to pitch organization. *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* is a strictly serial composition, employing a tone row of just five notes.<sup>4</sup> Before *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, Stravinsky had experimented with diatonic note rows—still firmly within his own concept of extended tonality—in the *Cantata* (1953), *Septet* (1954), and *Three Songs from William Shakespeare* (1954). In a recorded interview, Stravinsky recalled the genesis of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* in his broken, yet wonderfully expressive English:

I dealt with a some very, um, low quantity of syllables: four, five syllables and four, five intervals and, you know, the piece, the memory of Dylan

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 254.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent analysis of the row and its uses, see Hans Keller and Milein Cosman, *Stravinsky Seen and Heard* (London: Toccata Press, 1982), 14-23.

Thomas, has five notes. I found the five notes when I sung, you know, his own text, written in the memory of his father, who died in the same way as himself: completely drunk. Completely drunk. There were drunkards. And, you know, and he wrote a very wonderful poem on the father's death and I was so touched by his death because, you know, I met him in Hollywood, where I was living, met him to compose an opera with him, you know. And my wife said...very disagreeable news: instead of coming here, he died. I was very shocked, you know. And some days afterwards, I started to think about how to fix this terrible act.... I was really very moved and I found that this was the beginning of my serial writing.<sup>5</sup>

It was the highly literate Craft who suggested, out of Thomas's many works, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" for the tribute. Stravinsky began work on his setting in February of 1954 and composed quickly, completing the score by March.<sup>6</sup>

Over four decades after Stravinsky's first major popular success, the unveiling of a new work by the composer of *Le sacre du printemps* was still an important musical event. Rumors of a significant new work appeared in *The New York Times* two months prior to the September première.<sup>7</sup> Gossip of Stravinsky's serial flirtations no doubt fueled expectations. The anticipation with which audiences awaited the new work, however, did not translate into corresponding ovations. The initial reception was tepid: neither overtly positive nor viciously negative. Many reacted with uncertainty and even trepidation. Critics approached *In memoriam* with the care necessary in dealing with one acknowledged as the greatest living master of music. Some cautiously withheld judgment in hopes of further hearings. The work was spared from the mass media contro-

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<sup>5</sup> Igor Stravinsky, recorded interview for "Program VIII: The Serial Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 314.

<sup>7</sup> Ross Parmenter, "The World of Music: New 'Zoo' Theatre," *The New York Times* (25 July 1954).

versy that was to greet Stravinsky's next major work, *Canticum sacrum*, perhaps due to the slight dimensions of the work, the immediacy of *In memoriam*'s elegiac origins, or its première among a small, sympathetic group of musicians.

*Los Angeles Times* critic Albert Goldberg, having witnessed the world première, recorded a brief and tentative first reaction for national distribution in *Musical America*.<sup>8</sup> While he offered praise for both the conductor Robert Craft's and tenor Richard Robinson's performances, little judgment was passed on the work itself. Sensing the greater emotional intensity of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* in comparison to Stravinsky's *Mass* (1948) or the *Cantata* (1952), Goldberg noted mildly a "rather more dramatic emphasis than is characteristic of the composer's recent work."<sup>9</sup> Surprisingly, in the context of a brief description, Goldberg did not mention that Stravinsky achieved this end through serial means. In fact, what is in hindsight the most striking feature of this memorial work received no mention. The serial nature of the piece seems to have gone unnoticed by those unaided by the score or uninformed as to Stravinsky's new techniques. Hans Keller (1919-1985) has recorded the surprise of Sir Peter Pears, after a Donaueschingen performance in 1954, learning that the work was organized according to serial procedures.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to consider how others might have reacted had they remained uninformed and unprejudiced by prevailing negative views of serial music.

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Goldberg, "Dylan Thomas Honored In Stravinsky Work," *Musical America* LXXVI (1 November 1954), 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Hans Keller and Milein Cosman, *Stravinsky Seen and Heard*, 15.

Another review of the Los Angeles performance, penned by William Wolf for *Music of the West*,<sup>11</sup> made note of the extraordinary program in which *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* was first heard. The evening featured many rarely-performed works of early music, notably compositions of Andrea Gabrieli, Adrian Willaert, Heinrich Schütz, a cantata of Johann Sebastian Bach, six madrigals of Don Carlo Gesualdo, and Henry Purcell's wrenching *Music on the Death of Queen Mary*. Wolf failed to hear, however, the inspiration Stravinsky drew from similar late Renaissance polyphony or the pre-Romantic expressive tone these early works shared with *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*. Wolf described the basics of Stravinsky's new work, although he was disappointed by the musical effect: "The music seems to have some warmth—an element that has not been apparent in much of Stravinsky's latest output. Still, to me, at least, the mood is remote from the pure lyricism and controlled rage of Thomas' lines." In so saying, Wolf merely repeated a complaint common in decades of reviews, namely that Stravinsky's music was expressively aloof from its appointed task and unsatisfactorily cold.

The East Coast hearing of the Thomas tribute, heralded as the most anticipated happening of the New Year, took place in Boston in January of 1955. Cyrus Durgin reported on this Jordan Hall performance for *Musical America*.<sup>12</sup> The concert, which featured the soloist Carl Nelson and the Zimmler Sinfonietta under the direction of Charles Munch, was prefaced by the comments of John Malcolm Brinnin, who spoke of the relationship between Stravinsky and Dylan Thomas. In Durgin's review, this extra-musical, elegiac aspect of the work received equal, if not greater, attention than did the music. As

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<sup>11</sup> William Wolf, "Concert Reviews," *Music of the West* X (November 1954), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Cyrus Durgin, "Boston Hears Stravinsky Work In Memory of Dylan Thomas," *Musical America* LXXV (1 February 1955), 8.

with Goldberg's initial report, there was no mention of the work's revelatory new serial language. The human interest of the work's genesis, likely coupled with obvious links to tonality, seemed to have kept the reviewer ignorant of the serial nature of the music. Durgin failed to hear the complexity of the elaborate canonical structures: "This is a simple, unpretentious piece, and I hope we shall have a chance to become thoroughly familiar with it."<sup>13</sup> There was only a hint of dissatisfaction in the setting, which Durgin mildly complained was "unnecessarily complex and strained." As in Los Angeles, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* shared the program with a number of Baroque works, though this time among its companions were the infinitely more familiar *Le quattro stagioni* of Antonio Vivaldi and the sixth Brandenburg Concerto of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Reaction to the first English performance, which took place at London's Church of St. George the Martyr on 20 January 1955 and featured Sir Peter Pears as soloist, was similarly congenial. Publisher and critic Donald Mitchell (born 1925) reported on the event for *The Musical Times*. It was the composer's flare for novel timbre, a perennial source of instant gratification in his music, that first drew praise from Mitchell: "The soft, funeral colours and sonorities of the canons contrast effectively with the texture of the song whose tender inspiration pays moving tribute to the dead poet."<sup>14</sup> Again, Mitchell made no mention of the composer's new use of a tone row or of any loss of tonal centrality.

A curious feature of the score, published by Boosey & Hawkes in 1954, guaranteed that Stravinsky's adoption of serial techniques would not long remain a secret. The

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Donald Mitchell, "Some First Performances," *The Musical Times* LXXXVI (March 1955), 152.



“Dirge-Canons” that comprise the prelude and postlude to the central setting of the Thomas poem were conspicuously bracketed and labeled with terms familiar in basic serial analysis. Stravinsky marked his various manipulations of the row with the terms “Theme,” “Inversion,” “Riversion,” and subsequent abbreviations. Similar markings appear in the score of the proto-serial “Ricercar II” of *Cantata* (1952) and were nearly printed in the score for Stravinsky’s next work, *Canticum sacrum*, as well. Some have speculated that these brackets and labels were deliberate announcements of the composer’s new direction. Joseph Straus has argued that, because Stravinsky used these marks as tools for self-analysis at every stage during the composition of his serial works, their appearance in the finished score was probably a mistake.<sup>15</sup> Correspondence between publisher Erwin Stein and the composer has, in fact, established that these markings were included in the score in error.<sup>16</sup>

The English critic Colin Mason (1924-1971), writing for *The Musical Times* in 1956, offered one of the first critical embraces for *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*.<sup>17</sup> In the context of a review of newly published scores from Boosey & Hawkes, Mason found Stravinsky’s *In memoriam* the most impressive of the lot. A respected authority on Béla Bartók, Mason demonstrated his authority in matters of twelve-tone composition. Of *In memoriam*, Mason wrote, “This continues the trend in Stravinsky’s recent music towards serialization,” and showing his knowledge of recent musical politics, Mason continued, “it will certainly canonize him in the eyes of serialists, after the sins of ‘The Rake’s Progress’.” Mason made a number of bold but incorrect assertions about Stravinsky and

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>16</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 431.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Mason, “New Music,” *The Musical Times* LXXXVII/1355 (January 1956), 24-26.

his new work: The composer “attempts no compromise with tonality,” and that in giving himself over entirely to serial technique, Stravinsky “does not try to use it simply as another vehicle for a fundamentally conservative or traditional conception of music.”<sup>18</sup> But while Mason seemed to assert that Stravinsky had made a break with his past, he quickly qualified that notion: “The ‘In Memoriam,’ in spite of its new technique, is not essentially different in character” from Stravinsky’s earlier works, featuring an “almost hypnotic repetition of short phrases.”<sup>19</sup> Mason held back little in his accolades for the quality of the work or in his estimation of its potential significance for music. “It is beautifully, compellingly, uniquely expressive in very much the same way, the purest Stravinsky, and the purest serialism.”<sup>20</sup> But not only was *In memoriam* a great work in itself, it once again established Stravinsky’s artistic leadership, “making him at one stroke the greatest, most assured, most original, and perhaps the most radical living master not now only of music (which he has been for many years), but also of serial composition.”<sup>21</sup>

Not all critics sympathetic to Schoenberg were hospitable to Stravinsky’s approach to serialism. James Felton offered a scathing review of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* in the pages of *Etude*.<sup>22</sup> The occasion was the New York première, which took place on 30 November 1955. The program also featured Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) and *Deserts* (1954) by Edgard Varèse. Felton could not hide his admiration for Schoenberg, as he wistfully recalled being “transported” by *Pierrot* “to the assured at-

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> James B. Felton, “Music in Focus,” *Etude* LXXIV/3 (March 1956), 22 & 43.

mosphere of a masterpiece of 20<sup>th</sup> century lieder.”<sup>23</sup> Neither Stravinsky’s nor Varèse’s offering could match Felton’s estimation of *Pierrot*. Despite the elegiac intent of *In Memoriam*, Felton found more calculation than emotion in Stravinsky’s work, writing that the piece “sounded still-born, pinched and desiccated.... One becomes uneasy, if not bored, as brief motifs (they are hardly melodies, and certainly unlyrical) spin themselves into a thin net of carefully calculated textures.”<sup>24</sup> Unlike Mason, who believed that Stravinsky’s new work surpassed aspects of Anton Webern,<sup>25</sup> Felton reckoned *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* cheap in comparison to the Austrian composer. He scolded, “The shadow of Webern, without his substance, falls across the apportioned measures like a gliding of dry leaves over glass, and we are aware of nothing but a sterile brittleness of sounds.”<sup>26</sup> Felton was troubled by his perception that Stravinsky was following Schoenberg’s methods too closely, as if in fulfillment of an academic exercise, leaving no allowance for spontaneous deviation from established practices. “I mean to suggest that ‘In Memoriam Dylan Thomas’ is a contrived product,” Felton flatly declared, and, “that is not successful Stravinsky.”<sup>27</sup>

Richard Franko Goldman’s articulate and substantial response, penned for *The Musical Quarterly*, is important for a number of reasons. First was the character of that eminent American journal of musical scholarship. Second, Goldman used the review as a springboard to address a number of issues common to critics exasperated with

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Colin Mason, “New Music,” 25.

<sup>26</sup> James B. Felton, “Music in Focus,” 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Stravinsky's recent works. According to Goldman, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* showed the composer's pandering to the avant-garde, his unsettling preference for eye music over audible sound, and his pitiful absence of expression. Many of Goldman's charges would be echoed by critics throughout Stravinsky's final period and continue to color the post-humous reception of his works.

In Goldman's judgment, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* seemed created to both delight the composer's agile mind and to curry favor with academics by providing fodder for serial analysts. Accordingly, Goldman charged that the composer no longer followed the pull of his heart or the wisdom of his ear, but instead proceeded according to the highly cerebral rules of serial calculation:

It [*In memoriam Dylan Thomas*] appears to be engineered with rather grim determination, in order to prove or to demonstrate a theorem, a method, or a hypothesis. It is consistent, ingenious, and made to order for the kind of "analysis" that is a fashionable substitute for listening and hearing. The current preoccupation with musical machinery is interesting and symptomatic; at times one feels that the major obligation of the composer is to provide stimulating opportunities for the analyst; certainly a whole school of critics and propagandists reserves its greatest admiration for those works that provide the neatest possibilities of demonstration. It is, one may suppose, no accident that the Age of Anxiety and the Age of Analysis are one in the same.<sup>28</sup>

Goldman believed that Stravinsky's new goal was to impress the serial faction, as the composer had abandoned his audience to court only the university-affiliated serial composers and theorists.

Goldman perceptively identified the uniqueness of Stravinsky's serial technique, which he characterized as both simple and personal. Even so, Goldman dismissed *In*

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Franko Goldman, "Current Chronicle – United States, New York," *The Musical Quarterly* XLII/2 (April 1956), 238.

*memoriam Dylan Thomas* as at best the product of a compositional exercise, one that appeared to have been produced by a gifted student, but certainly not by a great master.<sup>29</sup> “The principle of the six-minute *In Memoriam* is a simple one,” Goldman asserted, “and it is put into practice with such strictness that one completes a study of the score with the feeling that the work is an exercise.”<sup>30</sup> But not only did it look like an exercise, Goldman insisted that it sounded like one too, “a neutral, complicated, morally indifferent, and laborious exhibition.”<sup>31</sup> For a musical example Goldman’s article printed a portion of the “Dirge-Canons” that reproduces Stravinsky’s own analytical markings, identifying the various permutations of the row. Such a simple, even naïve, use of Schoenberg’s technique must have struck Goldman as beneath Stravinsky. Himself a student of the notoriously demanding Nadia Boulanger, Goldman would have certainly felt qualified to distinguish pedantic exercise from inspiration. He would have also, however, been a likely partisan of the neoclassical Stravinsky, as had been his teacher.

Goldman described Stravinsky’s new musical outlook as “Gothic” in both technique and expression. “It is ridiculous to discover,” Goldman wrote, “as some analysts have done, an influence of Schoenberg or Webern here. Stravinsky’s latest phase is as un-Viennese as any of his earlier ones; it is a state of mind as well as a manifestation of technique, and the state of mind is evidently medieval.”<sup>32</sup> The medieval link that Goldman cites is to the *Ars Nova*, when composers such as Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377) devised clever visual elements in their scores to delight educated performers

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

and musical connoisseurs. Goldman lamented the premium Stravinsky placed on similar elements of paper music, rendered in high visual relief by the composer's analytical markings but forever out of earshot of most listeners.

Stravinsky found a more sympathetic ear in the English "anti-critic"<sup>33</sup> and Schoenberg proponent Hans Keller. In addition to his studies of Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), Keller has written enthusiastically of Stravinsky's serial conversion, often with an eye to *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*. Keller left no doubt as to his enchantment with Stravinsky's adoption of serial technique, as well as his admiration for the Russian composer's unfaltering musicianship. As for *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, Keller called it a "canonic masterpiece."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Keller believed the Thomas tribute to be Stravinsky's "most perfect" composition since his *Mass* (1948),<sup>35</sup> an impressive era that included *The Rake's Progress*. Keller further defended Stravinsky against those, like Goldman, who protested the lack of emotional expression in his works. Keller pointed out that what he called Stravinsky's "anti-expressionism" was actually in itself expressive, a kind of "statically intense tension," or a perpetual state of dynamic stasis, where small gestures take on greater and greater significance.<sup>36</sup>

Within the vast array of scholarship that explores Stravinsky's oeuvre, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* receives relatively little consideration. Although its importance as a transitional work cannot be denied, its modest proportions have not inspired

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher Wintle, "Keller, Hans," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XIII, 458-60.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Keller and Milein Cosman, *Stravinsky Seen and Heard*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

the same attention as *The Rake's Progress* or even *Canticum sacrum*. Only a few tantalizing comments have been ventured by prominent Stravinsky scholars to augment conventional and often repeated descriptions of the biographical context, form, and serial technique of the work. Even Eric Walter White's invaluable survey of Stravinsky's complete works gives only a relatively brief discussion of it.<sup>37</sup> Surprisingly, White made a considerable effort to point out flaws not in Stravinsky's music, but in Dylan Thomas's poem. White is clear, however, in his regard for Stravinsky's setting: "This work of compassionate homage transcends any weaknesses of Dylan Thomas's original poem and is one of Stravinsky's most moving compositions."<sup>38</sup> Walsh has called *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* "one of the most satisfying and most moving of all Stravinsky's shorter compositions. But it would be harder to argue that it is one of his most characteristic."<sup>39</sup> Walsh was much more enamored of Stravinsky's proto-serial *Septet* (1953), which he called a "piece of neo-Bachian wizardry" and "one of Stravinsky's most vivacious movements for a decade."<sup>40</sup> Walsh amplified his praise for the *Septet*, but not for *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, in his massive, two-volume biography of the composer.

Neil Tierney's introductory survey of Stravinsky's life and music, *The Unknown Country*, was published just a few years after the composer's death.<sup>41</sup> Although Tierney is not a champion of Stravinsky's last phase, he was ready to admit that "these composi-

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<sup>37</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>41</sup> Neil Tierney, *The Unknown Country: The Life of Igor Stravinsky* (London: Robert Hale, 1977).

tions quite often touch the heart and ravish the ear.”<sup>42</sup> Like other English critics, Tierney cannot help but sometimes criticize Stravinsky in light of his own beloved Benjamin Britten. Tierney called the “Lyke-Wake Dirge” of the Stravinsky’s *Cantata* (1952) “contrived and bloodless” compared to Britten’s setting of the same text in *Serenade*.<sup>43</sup> In regards to *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, Tierney wrote the following:

the music itself, rising and falling with mechanical regularity, is anything but dirge-like. Ritualistic grief cannot be separated from dignity, and I do not find in Stravinsky’s admittedly original and sometimes poignant music the delicate feeling for words that Britten so often displayed in setting poems. The too easily perceptible emotion of the verse seems in this instance to reject, as in a clumsy heart transplant, the music chosen to illustrate it, and perhaps Stravinsky was wrong to undertake so formidable a task.<sup>44</sup>

Tierney repeated a common complaint in regards to Stravinsky’s text setting. No matter the language, it was common practice for Stravinsky to set his own rhythms against that of the natural rhythm of the poetry, an idiosyncrasy Tierney complained distorts the text of *In memoriam*.<sup>45</sup>

Joseph Straus’s monograph, *Stravinsky’s Late Music*, pays little attention to *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* except as the occasional target of analysis. An important exception, however, can be found in the final portion of the text, which the author devoted to expression in Stravinsky’s late music. Straus identified several instances of movement from music centered on E with a phrygian or minor character to music centered on D

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



with a major character. Such movement from E to D is heard in Stravinsky's neoclassic ballet *Orpheus*, as well as in the settings of the "Lyke-Wake Dirge" from *Cantata* and in the "Dirge-Canons" of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*. Drawing on the plot of the ballet, as well as the elegiac texts of the *Cantata* and *In memoriam*, Straus argues that this pitch movement symbolized for Stravinsky an emotional journey from "grief and lamentation to acceptance or transcendence of death."<sup>46</sup> While such an insight rings true for the works and portions of works identified by Straus, one wonders why this same association does not appear more frequently in Stravinsky's death-haunted late music.

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<sup>46</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 187.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL”: *CANTICUM SACRUM AD HONOREM SANCTI MARCI NOMINIS*

*Canticum sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci nominis* proved to be Stravinsky's most controversial première since the riotous first performance of *Le sacre du printemps* (1913). This new “Sacred Song” defied all expectations, baffled critics, and sounded, to many, like an act of sacrilege. For those who had not followed the composer's recent flirtations with Schoenberg's methods, *Canticum sacrum* trumpeted Stravinsky's annexation of dodecaphonic techniques to the world. The organizers of the Venice Contemporary Music Festival had hoped that a new sacred cantata by the world's greatest composer—commissioned for the handsome fee of \$12,000—would serve as the crown jewel of their 1956 season. Called a musical “panegyric,”<sup>1</sup> the work remains a pivotal yet neglected opus in the composer's catalogue and a remarkable tribute to Stravinsky's faith, to music history, and to the city of Venice.

As festival organizers had hoped, the 13 September performance at Saint Mark's Basilica was a highly anticipated event. It is difficult to imagine a more resplendent venue than San Marco, the haunt of Adrian Willaert (1490-1562), Cipriano de Rore (1516-1565), Giovanni Gabrieli (1557-1612), and Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), as a stage for Stravinsky, the twentieth century's own renaissance prince. Interest crossed over even into the mainstream press. *Time* magazine described the unforgettable event in a vivid account:

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<sup>1</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meie, 1987), 258.

In Venice one night last week, 3,000 special guests—among them 130 music critics, dozens of big-name musicians, counts and cabinet ministers—followed purple-robed Cardinal Ronicalli, Patriarch of Venice, into the Byzantine basilica of St. Mark for one of the strangest events in its 1,000-year history. Outside, thousands more were gathered around loudspeakers to hear Igor Stravinsky's latest work.<sup>2</sup>

Stravinsky himself conducted the performance. The work was repeated, not by popular demand, but by *a priori* consideration of its slight temporal dimensions (a mere seventeen minutes). The composer suggested that his work be prefaced with Italian music of the Baroque because, as he cautioned, “the *Canticum* will suffer if first performed together with any of my earlier compositions.”<sup>3</sup> To provide needed filler for the remainder of the concert, Stravinsky's reworking of a masterpiece by Johann Sebastian Bach, the *Chorale Variations on “Von Himmel hoch da komm' ich her,”* was also performed.<sup>4</sup>

All ingredients were present for an historic musical event: dramatic location, Stravinsky's star power, and a sophisticated audience. Few works have enjoyed such an opportunity to be born with a silver spoon in their mouth. What the composer delivered, however, was something of an *infant terrible*. *Canticum sacrum* was a brief, pithy, and yet monumental cantata for a concerted ensemble of tenor and baritone soloists, chorus, orchestra, and organ.<sup>5</sup> Unlike *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, *Canticum sacrum* was only partly serial: tonally oriented outer movements frame dodecaphonic inner movements.

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<sup>2</sup> “Murder in the Cathedral,” *Time* LXVII/13 (24 September 1956), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Igor Stravinsky, letter to his publisher quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 434.

<sup>4</sup> Stravinsky lobbied additionally for the inclusion of music by the infamous Don Carlo Gesualdo (c.1560-1613) in the program. Festival organizers, however, deemed his music inappropriate for the Basilica of San Marco.

<sup>5</sup> The orchestra, similar to that of *Symphony of Psalms*, emphasized dark, archaic sonorities. There were no violins, and woodwinds are used sparingly in favor of brass.

All aspects of the work, from its sung dedication to its final movement (an exact retrograde of the first movement), suggested an air of learned formality. Even the Latin title, “Sacred Song in honor of the name of Saint Mark,” was dauntingly artificial and erudite. At its heart *Canticum sacrum* was an artistic conglomerate, featuring strata from almost every style European music had known since the Middle Ages.

Few occasions in the history of music have offered such a perfect union of music and architecture. In this regard, *Canticum sacrum* was a modern counterpart to *Nuper rosarem flores* of Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474), the ceremonial motet written for the consecration of the Duomo of Florence in 1436. Like Dufay, Stravinsky sought to mirror the construction of a sacred space in music. Stravinsky had long expressed an interest in architecture and its relationship to musical structure: “One could not better define the sensation produced by music than by saying that it’s identical with that evoked by contemplation of the interplay of architectural forms. Goethe thoroughly understood that when he called architecture petrified music.”<sup>6</sup> *Canticum sacrum* is cast in five movements, mirroring in sound the five domes of St. Mark’s Basilica. The portico of the church corresponds to the modal, nine-bar opening dedication for tenor soloist, baritone soloist, and three trombones. The strong rhythmic syncopation and narrow melodic range characteristic of so much of the composer’s music here is used to mime practices of the late Middle Ages, complete with a Stravinskian take on the famous cadence attributed to Francesco Landini (1325-1397).

The first movement, “Euntes in mundum,” displays a texture reminiscent of the massive, chordal sonorities of the Venetian school of Andrea Gabrieli (1510-1586) and

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<sup>6</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York: Norton, 1962), 54.

Giovanni Gabrieli, whose music began the St. Mark's concert. Stravinsky's fingerprints are evident from the first phrase, with the syncopation of the opening bar and the fleet, staccato, sixteenth-note rhythms in the trumpets and bassoon. The intense, bitonal dissonances of this first movement—perhaps the composer's most elaborate use of his famous “wrong note” technique—are alleviated by serene contrasting consonant episodes for the organ. Here, Stravinsky's life-long reliance on block forms takes on antiphonal connotations, as strong tutti episodes for chorus and orchestra are inter-cut with music for the organ, hinting at the *cori spezzati* traditions of St. Mark's (though the poor condition of the Basilica's famous choir lofts would preclude their use at the première.) On 18 April 1955 the composer famously researched the acoustics of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, adjusting the score of “*Euntes in mundum*” to allow for the reverberation time of St. Mark's.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the second movement, “*Surge, aquilo,*” Stravinsky—ever the wizard of orchestration—conjures three hauntingly beautiful chords from the harp and a trio of double basses (playing in harmonics). This movement is a kind of sacred aria for solo tenor, to which the composer adds flute and English horn. The languid sensuality of the verse, selected from the *Canticum canticorum*, contrasts with the brief, terse character of the other movements. More than merely serial, this movement represented Stravinsky's first exposé in twelve-tone technique. He maintained, however, certain key points of his compositional style, especially a narrow melodic range and prominent use of the minor third. The sparse texture, angular lines, rhythmic abstraction, and orchestral touches point unmistakably to the influence of Webern.

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<sup>7</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 430.

The central movement presents the three virtues—Faith, Hope, and Charity—acknowledged by St. Paul in Corinthians I. Stravinsky rearranges these virtues—Charity, Hope, and Faith—within a movement based on a twelve-tone row. The movement begins with a ritornello for solo organ, wherein the composer monophonically presents the tone row in quadruple octaves that exploit the entire range of the instrument. He continues to capitalize on the polychoral tradition of St. Mark’s, following the organ ritornello with a brief *sinfonia* for orchestra. At the entrance of the chorus, his historical eye turns to the Renaissance, particularly to the polyphonic art of the *Prima prattica*. The chorus sings a series of canons, somewhat free in construction, sometimes a cappella, often with minimal accompaniment.<sup>8</sup> The central part of the movement, “*Spes*,” begins with the row-ritornello for organ, up a third, followed by a brief orchestral *sinfonia*. The tenor and baritone soloists sing a homorhythmic duet, alternating in small blocks with a similar duet for the “*Discanti*” and “*Alti*” from the chorus. The solo organ returns, presenting once again the naked tone row, down a second, as ritornello and prelude to “*Fides*,” the final portion of this movement. Following another brief *sinfonia*, the entire chorus enters in unison and magadizing for fifteen bars, stuttering between B-flat and A. The sameness of this section is contrasted by a final canon, sung by the chorus and doubled by the orchestra. The movement closes with a final *sinfonia*, followed by one last, unadorned presentation of the row given, unexpectedly, to the strings.

The fourth movement, “*Brevis motus cantilenae*,” in its use of the solo baritone, balances the tenor solo of the second movement. The baritone line, with its high tessitura, rhythmic energy, and reiterations and vacillations around reciting tones, is strongly

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<sup>8</sup> The text, drawn from Deuteronomy, is the famous prayer “Hear, O Israel,” set by Schoenberg in his harrowing *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947).

reminiscent of the cantorial tradition. The chorus adds significant weight to the movement, echoing the solo line and interrupting with more canons.

Stravinsky closes the *Canticum sacrum* with “Illi autem profecti,” a retrograde presentation of the first movement. Here is another of the composer’s many historical references, recalling the eye music of the Ars nova and Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377), namely his famous polyphonic chanson, *Ma fin est mon commencement*.

*Time* magazine pronounced the première of *Canticum sacrum* “Murder in the Cathedral.”<sup>9</sup> The *Time* critic, in one of the great gems of popular press ever devoted to the composer, took special delight in using to vilify the cantata the famous phrase of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), a friend and admirer of Stravinsky’s. The author richly described the event, citing the composer’s “wooden fury” on the podium and his close resemblance to an “animated Gothic gargoyle.” Reported are the whispered comments of an audience member assessing the composer’s enthusiastic but inept conducting. The best portions of the work, which are found in the “Surge, aquilo,” are judged as merely “listenable.” Here Stravinsky’s music seemed to have been saved by the efforts of a sympathetic tenor, in whose hands the aria was “made sweet and plaintive as an Urdu love song.” “Elsewhere, the 70-voice chorus surged in powerful chant, defeating the squeaking, thudding, 50-piece orchestra.”<sup>10</sup> An unidentified festival official was quoted as commenting frankly, “In a cathedral the audience cannot applaud, but at least they cannot boo, either.”<sup>11</sup>

Would an eruption reminiscent of the première of *Le sacre du printemps* have occurred, without the sanctity of San Marco imposing a modicum of behavior on the audience? In

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<sup>9</sup> “Murder in the Cathedral,” *Time* LXVII/13 (24 September 1956), 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

hindsight, one wonders how those in attendance could have expected anything *but* the unpredictable from Stravinsky. Words such as “exasperating,” “mystifying decadence,” and “strange disorientation” were overheard from critics.<sup>12</sup> Although in a minority, there were those faithful disciples who admired the creative ability of a man to continue to shock, even after so many years of innovation.<sup>13</sup>

Christina Thoresby reviewed the Venice spectacle for *The New York Times* and *Musical America*. “The new work has aroused much controversy,” she recorded, “it was a source of wonder that the composer, now in his seventies, should have so regenerated his ideas as to fuse his once revolutionary methods with that other important development—the twelve-tone technique from which he had always kept himself apart.”<sup>14</sup> A contrary view, however, expressed by those suspicious of the composer’s new musical direction, held that “Stravinsky was either in his dotage or pulling a fast one.”<sup>15</sup> A noticeable portion of the audience, Thoresby noted, did not return to the Basilica after intermission, apparently wishing to forgo the planned encore performance of *Canticum sacrum*.

Thoresby was certain of what others had speculated, that “Had the premiere performance taken place in the Fenice Theatre instead of in the Basilica, some sort of demonstration undoubtedly would have occurred.”<sup>16</sup> Although Thoresby seemed ready to conclude that *Canticum sacrum* was a mathematically conceived work, she intuited the

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Christina Thoresby, “Stravinsky in Venice: His New 12-Tone ‘Canticum’ Subject of Controversy at Italian Festival,” *The New York Times* CVI (30 September 1956), 2: 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



connection between Stravinsky's form and that of the Basilica. "The work," she observed, "scored with extreme clarity and logic, forms a balanced pattern, leading toward the middle like a series of arches."<sup>17</sup> Others sensed the intimate connection between Stravinsky's new work and St. Mark's. "Not a few of the faithful considered its unfamiliar sounds to be sacrilegious;" Thoresby wrote, "but after hearing it repeated at rehearsal and in performance it seemed to one listener to blend marvelously with the mathematics and metaphysics of the great Basilica."<sup>18</sup> Thoresby regretted, along with many Venetians, that the heavy price paid for *Canticum sacrum* had drained the finances necessary for making the rest of the festival a success.<sup>19</sup> Funds were so depleted, in fact, that for the first time in the festival's history, no opera could be presented.<sup>20</sup> Thoresby summed up well the reason for the negative reaction from those assembled to hear *Canticum sacrum*: "The Venice festival, and probably most of the world, was expecting a large oratorio-like work in a now familiar idiom. What they got was an extremely economical, transparent mathematically conceived piece, lasting only 17 minutes."<sup>21</sup> *Canticum sacrum* would have been a shock to anyone expecting Stravinsky to repeat the attractive, demanding though not difficult, style of *The Rake's Progress*.

The English critic and composer Reginald Smith Brindle (1917-2003), a student of the twelve-tone composer Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-1975), was more critical of the *Canticum sacrum*. Perhaps recalling the comment of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) that

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Christina Thoresby, "Stravinsky Premiere in Venice," *Musical America* LXXVI (1 November 1956), 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

music that looks good on the page will sound good as well, Smith Brindle gave the following assessment: “On paper this work looks bad; I hazard that no reading panel would consider such writing from an unknown composer.”<sup>22</sup> He admitted grudging praise, however, for “Surge aquilo,” the second movement. Smith Brindle allowed that it was composed “in the *avant-garde* twelve-note style of around 1950, excellently done; but this chamber-music style is foreign to the rest of the work.”<sup>23</sup> His main complaint was the lack of stylistic cohesion: “In short, without going further in this analysis, there is no unity of style whatsoever, except that it all comes from the same energetic pen.”<sup>24</sup> What is more, Smith Brindle simply objected to the sound of the work, citing “tortured dissonances” and dodecaphonic music that “sounds as though it were written with utter disregard for the result.”<sup>25</sup> Even worse: “The organ and brass interludes which herald Faith, Hope, and Charity are the foulest sounds I, or St. Mark’s, have ever heard. The final staccato brass chord sounds like a blurt of derision at what has gone before.”<sup>26</sup> Credit can be given to Smith Brindle, however, for his perception, if not understanding, of multiple stylistic tendencies at work in *Canticum sacrum* and Stravinsky’s search for a new style.

John Weissmann, reporting for *The Musical Quarterly*,<sup>27</sup> treaded lightly, stressing objectivity and respectfully granting the composer the benefit of the doubt. It is easy to

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<sup>22</sup> Reginald Smith Brindle, “The Venice International Festival of Contemporary Music,” *The Musical Times* LXXXVII (November 1956), 599.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> John S. Weissmann, “Current Chronicle: Italy,” *The Musical Quarterly* XXXIII/1 (January 1957), 104-10.

understand the precarious position of Weissmann and other scholars in dealing with such an unexpected and enigmatic work as *Canticum sacrum*, especially when forged by an artist of great renown. Weissmann went to great lengths to separate description from artistic judgment in his article. Even so, he was also troubled by a lack of stylistic unity: “From a positivistic point of view, there is little that could be said for a work of such remarkable stylistic inconsistency.”<sup>28</sup> True, each new movement presented wrenching changes of pitch organization, texture, and orchestration, giving the initial impression of a pastiche.

The *Canticum sacrum* première featured works from the early Baroque by past masters of St. Mark’s Basilica. Such programming, however, invited historical comparisons. Weissmann questioned why Stravinsky had not, to his ear, exploited traditional Venetian antiphonal effects in his new score:

Curiously enough, Stravinsky, than whom no creative musician alive today has a keener aural sensibility, had chosen to disregard the sound effects obtainable in St. Marks.... Yet the sound resulting from his scoring is harsh, austere, emaciated especially when compared to the music of the Gabrieli's, Monteverdi, or Schütz, performances of which preceded that of Stravinsky's *Canticum*.<sup>29</sup>

Weissmann’s keenest perceptions came in his recognition of the important transitory nature of *Canticum sacrum*. He heard the composer’s attempt to weld together many seemingly opposing ideas: Renaissance counterpoint, dodecaphony, Webernesque economy, and Stravinsky’s own rhythmically charged style. “*Canticum Sacrum* is potentially

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

the first of a possible series of great works; a preliminary sketch...by no means a mature composition. Nevertheless it speaks of its composer feeling a serious responsibility towards a vanishing Europe: hence his attempts to explore its achievements creatively.”<sup>30</sup>

No other character in the Stravinsky story can compare to the magnitude and influence of Robert Craft. Craft has largely refrained from trumpeting his own criticisms of the music; like all Stravinsky familiars knew, the composer’s friendship was prefaced on complete loyalty. Although Craft has conducted and recorded practically all of Stravinsky’s music, he has admitted a preference for the late serial works.<sup>31</sup> Craft prepared an informed and practical defense of *Canticum sacrum* for *The Score I. M. A. Magazine*, a virtual conductor’s study of the score.<sup>32</sup> He was quick to answer the question, “Why had Stravinsky not exploited the architecture of Saint Mark’s for antiphonal effects?” The answer is simple and practical: the lofts for such purposes had been deemed structurally unsafe at the time of the performance.<sup>33</sup> Craft also defended what many saw as a lack of unity, both in the music and in the text. Stravinsky’s protégé revealed that unity was achieved in the architectural plan of the work, which mirrored the five domes and portico of San Marco in five movements with a sung dedication.<sup>34</sup> Most important, he defended the essence of the composer’s new style, a manner favoring the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Craft, recorded interview for “Program X: The Final Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Craft, “A Concert for Saint Mark,” *The Score and I. M. A. Magazine* 18 (December 1956), 35-51.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

use of many archaic techniques presented in a music of great intensity, though not of intense personal emotion:

Most critics are Berkeleyans; they can prove their argument and prove that according to it a masterpiece does not exist. In Venice they proved they did not hear the masterpiece that was presented there. Instead, they noticed an “austerity,” which is irrelevant, rather than a directness, which is profound; and they touted “influences” which are trivial, having failed to perceive inimitability.<sup>35</sup>

Thirty-five years later, in reference to the historical influences that made *Canticum sacrum* so stylistically inconsistent, Craft reflected “Stravinsky was a great artist because he knew that depth of allusion can be attained only by using the past, and that creation depends as much on the old as the new.”<sup>36</sup>

Donald Mitchell, sizing up the 1959 London performance of *Canticum sacrum*, offered remarkable insight. “There is no disguising the fact,” Mitchell admitted, “that the *Canticum*...is a tough work: I shall need many further hearings of it before I can pretend to understand it fully. It did not leave me any doubt as to its essential inspiration, however, nor did it seem anything else but very much a piece by the composer of the works that preceded it.”<sup>37</sup> Mitchell’s humility and realization that *Canticum sacrum* was too new a work to be appreciated on first hearing was shared by others less secure in their initial judgments. Mitchell’s review also hit on a new stylistic aspect in *Canticum sacrum* that had gone unappreciated by many who had heard the work. On the second movement, he observed,

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Craft, “A Centenary View,” *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (London: Lime Tree, 1992), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Donald Mitchell, “Stravinsky in London,” *The Musical Times* LXXXVIII/1368 (February 1957), 93.

the tenor solo, *Surge, aquilo*—whose rich melodic invention, so unusually long-spanned, is facilitated by its serial organization. Melody of this caliber is a new departure in Stravinsky—another example in the *Canticum* is the deeply expressive vocal counterpoint of *Caritas*—and must certainly be attributed to his assimilation of the serial method. It may well be that in this late style of Stravinsky's, melody, for so long absent from his music except when nourished by diverse classical precedents, will at last be restored to its rightful place.<sup>38</sup>

A new attention to melodic profile was, perhaps, the greatest benefit of Stravinsky's acquisition of serial techniques; this concern would continue throughout the composer's final phase.

Paul Steinitz, the chorus master charged with preparing the first English performance of *Canticum sacrum*, also stressed the necessity of repeated hearings of the work.<sup>39</sup> Steinitz related that his chorus developed a sincere appreciation for the score, but only after it had been thoroughly assimilated. Steinitz pointed out that,

the full beauty of 'Diliges Dominum', and its repeat 'Diligamus' were perhaps only fully felt for the first time at the performance, owing to the extreme technical difficulties; curiously enough, I believe that this at first unrewarding, and to many critics incomprehensible, passage, was the most moving of all, at least to me and to most of the choir. One wonders whether the average member of the audience needs to hear it as many times as we did to appreciate it.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Paul Steinitz, "One Rehearsing a Choir for the 'Canticum Sacrum'," *The Score and I. M. A. Magazine* 19 (March 1957), 56-59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Roman Vlad echoed the thoughts of Steinitz, advising of the *Canticum sacrum* that “very few of its qualities can be appreciated at first sight or on first hearing; they need to be heard again and again before they yield up their secrets.”<sup>41</sup>

Another perceptive English critic, Colin Mason, writing for *Music & Letters*, shed more light on *Canticum sacrum*.<sup>42</sup> Mason praised the tonal portions of the work, which he likened to “Stravinsky’s earlier powerful dynamic harmonic style—something like that of the first movement of the ‘Symphony of Psalms’.”<sup>43</sup> Again, there was the sense that, while *Canticum sacrum* was an imperfect composition, it represented an important step in a new direction for Stravinsky: “This score offers no more than a fascinating skeleton of the music, but a work of great beauty, power and genius can be recognized in it.”<sup>44</sup>

The first American performance was given as part of a seventy-fifth birthday celebration for the composer. The concert, conducted by Craft, was part of the eleventh annual Los Angeles Music Festival at UCLA’s Royce Hall on 17 June 1957. The concert included a special greeting read from President Eisenhower, the world première of *Agon*, and Stravinsky’s *Greeting Prelude* (1955), dedicated to Pierre Monteux (1875-1964) on his eightieth birthday.

To Albert Goldberg, who reported on the UCLA celebration for *Musical America*, the highly approachable *Agon* eclipsed the more remote *Canticum sacrum*.<sup>45</sup> Goldberg

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<sup>41</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Frederick Fuller (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 183.

<sup>42</sup> Colin Mason, “Reviews of Music,” *Music & Letters* XXXVIII/1 (January 1957) 106-08.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Albert Goldberg, “Stravinsky at 75: Los Angeles Music Festival Honors Famous Composer,” *Musical America* LXXVII/1 (July 1957), 9-10.

stated that the new cantata “proved to be far less accessible on first hearing than ‘Agon’.”<sup>46</sup> No doubt Goldberg was attracted to the rhythmic aspect of *Agon*, as well as its wealth of novel orchestral colors. His opinion has been born out by popular tastes, as all of Stravinsky’s late works have remained in the shadow of the more popular *Agon*. Goldberg appreciated *Canticum sacrum*, on the other hand, not for its visceral qualities but as an expression of austere religious devotion. Goldberg called the work, in the most forbidding terms, “one of Stravinsky’s most recondite and uncompromising essays.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, “it is plotted with mathematical strictness and demands minute analysis to reveal all its subtleties and complications. Whether the ear alone can ever accomplish this is debatable.”<sup>48</sup>

The East Coast première of *Canticum sacrum*, a part of the Empire State Music Festival in Ellenville, New York in July of 1957, attracted an audience of 3,500. *Newsweek* reported that “It was hard to tell last week whether the audience...applauded Igor Stravinsky’s ‘Canticum Sacrum’ out of appreciation or from the sheer relief of having it over with.”<sup>49</sup> This article, “*Canticum* in the Catskills,” was full of pharmaceutical imagery, citing the repetition of the cantata on the same program as a “double dosage.” Stravinsky’s new music was perceived as medicinal and as palatable as castor oil: art that is probably good for you, but which is very difficult to take. *Newsweek* credited the appearance of the work, further described as “some of the most astringently complicated

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Terry Ferrer, “Canticum in the Catskills,” *Newsweek* L/5 (29 July 29 1957), 77.



music the Russian-born Stravinsky has ever written,”<sup>50</sup> to the influence of Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977), who led the performance.

Soviet critics viciously attacked Stravinsky’s embrace of serialism, even after the warming of State criticism following the death of Joseph Stalin. One Soviet critic charged that Stravinsky’s move to serialism demonstrated a “further creative deterioration, sad senile debility, and complete barrenness of imagination.”<sup>51</sup> Although the press clearly served as an instrument of the conservative regime, such politically motivated opinions were strikingly similar to those offered by Stravinsky’s adversaries in the West. Of the *Canticum sacrum*, one Soviet critic protested its harsh, austere Medieval elements, married with “revolting” twelve-tone techniques, both of which “carefully avoid any living melodic thought conceived by a human heart and capable of evoking a warm response in the soul of a normal listener. In the *Canticum* there is literally not a single natural inflection. It is a dead desert, barren and stony.”<sup>52</sup>

Exceptions to the widespread doubt and distaste inspired by *Canticum sacrum* are striking. One positive response came from Alfred Frankenstein (1906-1981), who reviewed Stravinsky’s recordings of both *Agon* and *Canticum sacrum* (Columbia ML 5215) for *High Fidelity Magazine*.<sup>53</sup> Curiously, Frankenstein found both works “instantly and completely enchanting.” Perhaps appreciating its many points of stylistic diversity, Frankenstein argued further that *Canticum sacrum* “has a golden resonance like that of

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Boris Schwarz, “Stravinsky in Soviet Russian Criticism,” *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: Norton, 1963), 87.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>53</sup> Alfred Frankenstein, “A Blend of Ages: *Agon* and the *Canticum*” *High Fidelity Magazine* VIII (January 1958), 60.

the cathedral's famous mosaics." He even made the bold prediction, sadly ridiculous in hindsight, that *Canticum sacrum* would become as widely admired as the *Symphony of Psalms*. Frankenstein's praise for Stravinsky's poor performance on the recording, which he termed, "of course, beyond criticism," calls into question all of his previous assertions. On the other hand, Michael Oliver, lamenting the continuing unpopularity of *Canticum sacrum*, blamed Stravinsky's recording of the work, so praised by Frankenstein. Oliver criticized the recording, in which a

very small choir and scratch orchestra negotiate the notes by the skin of their teeth in a pitilessly dry studio. Of the work's sheer beauty of sound, of the spare eloquence of its long lines, of its deeply moving pious intensity there is as little evidence as there is of any attempt to provide the impressively reverberant acoustic for which it was so carefully designed.<sup>54</sup>

Refinements in subsequent recordings have indeed shown the inadequacy of Stravinsky's performance.

In the years following the initial reception of *Canticum sacrum*, critics have questioned the sincerity of Stravinsky's piety as expressed in his late serial works. The eminent scholar Paul Henry Lang, who found in the composition only "formal thought and dogma,"<sup>55</sup> professed such suspicions:

Of late [Stravinsky] has turned to religious subjects—is he a genuinely religious composer of 'sacred' music? No, he could not be, for his ideal world is too little concerned with the final inwardness of life. In reality, nowhere in the many works written since he became representative of contemporary Western music was he able to transcend his egoism, therefore his spirit center lies somewhere between dream and make-believe.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Oliver, *Stravinsky* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995) 192-93.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Henry Lang, "Introduction," *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work*, ed. Paul Henry Lang, (New York: Norton, 1963), 15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Stravinsky's princely lifestyle, with his love for the theater and fine Scotch whisky, struck many observers as contradictory to traditional models of piety. After his death, revelations of his troubled family relations, penny pinching, extra-marital affairs, and anti-Semitism only added to these doubts. And yet, since his return to the Orthodox Church in 1926, faith had been of prime importance to Stravinsky. He went so far as to identify his entire creative output as "the fruit of my conscience and my faith."<sup>57</sup> In his final years Stravinsky devoted more and more of his writings and music to the sacred. "The Church knew," Stravinsky pronounced, "what the Psalmist knew: music praises God. Music is as well or better able to praise Him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church's greatest ornament."<sup>58</sup>

In his late sacred works, Stravinsky thumbed his nose at traditional expectations of church music, fueling doubts to his piety. The church was considered the place of artistic conservatism, not a place for the avant-garde. Equally incongruous was the apparent lack of emotion or sensuality in Stravinsky's sacred music. As Gilbert Amy explained,

finding any evidence of a sentimental attitude toward the sacred in Igor Fyodorovitch's religious music would be difficult. On the contrary, this music is characterized by the starkness of its content and the sharp clarity of its lines, the absence of pathos or bombast but not of eloquence. Economy, clarity, objectivity, and exclusion of 'personal' emotion are the hallmarks of Igor Stravinsky's style.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 8.

<sup>58</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959) 141.

<sup>59</sup> Gilbert Amy, "Aspects of the Religious Music of Igor Stravinsky," *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 195.

Even fifty years later, Stravinsky's première at St. Mark's may strike one as being as much a photo opportunity for a well-heeled celebrity tourist as the journey of a genuine pilgrim.

Robert Copeland and Stephen Walsh have each made important contributions to an understanding of Stravinsky's unique position as a creator of sacred music. Copeland has emphasized the importance of theological concepts of Russian orthodoxy, including an emphasis on mystical experience over a systematic theology and its unique concept of redemption.<sup>60</sup> Walsh has augmented Copeland's thoughts by exploring the important influence of French Catholicism on Stravinsky in the 1920s:

The crucial point here is that while the family devotions were exclusively Orthodox in tone and content, artistically and intellectually Stravinsky was, from the moment he settled in France, under Catholic influences.... Reading Maritain in the early twenties, he had been reading into a theological tradition that stretched back in a continuous line to the Middle Ages and beyond, by implication, to Aristotle. And because Maritain's writing was both historically based and alert to the problems of modern sensibility, it seemed to offer solid, authoritative spiritual answers to contemporary aesthetic questions. *Art et scolastique* had argued that the instability in late-nineteenth-century Catholic thought and late-romantic art had common causes and a common antidote, which amounted to the deindividualization of personal expression and the return to a quasi-medieval ideal of humility and anonymity, and a divine concept of order.<sup>61</sup>

Although a detailed investigation of Stravinsky's late music in light of the philosophical ideas of Jacques Maritain awaits publication, Walsh's writings elsewhere hint at the riches that could be gained from such a study.

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<sup>60</sup> Robert M. Copeland, "The Christian Message of Igor Stravinsky," *The Musical Quarterly* LXVIII/4 (October 1982), 563-79.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring, Russia and France, 1882-1934* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 499.

Another focal point in the scholarly dialogue regarding *Canticum sacrum* centers on Stravinsky's elaborate and eclectic use of materials drawn from music history. While his conspicuous consideration of historic materials as inspiration dates to *Pulcinella* (1920), *Canticum sacrum* was certainly the apex of this practice. Roman Vlad assembled an impressive list of the historical references heard in the cantata:

From the point of view of form, this work embraces features which span the entire panorama of European musical history and gathers them all into one vast *ominum gatherum*—from Gregorian chant to Webern's spacious intervals; from the Byzantine modes to polymodality, polytonality, and atonality; from the old-fashioned diatonic to the modern polydiatonic style and out-and-out chromaticism; from phrases which recall the archaic effect of the hocket and inflexions reminiscent of the Venice School of the Renaissance to the tightly-drawn dodecaphonic curves; from the baroque solidity of harmonic masses to the contrapuntal *pointillisme* of the ultra-moderns; from an ensemble in the style of the old Venetian school to an instrumental disposition which betrays an acquaintance with Webern's Variations for orchestra.<sup>62</sup>

From Vlad's list it is apparent that Stravinsky's new work did not rehash the Middle Ages or offer a simple pastiche of the past but welded together both the ancient and modern in a completely new way. Vlad declared this union "the most comprehensive and essential synthesis of elements it is possible to imagine at this particular stage in the evolution of European music."<sup>63</sup> The Russian scholar Mikhail Druskin has rightly described Stravinsky's view of the past as representing a continuum of tradition that offers substantial kinship with the remote past unavailable to artists of more recent eras: "At this level, the past and the present are thought of as indissolubly one, as Bach or Beethoven,

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<sup>62</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 183-84.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

Gesualdo or Monteverdi are more ‘contemporary’ than either Chaminade or those member of the avant-garde who reject all connection with universal artistic tradition.”<sup>64</sup>

Stravinsky’s interest in early music has raised strong objections among some scholars. Lang described the composer’s uses of historical materials as “not convincing,” complaining that his references “often bear little relation to actual events.”<sup>65</sup> Stravinsky’s application of historical terms, such as “ricercar” or “anthem” were frequently inaccurate, as if the composer were an enthusiastic student of music history who had not taken proper notes, or perhaps had even missed a day or two of class. No doubt this seemed to detractors as further evidence of dotage in the old man. Glenn Watkins, however, has pointed to the continuity in Stravinsky’s apparent mishandling of terms, noting the composer’s misuse of terms such as “capriccio” and “symphonies” in his earlier works.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Stravinsky’s use of historical labels not only displayed his delight in musical perversity but also challenged and expanded accepted notions of traditional genres. Wilfrid Mellers questioned the accessibility of Stravinsky’s erudite use of history for a modern audience. Mellers perceptively recognized that Stravinsky’s adoption of the tone row was similar to the manipulations of the cantus firmus in the Middle Ages, but with an important expressive difference. “The difference, of course,” Mellers explained, “lies in the fact that the *cantus firmus* did have doctrinal significance which was intelligible to at

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<sup>64</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works, and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 174.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Henry Lang, *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Glenn Watkins, “The Canon and Stravinsky’s Late Style,” *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 221.

least a fair proportion of the people who listened to, participated in, the music.”<sup>67</sup> Because Stravinsky’s modern cantus firmus was not a familiar bit of plainchant but an abstract tone row of his own invention, his audience would remain excluded from any sense of allusion.

In his thoughtful monograph, the French composer André Boucourechliev also offered important insights on Stravinsky’s creative reuse of the past:

He saw the whole course of history as available to him and he criss-crossed it with abandon and delight, sometimes at the risk of losing his power of conviction. Why did he do this? In order to put the clock back? To support an imagination suddenly paralyzed after the *Sacre*? No: rather to rediscover beyond but also at the very heart of the complex constellations of musical history, perpetually recurring down the ages, certain active *constants*.<sup>68</sup>

Although Boucourechliev did not identify those “constants” he believed Stravinsky sought to rediscover, one can speculate that they embrace those ideas and practices that Stravinsky mirrored in his own late works: contrapuntal rigor, depersonalized emotional content, and devotion to his God.

Concerning Stravinsky’s exploitation of historical materials throughout his career, Boucourechliev identified three primary ways in which the composer approached his models. In Stravinsky’s most popular works, such as *Le sacre du printemps*, *Les noces*, *Histoire du soldat*, and *Symphony of Psalms*, “cultural elements—possibly of his own invention—occur as primary material, which is then freely exploited by the composer’s im-

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<sup>67</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, “Stravinsky’s Oedipus as 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Hero,” *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: Norton, 1963), 45.

<sup>68</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meie, 1987), 10.

agination.”<sup>69</sup> In contrast, *Canticum sacrum*, Boucourechliev argued, belonged with *Mavra*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Persephone*. In these works Stravinsky “recreates a tradition—and recreates himself within that tradition—basing his music on models, either real or imaginary, which his language adapts, stylizes, updates, or transforms.”<sup>70</sup> In a third practice, seen in neoclassic works such as *Dumbarton Oaks*, *Violin Concerto*, and *Symphony in C*, Boucourechliev asserted that Stravinsky allowed his models to get the best of him. In these works, the only instances in which Boucourechliev believed Stravinsky experienced a “partial, temporary inhibition of his creative powers,” the model tends to dominate, “subverting and dictating” the composer’s work.<sup>71</sup>

In his monograph, *Stravinsky’s Late Music*, theorist Joseph Straus devoted a concluding chapter to expression in the composer’s late works. Although not entirely convincing, one of Straus’s most intriguing ideas centered on the “Surge, aquilo” from the *Canticum sacrum*. “The text,” Straus noticed, “from the ‘Song of Songs,’ is erotically charged, and concerns a garden into which the lovers enter to eat and drink.”<sup>72</sup> Significant for Straus was the fact that, although this movement is based on a fully chromatic twelve-tone row, there was centrality on the pitch class A. Straus found centrality on A in other late works, including “The Maidens Came” from *Cantata* and the first movement of the *Septet*. The pitch class A was also an important focus of the pastoral first scene of *The Rake’s Progress*. Straus proposed that Stravinsky attached significant meaning to music centered on A, perhaps equating this pitch class to “A garden of delight,” or

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 194.



“love’s kingdom,” or even “a transcendent realm beyond the vicissitudes of daily life.”<sup>73</sup>

As further evidence of this construction, Straus cited the importance of A in the second movement of the *Octet* (1923), a work Stravinsky dedicated to his then mistress and future wife, Vera Sudeykina.<sup>74</sup> One wonders, however, why such a connection was not borne out by *The Owl and the Pussycat*, Stravinsky’s last original work and a much more overt valentine to his wife. What is also curious is that Straus does not mention the *Serenade in A*, a Mozart-inspired work dedicated to Stravinsky’s first wife, Catherine.

In addition, Straus stretched this association beyond plausibility by arguing for its presence in three purely instrumental works from Stravinsky’s last period: *Septet*, *Movements for Piano and Orchestra*, and *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)*.

Straus interpreted the entire first movement of the *Septet* from the vantage point that its A major tonality—and movement through subsequent areas of E minor and D major found in the “Dirge-Canons” of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*—was intended to evoke a musical journey, transporting listeners “from an earthly Eden, through contact with death and an acceptance of death, eventually regaining our starting point, but now with a sense of ecstatic transcendence.”<sup>75</sup> Such tonal a progression—A major to E minor to D major—needs no program to explain its logic. Beyond the tonality, however, the foreground features and mood of the music hardly support Straus’s interpretation. Indeed, it would be exceptionally uncharacteristic for Stravinsky, who spent a lifetime fighting an unpopular battle against such poetic interpretation in favor of the freedom and value of absolute music, to communicate a program in a purely instrumental work. In addition, Richard Taruskin has

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music*, 194.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

identified a cryptic program in *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1921),<sup>76</sup> but here the programmatic content is that of a Russian Orthodox funeral service, one of a less personal nature than the scenario advocated by Straus. To disagree with Straus's interpretation is not to imply that the *Septet* is inexpressive. On the contrary, Straus's rather superficial interpretation of such profound music, especially when he has so thoroughly analyzed the works in question, will only confirm the opinions of doubters who have long suspected an emotional vacuity in Stravinsky's late works.

In centuries to come, if *Canticum sacrum* is remembered at all, it may be because of its exceptional representation of the 1950s. Like the bebop of Charlie Parker or the rock and roll of Elvis Presley, Stravinsky's cantata for Saint Mark represents its tortured decade—with its crises of faith, its bold adventures in serialism, and its rediscovery of the past—better than any other work of modern music. Roman Vlad has described the “Fides” portion of the *Canticum sacrum* as marking “perhaps one of the highest peaks of Stravinsky's creativeness and probably ranks as one of the great landmarks of dodeca- phonic music—indeed modern music in general.”<sup>77</sup> Some scholars have expressed concern for the lack of universality of *Canticum sacrum*. The English scholar Neil Tierney wrote, “Only by remembering the various influences—Gregorian chant, polytonality, Webern, Byzantine modes, atonality—can the listener reconcile the strange contrasts which the agitated trumpets at the beginning make with the ecclesiastical sound of the organ and choir.”<sup>78</sup> A great admirer and advocate of Stravinsky's music, the Dutch com-

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), II, 1488-93.

<sup>77</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 193-94.

<sup>78</sup> Neil Tierney, *The Unknown Country: The Life of Igor Stravinsky* (London: Robert Hale, 1977), 249.

poser Louis Andriessen has written, “Some music puts its trust in reminiscence. This is true for the late string quartets of Beethoven...and, to a lesser degree, for...Stravinsky. The reminiscence of this music weighs heavier than the listening itself: to listen is less important than to have listened.”<sup>79</sup> In the end, the extremely localized nature of the *Canticum sacrum* to San Marco, with its demands that listeners come to terms with both serialism and Medieval polyphony may continue to prove too demanding but for only a distinct minority of listeners.

The elitist scholarship surrounding Stravinsky’s late works should not discount, however, the composer’s uncanny talent for communicating to the uninitiated, to those fellow painters, choreographers, and writers, as well as musicians who have not yet been taught to dislike his music. As the composer John Tavener (born 1944) remembered, “there was one work in particular, Stravinsky’s *Canticum sacrum*, which was a musical revelation to me: I must have heard its first performance broadcast from Venice in 1956, when I was 12. I didn’t know at the time why it made such an impression, but it’s remained a key work of the twentieth century for me.”<sup>80</sup> The full influence of Stravinsky’s late music on that of Tavener, Arvo Pärt, and other contemporary composers who blend ideas of very new and very old music has not yet been fully explored.

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<sup>79</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>80</sup> John Tavener, quoted from interview in Paul Griffiths, *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980s* (London: Faber, 1985), 106.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “THE COLOUR OF A THUNDERCLOUD”: *THRENI: ID EST LAMENTATIONES JEREMIAE PROPHETAE*

Devotees and detractors of Stravinsky recognize austerity as one of the most imposing aspects of the composer’s late style. Regarding even the relatively colorful, Venetian Baroque-inspired music of *Canticum sacrum*, the critic Ronald Eyer concluded that “the work has no immediate sensuous appeal, and one’s first impression is dominated by that prune-like aridity that set in with Stravinsky when he began experimenting with atonality.”<sup>1</sup> Critics quickly linked this apparently puritanical lack of sensuality in the composer’s so-called atonal music with an overreliance on intellect and a poverty of emotional expression. “Too much head and too little heart,” Eyer further charged, “is the critical estimate one arrives at almost automatically.”<sup>2</sup> Stravinsky’s interest in early music only made matters worse. In 1952 the musicologist Lawrence Morton acknowledged that music historians were widely stereotyped as “dried up” and overly academic; further characterized the then-current estimation of musicology as “an esoteric activity of queer persons who are moved more deeply by the appearance of a neume on vellum than by the sound of an orchestral tutti.”<sup>3</sup>

The label of austerity was to brand Stravinsky for decades. In the year 2000 Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* summed up a great deal of opinion on the composer when he

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald Eyer, “Stravinsky Cantata Presented by Bostonians,” *Musical America* LXXVII/14 (1 December 1957), 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Morton, quoted without citation in Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 269-70.

declared, “his intellect was a limitation, and he left the public with an image of the classical composer as a cerebral rather than a sensuous being.”<sup>4</sup> It is this apparent lack of sensuality and emotional immediacy, what Walsh has called a “self-defeating severity,”<sup>5</sup> that is perhaps the greatest block to the general appreciation of Stravinsky’s late music. The charge of severity is most particular to *Threni: id est Lamentationes Jeremiae prophetae*, the work he was to compose soon after his cantata for St. Mark.

Austerity had been a growing trend in Stravinsky’s music for decades, most conspicuously in terms of instrumentation. As his early Russian period waned, he abandoned the lush tonal palette of the Post-Romantic orchestra in favor of leaner chamber ensembles and dryer timbres. The stark, percussive sound of four pianos in *Les noces* (1923), the jazz band inspired chamber ensemble of *Histoire du soldat* (1918), and the cold sonorities of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1920) stood in stark contrast to the orchestral opulence of *L’oiseau de feu* (1910). Public tastes, however, held fast to his earlier, more Romantic style, with its masterful abundance of instrumental color. Irritated by this lag in audience comprehension, the composer used his highly polemical *Autobiography* (1936) to defend his increasingly astringent style. He warned his audience against an “unhealthy greed for orchestral opulence,” which had corrupted their collective judgment.<sup>6</sup> Stravinsky confessed that he was “tired of being saturated with timbres” and desired freedom from traditional sound colors.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alex Ross, “Prince Igor: Reexamining Stravinsky’s Reign,” *The New Yorker* (6 November 2000), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Walsh, “Stravinsky, Igor,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXIV, 553.

<sup>6</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York: Norton, 1936), 119.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Critics soon assailed Stravinsky's sonic acerbity. Reviewing the New York premiere of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in 1924, Lawrence Gilman (1878-1939) asked pointedly, "What, then, is the effect upon the ear of this rigorously objective counterpoint of instrumental timbres, which is so austere bent upon resisting the tendency to harmonic fusion?"<sup>8</sup> The composer was well aware of such charges and combated his critics with characteristic wit. "I could make a very exacting criticism of my music," Stravinsky confided. "For example, it is not free from dryness. But that is the price of precision. *La Bruyère* is dry."<sup>9</sup> The *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* would prove just one example of a growing trend in the composer's music. Stravinsky's preference for stark, desiccated textures would well serve his neoclassical style and reach its apex in the composer's late works.

Stravinsky's polemics fueled critical perceptions of his music as indifferent, unemotional, and cerebral. In one of his more controversial and oft-repeated edicts, the composer proclaimed flatly that "I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all."<sup>10</sup> To his detractors, this statement was unimpeachable proof that Stravinsky's music was devoid of humane or poetic content and that its creator was a cold, calculating being. Although Stravinsky later attempted to

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Gilman, *New York Tribune* (6 February 1924), 11. Reprinted in Donald Prosser Thompson, *Stravinsky and the Press: Performances and Reviews of Stravinsky's Works in New York City, 1910-1954*. (Masters thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1954; Columbia, Missouri), 84.

<sup>9</sup> Igor Stravinsky, interview from *La Nación* (25 April 1936), quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 193.

<sup>10</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 52.

qualify this his most notorious maxim, claiming that “music expresses itself” and was beyond verbal meanings and verbal descriptions, the damage had been done.<sup>11</sup>

As Stravinsky approached serialism, his severity reached new extremes, particularly in such transitional works as *Mass* (1948) and *Cantata* (1952). Scored for small, four-part chorus and a stark double wind quintet, the aridity of *Mass* resulted, in part, from Stravinsky’s reaction to the warmth, sensuality, and theatricality of Mass settings by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, which he described as “rococo-operatic sweets-of-sin.”<sup>12</sup> Ironically, although the composer found Mozart’s model unsuitable for his *Mass*, the Austrian master’s dramatic style was central to Stravinsky’s next work, *The Rake’s Progress*. During the composition of his neoclassic opera Stravinsky steeped himself in Mozart’s dramatic works, returning to the scores for study and attending performances whenever possible. Stravinsky’s dual attitude toward Mozart demonstrates his dual attitude toward sacred and secular music. As the composer Lukas Foss (born 1922) observed, “I think that, as a religious composer, he was always interested in austere expression, rather than in an Italianate kind of expression. That was fun for him for his worldly compositions.”<sup>13</sup> The church, according to Stravinsky, was a place where “we commit fewer musical sins.”<sup>14</sup> For him, austerity was the only appropriate mode of expression for sacred compositions.

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<sup>11</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 115.

<sup>12</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions*, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Lukas Foss, recorded interview for “Program VIII: The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

<sup>14</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 141.

Stravinsky's increasing austerity was not only difficult for his critics, but for his champions as well. The *Mass* precipitated a split with Ernest Ansermet (1883-1969), conductor of the Ballets Russes and one of the composer's greatest interpreters. The Swiss conductor led the world première of *Mass* at Teatro a la Scala in October of 1948 with dubious results. Instead of employing the archaic sound of a small, all-male choir as Stravinsky had stipulated, Ansermet used the robust, mixed voices of his La Scala chorus. To the composer's horror, the La Scala women produced a much more operatic, vibrato-charged reading than he desired.<sup>15</sup> An ensuing squabble over the performance provided the impetus for Ansermet to vent his general dissatisfaction with Stravinsky's compositional direction. In a letter that was to end their long relationship, the Swiss conductor and mathematician chided Stravinsky:

You place too much emphasis on your technical powers and on your knowledge and not enough on the music itself and on your instincts. No matter what you say about art being simply a "product," in the end it is made by a man, and when you decided to make this *Mass*, it was not that you merely wanted to create a kind of Flemish motet in your style. You are also a believer who wanted to pay homage to his God.<sup>16</sup>

Undeterred by the loss of his friend, Stravinsky progressed more and more toward a hard-boiled, bleached-bone expressive attitude, as if austerity itself had become a coveted virtue in his music.

Throughout his career Stravinsky did his best to exercise singular control over what was written about his music. In particular, he sought to discipline interviews by

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 231.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Ansermet, letter of 8 February 1949, quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents.*, 450.



carefully selecting his interrogators. As early as the mid-1920s, the composer began strategically to grant interviews only to allies, sometimes further manipulating the process by writing both questions and answers.<sup>17</sup> Such media manipulation reached its zenith in Stravinsky's literary partnership with Craft. The two men collaborated on a popular series of conversation books that appeared at intervals from the late 1950s through the 1960s. These oft-quoted texts, which did much to increase the composer's celebrity, largely take the form of questions and answers between Craft and the composer. The true source of these polemics, however, has been a subject of controversy since their publication.

The use of ghostwriters was not new to Stravinsky, as both *An Autobiography* and *The Poetics of Music* had been penned in collaboration with unnamed authors. Those who knew the composer well recognized immediately that the literary voice of these conversation books was that of Craft, not Stravinsky. While Craft insisted that he was merely a recorder and transcriber of the master's thoughts,<sup>18</sup> doubts remained. The quick wit and wry humor of the Russian composer's colorful, distinctive English had been replaced by the measured, scholarly tone of his American amanuensis. Walsh, the composer's foremost biographer, has found in these conversation books "no trace of the idiosyncratic basso profundo drolleries of the composer's English-language conversation. It is too wordy, and in sense too intellectual—not, certainly, too quick or intelligent, but too

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (London: Lime Tree, 1992), 61. Craft later admitted that while the thoughts recorded in these books were the composer's own, "The language, unavoidably, is very largely mine." See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), xiii.

dialectically organized, at bottom too Anglo-Saxon, too sensible.”<sup>19</sup> Craft’s voice was perceived not only in Stravinsky’s prose but also in the texts of composer’s English language works. Not only did Craft coach Stravinsky in proper accentuation in preparation for *The Rake’s Progress*, but he also was instrumental in assembling the English libretti for *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* (1961) and *The Flood* (1962). Craft’s ventriloquism is particularly unfortunate, however, as his erudite, sometimes priggish tone became easily mistaken for Stravinsky’s own. Lang voiced this concern when he warned, “He is sometimes in danger of being almost too learned a citizen of the world, of knowing too much musicology, too many literatures, sciences, and philosophies.”<sup>20</sup> The “was-pish polemics”<sup>21</sup> of the Stravinsky-Craft conversation books only reinforced the view that the composer was an intellectual killjoy.

In the 1950s Stravinsky’s growing celebrity translated into a number of commissions. The composer’s savvy for negotiation often allowed him to initiate the new work he wished, only later manipulating patrons to pay for the new music. The Swiss twelve-tone composer Rolf Liebermann (1910-1999), speaking of his negotiations with Stravinsky to bring forth *Threni* for the North German Radio Symphony of Hamburg and the 1958 Venice Biennale International Festival of Contemporary Music, recalled the following incident:

[Stravinsky] had the generosity of a Russian prince and, at the same time, the sordid avarice of a usurer.... I offered ten thousand dollars for *Threni*, that too rarely played masterpiece, and he accepted. But the next day, at seven o’clock in the morning, I was awakened by a telephone call from

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 398.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Henry Lang, “Introduction,” *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Works*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: Norton, 1963), 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> “The Rightness of His Wrongs,” *Time* LXXXVII/16 (19 April 1971), 68.

our mutual friend Nicolas Nabokov: “Listen...Igor did not close his eyes all night: he wants a thousand dollars more and is embarrassed to ask you.” I would have been stupid to cancel the creation of a work by Stravinsky for a sum that our Hamburg Maecenases could raise in a few minutes. I accepted, and the money was found the same morning. But Igor was so pleased that he invited us all to the best restaurant and ordered mountains of caviar and cases of champagne, which cost at least a thousand dollars.<sup>22</sup>

Anne Shreffler has recently exposed that the real Maecenas of Hamburg was the Congress of Cultural Freedom, an organization funded by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States government to promote liberal ideas and arts of the West in the face of the Cold War Soviet threat.<sup>23</sup> Through contact with Nicolas Nabokov (1903-1978), the CCF indirectly contributed to generous commissions for a number of Stravinsky’s late works, including *Canticum sacrum*, *Movements*, *Threni*, and *Abraham and Isaac*.<sup>24</sup> The CCF also provided ample funds for appearance and conducting fees, as well as travel expenses for the composer. Stravinsky began work on *Threni* in the nightclub of his Venice hotel on 29 August 1957.<sup>25</sup> His curious choice of working location suggests a strong creative urge, as he had long since declared an inability to compose while within earshot of others.<sup>26</sup> The work was completed quickly, being finished in March of 1958.

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<sup>22</sup> Rolf Liebermann, *Actes et Entr’actes* (Paris: Stock, 1976), quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 443.

<sup>23</sup> Anne C. Shreffler, “Ideologies of Serialism: Stravinsky’s *Threni* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity: Essays*, ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 217-45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-29.

<sup>25</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 443.

<sup>26</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 57.

Two critical events punctuated the interim between the controversial *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni* two years later. The first involved the health of the aging composer, who suffered a life-threatening stroke at the podium soon after the St. Mark's première. While he spent four weeks in the hospital recuperating, hard questions were raised as to his future. His vitality had proved misleading. Suddenly, the world was made aware that each new work might be his last. A second event proved to be one of the great triumphs of the composer's career: the première of *Agon* with the New York City Ballet on 1 December 1957. *Agon* was one of the "most spectacular successes of his entire career."<sup>27</sup> A collaboration with George Balanchine, *Agon* brought a brief restoration of the fleet rhythms and brilliant orchestration of Stravinsky's past. No doubt its reception profited from the public's sense of nostalgia for the past ballets, as the significant influence of Webern's music in the score's interior portions seems to have been largely overlooked.

*Threni*, in the great Renaissance tradition of Orlando de Lasso (1532-1594) and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594), was a setting of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, texts approved for centuries by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the elaborate Tenebrae rituals of Holy Week. When asked by Craft if he had modeled his setting on any particular early master, Stravinsky responded, "I had studied Palestrina's complete service and the *Lamentations* of Tallis and Byrd but I don't think there is any 'influence' of these masters in my music."<sup>28</sup> Although Stravinsky denied specific, *Threni* offered a similar mix of archaic practices and modern innovations found in *Canticum*

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Igor Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 374.

<sup>28</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 19.

*sacrum*, the blend resulting in a much greater sense of unity. A contemporary influence on *Threni* was Stravinsky's fellow émigré Ernst Krenek (1900-1991), who revived the Renaissance tradition with his own *Lamentio Jeremiae Prophetarum* (1941) for a cappella chorus.<sup>29</sup>

Stravinsky began *Threni* with one of his most memorable gestures: a throbbing, five-fold, descending augmented octave that unmistakably illustrates the mournful nature of the Lamentations. This gesture of so-called mistuned octaves—major 7<sup>th</sup>s, diminished octaves, and augmented octaves—has been identified by Walsh elsewhere in Stravinsky's work as an important aspect of his harmonic thinking.<sup>30</sup> From there, the work's opening recalls the sung dedication of the *Canticum sacrum*, with soprano and alto soloists intoning the incipit of the prophet's text. As in *Canticum sacrum*, symmetry and balance are apparent in the structure of *Threni*. The body of the work consists of three elegies: "De Elegia Prima," "De Elegia Tertia," and "De Elegia Quinta." The central movement, "De Elegia Tertia," is in turn divided into three portions, which Stravinsky entitled "Querimonia," "Sensus Spei," and "Solacium." At approximately thirty minutes, *Threni* was twice as long as any other work of Stravinsky's last years. Unlike his previous Venice commission, *Canticum sacrum*, there were no objections concerning the brevity of *Threni*.

Stravinsky's set his Lamentations for the largest ensemble he had specified in many years: solo soprano, contralto, two tenors, bass, basso profundo, chorus, and large orchestra. Despite the immense forces, however, Stravinsky characteristically eschewed Romantic bombast, offering instead music of a chamber-like transparency. Although re-

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<sup>29</sup> Günther Massenkeil, "Lamentations," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), XIV, 190.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Walsh, "Stravinsky, Igor Fyodorovich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2 ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2000), XXIV, 536.

strained, *Threni* was peppered with unforgettable instrumental and vocal effects. The vocal soloists carry much of the music, while the orchestra supports the chorus and illustrates lines of counterpoint. To the chorus Stravinsky assigned what are, initially, the most appealing features of the work: choral settings of the Hebrew letters that begin each verse of the Lamentations. Each of these Hebraic settings, though brief, was a unique and memorable example of Stravinsky's latent sonic wizardry. While the composer did not acknowledge any influence, this feature was likely inspired by Palestrina's *Lamentations*, as the Renaissance composer also highlighted these Hebrew letters by making them more melodically and rhythmically ornate.<sup>31</sup> The chorus also contributes ghostly episodes of *parlando sotto voce*, a device Stravinsky employed in several of his late choral works, such as *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer, Introitus, and Requiem Canticles*.

From start to finish, *Threni* is a thoroughly polyphonic work, employing an impressive succession of linear devices, most apparent in the form of elaborate vocal canons. One of the most obvious tips of the hat to the music of the Renaissance occurs in the "Querimonia," in which Stravinsky removed the bar lines from his vocal canons. When asked about this practice by Craft, Stravinsky explained, "The voices are not always in rhythmic unison. Therefore, any bar lines would cut at least one line arbitrarily. There are no strong beats in these canons, in any case, and the conductor must merely count the music out as he counts out a motet by Josquin.... This is perhaps more difficult to read, but it is a truer notation."<sup>32</sup> To appreciate these contrapuntal intricacies, listening

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<sup>31</sup> Günther Massenkeil, "Lamentations," 189.

<sup>32</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 18-19.

to *Threni* is aided greatly by the score, perhaps more than any other work by the composer. The written notation makes clear the potential rhythmic verve of *Threni*, a quality not always well conveyed by its lethargic tempos and largely vocal medium.

Robert Craft rehearsed the North German Radio Symphony Chorus twenty times for the Venice première,<sup>33</sup> and with good reason. *Threni* is a technically demanding work for performers, particularly in terms of intonation. Commenting on his own 2001 recording of *Threni*, Craft confessed that he believed it to be “the first time ever that all of the correct pitches have been sung.”<sup>34</sup> *Threni* was Stravinsky’s first entirely dodecaphonic work, based from start to finish on a single, twelve-tone row. That his first essay in fully dodecaphonic composition should be so substantial and in such an important genre was certainly a precocious step. What is more, to bring to bear such a controversial technique in a purely sacred work shows yet another attractive perversity in Stravinsky’s character. As the composer had claimed, “Ever since it appeared in our vocabulary, the word dissonance has carried with it a certain odor of sinfulness.”<sup>35</sup> *Threni* allowed no hiding places for iniquitous aromas of the music’s considerable discord. The almost perpetual dissonance of the twelve-tone row provides a convincing musical analogue to the harsh imagery of the text. Characteristically, Stravinsky would never admit to text painting as such, insisting that pathos and chromaticism were associated only by the conventions of the past.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Serial Success,” *Time* LXXII/14 (6 October 1958), 45.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Craft, *An Improbable Life: Memoirs* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 431.

<sup>35</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 36.

<sup>36</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), 109-10.

Like *Canticum sacrum*, *Threni* was introduced in Venice. Performed by the North German Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus of Hamburg, Stravinsky's new work served as the finale of the Bienele Festival of 1958. Christina Thoresby, having witnessed the 23 September world première "among the Tintoretto's grandiloquent paintings in the Scuola di San Rocco"<sup>37</sup> for both *The New York Times* and *Musical America*, offered a respectful record of what she described as the "climax of the International Festival of Contemporary Music."<sup>38</sup> An elegiac tone hung over the occasion due to the recent death of Alessandro Piovesan, the festival organizer and leading spirit behind *Threni*'s commission. Thoresby reported on the balance of the program: "Stravinsky also conducted his interesting Symphony for Brass Instruments in memory of Claude Debussy, as well as his arrangement of Bach's 'Von Himmel Hoch,' and the 'Dirge Canons and Song in memoriam Dylan Thomas,' which was given an outstanding performance by Richard Robinson."<sup>39</sup>

According to Thoresby, *Threni* was greeted by the audience with "greater appreciation and less heated denunciation in certain quarters than was *Canticum Sacrum* two years ago."<sup>40</sup> The press was aware that *Threni* represented an important milestone in Stravinsky's development, being his first fully dodecaphonic work. It is obvious, however, that much of the consternation that resulted from his adoption of serialism remained: "Few serious musicians can now doubt that Stravinsky's actual preoccupation

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<sup>37</sup> Christina Thoresby, "Stravinsky in Venice: World Premiere of His Sacred Work, *Threni*, Given in Italian City," *The New York Times* CVIII (5 October 1958), 2: 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



with serial techniques is no more than a passing phase of experimentation or that his creative genius is in any measure exhausted.”<sup>41</sup> Thoresby pointed to some particular beauties in the score, in particular “some sotto voce speech song, especially in the first section with great effect”; also of note were instances of Stravinsky’s sonic wizardry, as the “juxtaposition with the Latin verse of...Hebrew letters...sung sometimes by the soloists, more often by the chorus, is among the most striking features of *Threni*.”<sup>42</sup> Among critics, Thoresby was unusually committed and perceptive, venturing a tentative appraisal of the work: “*Threni* is an impressive work that in time may well be considered among his greatest masterpieces. The impression left...has been deep and lasting.”<sup>43</sup> Austerity, again, was recognized as a defining feature of the new work, but Thoresby managed to appreciate this quality more than do contemporaries: “Perhaps the most impressive quality of *Threni*, apart from the masterly invention of detail and over-all design, is the dignified restraint, at once human and impressive, with which the text has been set. *Threni* is a work that could only have been organized by an extremely original and mature mind.”<sup>44</sup> As with other critics of her day, Thoresby recognized head and not heart in Stravinsky’s new work.

The review offered in the pages of *Time* magazine was a good deal kinder than that which had greeted *Canticum sacrum*. Two of the twentieth-century’s greatest musicians appear on the same page, as the account of the Venice première of *Threni* accom-

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Christina Thoresby, “International Report: Stravinsky Conducts Premiere of *Threni* at Venice Festival,” *Musical America* LXXVIII (1 November 1958), 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Christina Thoresby, “Stravinsky in Venice,” 9.

panies a photograph of Ella Fitzgerald (1917-1996) and an assessment of her latest song-book recordings. Included is a snapshot of the composer at the podium, illustrating how the “76-year-old Igor Stravinsky, with a clawlike motion of his right hand, launched the orchestra into the première of his latest work. What followed was some of the finest—and most complex—music of Stravinsky’s career.”<sup>45</sup> The article reports that both audience and critics were forced to journey to the Scuola di San Rocco, by gondola, as all motor-boat pilots were on strike. As to the music itself, *Threni* is described as having a mostly “funereal” tempo, “and throughout the mood is unrelievedly austere.” Despite the severity and requirements of Stravinsky’s new twelve-tone idiom, the article is remarkably perceptive of “Stravinskyan trademarks—harmonic juxtapositions, rhythmic ingenuities—that adorn such earlier works as *Les Noces* and *Symphony of Psalms*.”<sup>46</sup> All things considered, the *Time* correspondent calls *Threni* “An important, affecting work that will probably influence other composers who up to now have hesitated to attempt serial writing. It may never achieve real audience popularity, but it will rank with other infrequently done large works, such as *Perséphone* and *Oedipus Rex*.”<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the pithiest statement in the article is a quotation, taken from the Russian-American composer Alexei Haieff (1914-1994), himself a pupil of Nadia Boulanger noted for his austere, neoclassical works. “What Stravinsky is writing,” Haieff pronounced, “is the best twelve-tone music in the world today.”<sup>48</sup> Whether the best twelve-tone music equals the greatest music of the day is a question left to the reader.

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<sup>45</sup> “Serial Success,” *Time* LXXII/14 (6 October 1958), 45.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Alexei Haieff, quoted without citation in “Serial Success,” 45.

The English press was not as kind. Reginald Smith Brindle (1917-2003), also a composer of the twelve-tone school, reported on the Venice performance for *The Musical Times*:

Stravinsky's new cantata *Threni* has the colour of a thundercloud—gray—brown, lowering. These 'Lamentations of Jeremiah' have no other colour, no illuminating glow to relieve a half-hour of unrelenting grief. Compared with this cantata, his "austere" *Symphonies d'instruments a vent* seemed a tender idyll, *Le sacre du printemps* seemed an absolute romp of innocent gaiety.<sup>49</sup>

Yet Smith Brindle found in this intense austerity a quality to admire, if somewhat grudgingly. He called *Threni* "without doubt the most grandiosely integral structure Stravinsky has ever given us. It is gigantic. A huge monolith of granite texture."<sup>50</sup> Surprisingly, the trademarks of Stravinsky's style escaped Smith Brindle, who deduced in *Threni* a deliberate attempt on the composer's part to subjugate his unmistakable voice in favor of an archaic language.

By a supreme act of self-sacrifice Stravinsky has stripped himself naked of all superficialities, of all exteriorities, and has set Jeremiah's lamentations impersonally, as a self-negating intermediary between God and man. The fingerprints of Stravinsky's personality are therefore non-existent, and the work is at first disconcerting in its anonymity...returned to the old Renaissance concept of universality of expression, where differences of personality and individual stylistic quirks were inconceivable.<sup>51</sup>

While *Threni* is expressively impersonal, it is surprising that Smith Brindle could not recognize Stravinsky's distinct voice. For him, *Threni* moves "in the old ecclesiastical

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<sup>49</sup> Reginald Smith Brindle, "Reports from Abroad: Venice Contemporary Music Festival," *The Musical Times* XCIX/1389 (November 1958), 619.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

style, without any rhythmic buoyancy,” and was “constantly unenergetic and fairly slow.”<sup>52</sup> He found relief from this monotony in the interjections of Hebrew letters so frequently identified in other reviews: “These interjections which, as first, seem incongruous in relation to the otherwise Latin text, are shafts of light, gleaming pillars which form the architecture of the whole edifice. Without them, *Threni* would have been without perspective, too uniform, a blank, impregnable façade.”<sup>53</sup>

With a certain smugness Smith Brindle identified particular problems with Stravinsky’s dodecaphonic technique: “from a purist point of view his serial writing is disappointing. There are so many flaws, so many concessions, so many traces of traditional harmonic procedures, that there is an impression not only that he is not at ease with this new technique, but that at times the delicate atonal equilibrium is crudely disturbed.”<sup>54</sup> Such a charge is surprising, as Smith Brindle’s own dodecaphonic compositions feature elements of tonality. One wishes that Smith Brindle, himself the author of a text on serial composition, would have clarified his stance.<sup>55</sup> Summing up, Smith Brindle concluded that “*Threni* will never be a popular work, it is too anonymous to attract our age. But in the distant future it may seem the one great religious work of this century which transcends the egoism and highly individualized introspection into which, rightly or wrongly, we have fallen.”<sup>56</sup> This criticism offers an interesting contradiction to the

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Reginald Smith Brindle, *Serial Composition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>56</sup> Reginald Smith Brindle, “Reports from Abroad,” 619.

accusations of Paul Henry Lang, who charged that Stravinsky's egotism was one of the primary obstacles to authenticity in his religious music.<sup>57</sup>

John S. Weissmann, reporting on the Venice premiere of *Threni* for both *The Music Review* and *The Musical Quarterly*, expressed concern that "The critics' welcome of the new work was divided. Their coolness may have been caused by the particularly inept arrangement of admittance to rehearsals."<sup>58</sup> The press, who had been barred from Craft's rehearsals, had first heard the work only on the day of the first performance in a specially arranged afternoon dress rehearsal, conducted by the composer.<sup>59</sup> Characterizing the audience's reaction to the première, Weissmann described the applause as "more of a token of respect for a great living musician than a sign of spontaneous appreciation."<sup>60</sup> Weissmann's own impressions of *Threni* were thoughtful, if mixed. Like Smith Brindle, he observed a "total effect of roughhewn monumentality, hardness, and archaic impersonality."<sup>61</sup> But while the overall impression may be roughhewn, *Threni*'s details were carefully crafted: "Stravinsky's astonishing technical virtuosity is not exhausted with these canons, duplex canons, inverted and crab canons."<sup>62</sup> Despite the allusions to technique, Weissmann managed to find something of Stravinsky's overall emotional

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Henry Lang, *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Works*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> John S. Weissmann, "Current Chronicle: Italy," *The Musical Quarterly* XLV/1 (January 1959), 104.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Second Exile*, 384.

<sup>60</sup> John S. Weissmann, "Venice 1958: Stravinsky's *Threni*," *The Music Review* XX/ 1 (February 1959), 74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

message as “channeled into a definite direction: despair is followed by hope, and hope leads to prayer as an expression of faith.”<sup>63</sup>

Weissmann lamented the loss of Stravinsky’s rhythmic drive, so characteristic of his earlier works. The rhythms of *Threni* were

less “Stravinskian,” we feel it less spontaneously vital, embodying a less compelling drive and energy.... That savage, barbaric force, that Dionysian element which was such an irresistible feature of his music, has become attenuated...the loss of primordial power is substituted, though hardly compensated, by a contrived sophistication reminding one of the schemes and combinations of certain of the medieval isorhythmic compositions.”<sup>64</sup>

The composer remained true to himself, however, in his orchestration, earning Weissmann’s praise as “the unforgettable magician of sound.”<sup>65</sup> Weissmann insightfully identified Stravinsky’s uniting twelve-tone technique with the contrapuntal practices of early church music: “And at first sight it seems an entirely successful and happy marriage: it has long been known that dodecaphonic technique lends itself particularly well to contrapuntal and canonic ingenuities which were often employed in medieval music.”<sup>66</sup> Weissmann’s most telling comments lie in his important reservations about Stravinsky and dodecaphony:

the more one examines just these stylistic qualities that seem so striking at first, the more one is forced to admit one’s misgivings...dodecaphonism is a method of organizing melodic continuity...But Stravinsky’s melodic imagination is admittedly the weakest point of his musical faculties...one

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<sup>63</sup> John S. Weissmann, “Current Chronicle,” 105.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

cannot help feeling that in adopting dodecaphonism Stravinsky has abused his own peculiar musical personality.”<sup>67</sup>

Though Weissmann heard *Threni* as an advance from the earlier *Canticum Sacrum*, he admitted reservations: “As a culmination in a line of development, it will retain a permanent place in Stravinsky’s *oeuvre*, even if its position in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century music will have to be accepted with certain reservations.”<sup>68</sup>

One of the first scholarly reports on *Threni* appeared in *Tempo*, a British journal of new music produced by Boosey & Hawkes.<sup>69</sup> Hansjörg Pauli (born 1931) attempted the ticklish task of describing a large, complex work when few had had the chance to hear or study the music.<sup>70</sup> Pauli admitted to his struggle between “publishing a tough analysis or composing a vast introduction, a sort of guidebook.”<sup>71</sup> Convinced that rigorous analysis would make sense to only himself and strangely secure that a guide book “would make no sense at all,” Pauli shepherded readers down a “middle course,” despite what he called the “emphatic warning” of Schoenberg against such a half measure.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, Pauli offered readers only a minimal distillation of *Threni*’s Latin text, assuming it seems that his readers would have ready access to the Vulgate of Saint Jerome. Pauli needlessly confused the issue of *Threni*’s structure with an elaborate alphabetical schema. Rather than focusing on the symmetry and relative simplicity of the large sec-

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Hansjörg Pauli, “On Stravinsky’s ‘Threni’,” *Tempo* 49 (Autumn 1958), 16-33.

<sup>70</sup> Pauli was a Swiss journalist, filmmaker, and a student of Hans Keller. In addition to his article on *Threni*, he has authored studies devoted to Webern and Hans Werner Henze.

<sup>71</sup> Hansjörg Pauli, “On Stravinsky’s ‘Threni’,” 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

tions of the score delineated by the composer, Pauli instead assigned letters to each of Stravinsky's many smaller episodes within the various movements. The specificity of the author's alphabetical scheme stands in curious contrast to his rather vague descriptions of the textural, vocal, instrumental, and rhythmic features of each episode. What is more, Pauli failed to cite the fairly obvious structural parallels between *Threni* and *Canticum sacrum*. The author identified liberties Stravinsky has taken with orthodox serial technique, notably the repeated segments with the row, stressing diatonic features of the row, and the advantageously edited or "lopped" rows.<sup>73</sup> Long on detail and short on judgments, Pauli's article represents a trend in serious Stravinsky scholarship devoted to the late music: elaborate and abstract schema are provided in place of prose to elucidate musical events. While some readers may appreciate Pauli's objective reporting of facts and the opportunity to form their own conclusions, others may not help but be disappointed at the author's striking neutrality to any other aspect than *Threni*'s complexity. If the author, after an extended period of intimacy with the score, can only report alphabetical and numerical schema, what potential benefits await the listener?

After the Venice performance, Stravinsky took the North German Radio Symphony Orchestra, Chorus, and soloists on a brief tour, presenting the new work at concerts in Switzerland and Germany. The most memorable of these occurred in Hamburg, where Stravinsky and the hometown orchestra and chorus were greeted with ovations both before and after the performance.<sup>74</sup> Horst Koegler, in a review for *The*

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Second Exile*, 385.



*Musical Courier*, reported that time had greatly benefited the performance, as the chorus, soloists, and orchestra had jelled since the rocky Venice première.

The Hamburg concert had that detached, “nothing-but-the-notes” perfection which has always been the supreme aim of Stravinsky the conductor.... While there can be no doubt that other, more dramatic readings of these works are imaginable—and in some cases perhaps desirable—the quality of authenticity lent the Hamburg performance a dignity, a well-assured security and unaffected beauty which will be remembered for a long time by everybody present at this impressive occasion.<sup>75</sup>

As for the work itself, Koegler seemed unsympathetic to twelve-tone music: “The most astonishing thing about the new *Threni* is the seemingly effortless flow of inspiration, which easily copes with the atrocious difficulties of the self-imposed dodecaphonic row.” Among critics, Koegler is unique in his praise for what *Threni* was, not his criticism for what it was not. Koegler stressed the “subtlety” and “variety” that Stravinsky brought to the text, “But what held us spellbound through all the 35 minutes of its duration, was the vigorous and active mind behind this composition, which is not easily matched in its austere majesty and grandeur by any other composer’s recent output.”<sup>76</sup> In the end, Koegler pronounced *Threni* to be a “true masterwork” and declared that “once again Stravinsky has confirmed his unique position on the contemporary musical scene.”<sup>77</sup>

Across the Atlantic *Threni* received its New York hearing at Town Hall on 4 January 1959. Stravinsky refused a request by Leopold Stokowski to replace Robert Craft.<sup>78</sup> During the months between Hamburg and New York, *Threni* had seen dark days.

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<sup>75</sup> Horst Koegler, “Berlin,” *The Musical Courier* CLVIII (December 1958), 23.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Paul Fromm, “Stravinsky: A Composers’ Memorial,” *Perspectives of New Music* IX/2 (1971), 11.

Pierre Boulez had organized a Paris performance with a poorly prepared ensemble. As Stephen Walsh described the disastrous Parisian performance, “It actually broke down on more than one occasion, despite Boulez having concealed himself among the chorus in order to cue entries, and several of the unaccompanied vocal ensembles dissolved into chaos.”<sup>79</sup> The poorly received performance was enough to reawaken Stravinsky’s long-held grudge toward Parisian audiences, inspired by the riotous reception *Le sacre du printemps*, and was a source of considerable tension in the composer’s relations with Boulez. The New York première was a much greater success. As the composer recorded in his diary, “Concert at the Town Hall under Bob’s wonderful conducting. American premiere of *Threni*. Very big success. Was obliged to bow.”<sup>80</sup> Paul Fromm (1906-1987), the German-Jewish wine merchant and philanthropist whose foundation sponsored the concert, described the ovations that greeted the composer after the performance as “explosive.”<sup>81</sup>

Two days later, a review appeared in *The New York Times*, penned by long time music editor and critic Howard Taubman (1907-1996). Taubman first expressed wariness about the products of dodecaphony, observing “If you have been exposed to enough run-of-the-mill examples of compositions using twelve-tone techniques, you may be justified in believing that no good can come of this method of writing music. The results are dry, footless, meaningless.”<sup>82</sup> Taubman then cautiously defended twelve-tone composi-

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Second Exile*, 387.

<sup>80</sup> Igor Stravinsky, quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 447.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Fromm, “Stravinsky: A Composers’ Memorial,” 11.

<sup>82</sup> Howard Taubman, “His Own Style: Stravinsky Uses Serial Technique Creatively,” *The New York Times*, CVIII (11 January 1959), 2: 11.

tion, admitting that “Enough of value has been produced to indicate that serial techniques can be used to say something. In every case, however, it has taken a composer of real gifts to turn the trick.”<sup>83</sup> Taubman professed his admiration for Stravinsky’s “profoundly personal use of serial technique.”<sup>84</sup> Stravinsky’s real achievement, in Taubman’s eyes, lay in his ability to mold the technique into the service of his own vision, making it sound uniquely Stravinskian, and not like so many lesser musicians: “the principal honor is Stravinsky’s. In his late seventies he is still capable of great music.”<sup>85</sup> Taubman concluded by asserting that *Threni* “belongs in the mainstream of [Stravinsky’s] music of religious inspiration,” and “This column feels secure in predicting that...Stravinsky’s ‘Threni: Lamentations of Jeremiah,’ will bulk as one of his memorable accomplishments.”<sup>86</sup>

*Musical America* offered readers a review of the same performance that was respectful, if not inspiring. Surprisingly, Robert Sabin detected more of Stravinsky’s stylistic fingerprints than did most, observing that “Nothing that he has produced bears more clearly the imprint of his artistic profile and characteristic textures. ‘Stravinsky’ is written in every measure.”<sup>87</sup> Sabin remained remarkably unaffected by the composer’s new serial language or his striking sonic details, being moved instead by “its exquisite workmanship, its marvelous clarity and expressive precision.”<sup>88</sup> In the end, the review is

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Robert Sabin, “Fromm Foundation Honors Stravinsky,” *Musical America* LXXIX (15 January 1959), 18.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

positive, although not for reasons that would likely encourage the reader of *Musical America*: “I cannot agree with those who find in his ‘Threni’ a profound and touching act of penitence, but I do agree that it is a marvelously wrought work by a master musician.”<sup>89</sup> It is ironic that a work could be acknowledged as such a fine piece of craftsmanship and yet miss the expressive mark so completely.

The Fromm Foundation *Threni* première was critiqued for *Saturday Review* by Irving Kolodin, one of the most widely read and influential American critics in the 1950s and 1960s. He first noted the impressive group of listeners on hand for the occasion, no doubt interested in hearing Stravinsky’s first complete work in the twelve-tone idiom. “To judge from the number of composers present,” Kolodin wrote, “a new work of Stravinsky is still the closest thing to a showing of high fashion that the music world has to offer, especially when it is well-advertised that he has been working with the musical equivalent of such fashionable needle-work as the twelve-tone system.”<sup>90</sup> Kolodin made inevitable comparisons of Stravinsky’s new works with his own acknowledged past masterworks and how public tastes had changed, particularly in reference to the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (on the same program). While Stravinsky’s tribute to Debussy once sounded “bleak and tenuous,” according to Kolodin, it now struck the ear as “merely quaint sounding.”<sup>91</sup> But in comparison to Stravinsky’s great sacred works of the past, in particular the *Symphony of Psalms*, *Threni* struck Kolodin as “a narrower,

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Irving Kolodin, “Music to My Ears: Stravinsky’s *Threni*—Sir J. B.—Verdi,” *Saturday Review* XLII/3 (17 January 1959), 83.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

much more restricted thing” and an “exercise in the archaic.”<sup>92</sup> Kolodin seemed to have been unimpressed by Stravinsky’s use of arcane practices in previous works, such as the *Canticum Sacrum*, citing their presence in the Lamentations as the first real justification for such manners. Kolodin’s final verdict was tepid, placing *Threni* in the, “category of confessional, serving a purpose for the composer, perhaps, but not communicating a strong impulse to the listener.”<sup>93</sup>

The next major performance took place with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, under the direction of William Steinberg (1899-1978), at Festival Hall on 2 June 1959. British critics submitted strikingly different perspectives of the event. Jeremy Noble (born 1930), for *London Musical Events*, admitted to having heard rehearsals and the New York première the previous January. Noble, himself an expert in the music of Josquin Desprez, made clear the difficulties performers encountered in Stravinsky’s new score. By Noble’s account, Steinberg’s performance was “flabby and ill-focused” and featured a “large chorus with plenty of dead or dying wood in it.”<sup>94</sup> Of the solo voices, Noble commented that “The six soloists coped bravely, and in some cases successfully with the very difficult music Stravinsky has given them to sing.”<sup>95</sup> Noble had particularly harsh words for the playing of orchestra members: “The steely accuracy that is demanded by this score, with its intricate rhythmic effects and subtle balancing of sonorities, was evidently quite beyond them.”<sup>96</sup> In the end, he asked rhetori-

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Jeremy Noble, “Musical Survey,” *London Musical Events XIV* (July 1959), 28.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

cally, “How the British public is supposed to make any kind of judgment on Stravinsky’s latest music when it is performed so rarely and so badly I simply do not know.”<sup>97</sup> While his review justly described the event, one wishes that Noble, a student of English and Flemish music of the Renaissance, had offered his insights on historical aspects of Stravinsky’s *Threni*.

Harold Rutland viewed the same London performance quite differently. Writing for *The Musical Times*, Rutland recorded, “The sequence of seven concerts given...by the London Philharmonic Orchestra ended, on 2 June, with both a bang and a whimper.”<sup>98</sup> Just as *Time* magazine had dubbed the Venice première of *Canticum sacrum*, “Murder in the Cathedral,” Rutland could not resist cribbing the words of T. S. Eliot to condemn Stravinsky’s work. “The whimper was Stravinsky’s *Threni*, which received its first performance in this country.”<sup>99</sup> As with other critics, Rutland acknowledged Stravinsky’s ingenuity but was not impressed by the resulting music. According to the review, *Threni* was “as intricately constructed as a chronometer. But a whimper it remains, in effect.”<sup>100</sup> Whereas Noble defended *Threni* in the light of poor performances, Rutland believed that Stravinsky was solely to blame. Rutland tired of the composer’s major sevenths and augmented octaves, which he charged were unvocal paired with “characteristic ejaculatory sounds that a psychologist has attributed to a fixation on Stravinsky’s part acquired in the nursery.” The caustic Rutland could not help but offer his own memorable proph-

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Harold Rutland, “Music of the Twentieth Century,” *The Musical Times* C/1398 (August 1959), 434.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

ecy: “If I am alive in fifty year’s time and *Threni* is still being performed other than as a musical freak, I will eat my space-travel helmet.”

Multiple reviews greeted Stravinsky’s recording of *Threni*, released by Columbia the same year as the New York première and featuring largely the same ensemble as the Town Hall performance. Longtime San Francisco *Chronicle* critic Alfred Frankenstein, writing for *High Fidelity*, praised the recording as “magnificent” and Stravinsky’s performance as “one of the highest possible authority.”<sup>101</sup> With the excellence of Stravinsky’s reading taken largely for granted, Frankenstein and other critics spent most of their space responding to the nature of the music. Repeated listening to Stravinsky’s lamentations seemed to have sweetened critical perspectives. Frankenstein called *Threni* one of the “quietest” and “most beautiful” of Stravinsky’s compositions, adding confidently that “It will take its place alongside the *Symphony of Psalms*, the Mass, and the *Canticum Sacrum* as one of the major religious compositions of our century.”<sup>102</sup> Frankenstein acknowledged perceptively that there was still a strong impact of tonality in *Threni* and that to the unaided ear the new work was not dissimilar from the *Symphony of Psalms*.<sup>103</sup>

In his review of the first recording for *The New York Times*, Eric Salzman was careful to define Stravinsky’s new musical style for his readers. Salzman was himself a composer who studied at Princeton University under Babbitt and Roger Sessions (1896-1985) and had undertaken further studies in twelve-tone music with Stockhausen and

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<sup>101</sup> Alfred Frankenstein, “*Threni*—Stravinsky’s Latest Work on Records,” *High Fidelity* IX (September 1959), 60.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

Luigi Nono (born 1924) at Darmstadt. To Salzman, Stravinsky's embrace of serialism was not entirely unpredictable, as the composer's music "has always been characterized by order and coherence and it was logical that he would have to come to terms with the great organizing principle of the century."<sup>104</sup> Unlike critics who initially failed to recognize Stravinsky in the impersonal and archaic *Threni*, Salzman believed that Stravinsky maintained his personality in his serial works, notably in such aspects as his choral writing, rhythm, and concern for symmetry. Salzman felt the need to differentiate Stravinsky's serial music from twelve-tone music that was atonal. Rather than creating atonal music,

Stravinsky uses twelve-tone procedures to produce music that is...full of tonal implications. The music is not 'in a key' in the old-fashioned sense, to be sure, but Stravinsky's sense of tonality in his earlier works was never quite the same as Mozart's or Bach's. He worked rather with centers of gravity or, to use his own word, "polarities." In his sense tonality is present in "Threni."<sup>105</sup>

Salzman perceptively pointed out the curious fact that Stravinsky, best known for his music for orchestra, should express his most "profound thoughts" in music for chorus. Nevertheless, Salzman bravely questioned the quality of *Threni*, noting that "It must be admitted that some of the more intricate moments in the three-and four-part canons do not come off in performance, although they look logical on paper. This may be the singers' fault or it may be a miscalculation on Stravinsky's part." Despite this reservation, however, Salzman admitted that *Threni* must be numbered among the great works that Stravinsky had composed for chorus.

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<sup>104</sup> Eric Salzman, "Records: 'Threni'," *The New York Times* CIX (20 September 1959), 2: 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*



Oliver Daniel (1911-1990), in his review of the Columbia recording for the *Saturday Review*, excused the austere nature of the work as a valid response to the text and acknowledged that Stravinsky's new work was "sparse and, as lamentations should be, dour."<sup>106</sup> While identifying "superbly impressive choral sections" that hearken to the days of the *Symphony of Psalms*, Daniel made a brave comparison of Stravinsky's new work with the *Lamentio Jeremiae Prophetarum* of Ernst Krenek: "Ignoring the odium of comparison we might ask: is this a better setting of the Lamentations than that of Krenek? Not necessarily so; for the Krenek work has a sense of relating to the great enduring Gregorian tradition and is, though perhaps less varied, a profoundly, moving work."<sup>107</sup> In summation, Daniel concluded that "*Threni* will not become landmark comparable to earlier works. While it is not a work of pioneering nature, it is a mature investigation of new ways."<sup>108</sup>

In the decades following its initial reception, critics have broken relatively little ground in their appreciation of *Threni*. Scholars have continued to fixate on its imposing austerity, while failing to open substantially new ways of understanding the work. Mikhail Druskin boldly ranked *Threni* as one of the very greatest of Stravinsky's late works.<sup>109</sup> The French composer André Boucourechliev, in his centennial monograph on the composer, called *Threni* "the most austere, the most noble and the most imposing of

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<sup>106</sup> Oliver Daniel, "Twelve-Tone Stravinsky," *Saturday Review* XLII (17 October 1959), 84.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works, and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 152.

all the composer's religious works."<sup>110</sup> The Italian composer Roman Vlad, who authored program notes for the Venice première, echoed many scholars, observing that *Threni* "is without any doubt the most ambitious and structurally the most complex of all his religious works."<sup>111</sup> But while these selected pronouncements strike readers as positive, more thoughtful reading proves that what is lacking in much of this scholarship is a genuine passion that matches the size and depth of *Threni*.

Perhaps the single most authoritative scholar on the current scene, Stephen Walsh has contributed one of the longest records of critical opinion devoted to *Threni*, with writings spanning the late 1960s to the present. He has offered noticeably higher praise for Stravinsky's late instrumental works, particularly the *Septet* and *Agon*. Walsh's skepticism for *Threni* has only grown through the decades. "Its ritual power is less than that of the *Canticum Sacrum*," Walsh contended, "but its construction, meticulously thought out and perfectly executed, is superior. One might call it reserved, deep but not lofty, a connoisseur's work."<sup>112</sup> He placed both *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni* in positions of distinction of Stravinsky oeuvre: "If *Agon* is the climax of Stravinsky's lifelong preoccupation with the music of dance and spatial movement, these two great devotional scores are the climax—though not the end—of his fascination with synthetic ritual forms and liturgies."<sup>113</sup> Walsh generally eschewed detailed serial analysis, instead focusing on larger questions of the expressive results of Stravinsky's dodecaphonic technique. In *Threni*, Walsh cogently observed that "on every page [Stravinsky] uses those processes

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<sup>110</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 273.

<sup>111</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Frederick Fuller (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 208.

<sup>112</sup> Stephen Walsh, "The Choral Music," *Tempo* LXXXI (1967), 50.

<sup>113</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 235.

as a kind of devotional act—a genuflection. That is, they belong to the music’s imagery almost as much as to its technique.”<sup>114</sup> Elsewhere Walsh has expressed doubts as to the practicality of *Threni* in performance:

The fact is that even for hardy spirits and under ideal conditions, *Threni* is a tough nut to crack.... One can look at the score, or even listen to a recording, and sense how wonderful much of its music might sound in some imaginary performance heaven.<sup>115</sup>

Apparently wearied of its austerity, Walsh declared, “the whole makeup of the music seems almost cruelly clear and peremptory.... This is par excellence of an objectified music, take it or leave it.”<sup>116</sup> Walsh even suggested that Stravinsky had second thoughts, as he recorded a comment made by the composer to Lawrence Morton: “I’m afraid it’s a big bore, but it will be good to bore my enemies.”<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately for *Threni*, the high profile of Walsh means that his lack of enthusiasm will stand for many years and influence many students and potential devotees.

Scholars have found intriguing points of continuity between one of Stravinsky’s Russian masterpieces and *Threni*. Walsh, Boucourechliev, and Paul Griffiths have each cited echoes of *Les Noces* (1923) in portions of Stravinsky’s setting of the Lamentations. The chanting of the bridesmaids in *Les Noces* is recalled by Stravinsky in both “De Elegia Prima” and “Sensus Spei” of *Threni*. According to Walsh, in both pieces there is “the

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 384.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>117</sup> Igor Stravinsky, quoted by Lawrence Morton on an undated note, Department of Special Collections, Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Reprinted by Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile.*, 384.

sense of perpetual recurrence,” expressing the “simple inevitability to the cycle of birth, life, and death.”<sup>118</sup> This recurrence is not only a feature of the text for each work, but is found in Stravinsky’s approach to serialism, as cyclical paths through the tone row take on a symbolic significance. Despite Stravinsky’s use of twelve-tone technique, Walsh found that the composer remains true to himself: “Indeed it is one of the most remarkable aspects of *Threni* that, at the moment of his fullest identification with the chromatic twelve-tone method, he should suddenly rediscover some of the purest gestures of his first maturity.”<sup>119</sup> Boucourechliev pointed out how comparisons of *Threni* and *Les noces* can enrich an understanding of each score: “Each of these two works seems to throw light on the other, ‘Sensus Spei’ revealing the liturgical character of *Les Noces* and *Les Noces* revealing ‘Sensus Spei’ as a savagely austere hymn of hope and joy.”<sup>120</sup> Richard Taruskin, the authority on Stravinsky’s Russian period, has not explored any connection between *Les Noces* and *Threni* in his writings to date.

Scholars have been universally impressed by the contrapuntal ingenuity Stravinsky brought to bear in *Threni*. This facet has invited comparisons to the contrapuntal masterworks of Johann Sebastian Bach. Stravinsky’s intimate contact with Bach, through his arrangement of the *Chorale Variations on “Vom Himmel hoch do komm’ ich her”* (1956), likely contributed to the canonic complexity of the work. During his California years Stravinsky heard performances of a number of Bach cantatas at the Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles. From the late 1950s until his death, Stra-

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<sup>118</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 238.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-39.

<sup>120</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, 276.

vinsky spent much of his leisure time at home listening to recordings of Bach.<sup>121</sup> Appreciating the “dense counterpoint” displayed in *Threni*, Russian musicologist Mikhail Druskin observed that both Stravinsky’s setting of the Lamentations and Bach’s *Art of Fugue* came late in the careers of each master.<sup>122</sup> Walsh also heard reminiscences of Bach in *Threni*: “The effect of the work is complex and extremely subtle, with technique very much on display, in the same way as in Bach’s *Musical Offering*, though to a less obvious plan.”<sup>123</sup> Although his celebrity far outshone Bach’s during the German composer’s lifetime, Stravinsky’s high regard for the craft of composition was strikingly similar to Bach’s. Stravinsky himself acknowledged that “by temperament and talent I would have been more suited for the life of a small Bach, living in anonymity and composing regularly for an established service and for God.”<sup>124</sup> While scholars do honor to *Threni* by comparing Stravinsky’s contrapuntal achievement to those of Bach, they miss the opportunity to explore the even greater expressive link between the two masters. Although the austerity of *Symphony of Psalms*, *Canticum sacrum*, and *Threni* has a powerful antecedent in the sacred music of J. S. Bach, Bach’s sacred music is relatively popular, despite its austerity and formality.

Scholars, moreover, have looked for text painting in *Threni*, despite the composer’s well-known aversion to the practice. As Stravinsky posited in his *Poetics of Music*, “Song, more and more bound to words, has finally become a sort of filler, thereby evidencing its decadence. From the moment song assumes as its calling the expression of

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<sup>121</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii*, 165.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>123</sup> Stephen Walsh, “The Choral Music,” 50.

<sup>124</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 123.

the meaning of discourse, it leaves the realm of music and has nothing more in common with it.”<sup>125</sup> He preferred to remain somewhat aloof from the semantic meaning of his texts, more often drawing inspiration from the phonetic content and rhythm of the words. In fact, Stravinsky deliberately chose unfamiliar languages, most notably Latin, to avoid traditional relationships between words and music. Despite Stravinsky’s tirades against text painting, Ruth Zinar found examples of this practice in the composer’s works with Latin texts, notably *Oedipus Rex*. Although *Threni* offered fewer examples, Zinar identified the significant role of the descending minor second in communicating the “pathos” of text: “This interval is used on occasion, in conjunction with words specifying ‘grief’ or ‘pathos’ ...and it also occurs repeatedly as a motif throughout the work.”<sup>126</sup>

The theorist David Smyth, in his study of Stravinsky’s sketches for *Threni*, made similar claims. In a study heavy with detailed serial analysis, Smyth connected Stravinsky’s various manipulations of the tone row to various portions of the text: “Throughout *Threni* text painting extends from the grandest scale to the smallest detail. . . . At every step in the creation of the piece, Stravinsky coordinated revisions of text and music to ensure the coherence of both.”<sup>127</sup> While Smyth’s claim is attractive, his evidence will be unclear to many readers, as his discourse is cast in advanced analytical language. In another intriguing, yet somewhat puzzling, claim, Smyth argued that, through editing the Biblical text and in his setting, Stravinsky “fashioned a much more hopeful

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<sup>125</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics*, 46.

<sup>126</sup> Ruth Zinar, “Stravinsky and His Latin Texts,” *College Music Symposium* XVIII/2 (Fall 1978), 184.

<sup>127</sup> David H. Smyth, “Stravinsky as Serialist: The Sketches for *Threni*,” *Music Theory Spectrum* XXII/2 (Fall 2000), 222.

work, in which there is a considerable range of emotional contrast.”<sup>128</sup> Although Smyth identified important cuts in the text that alter the emotional tone, one wishes that he would have cited comparable musical passages to justify the balance of his claim. Smyth remained hopeful that “Appreciation of the intimate relationship between text and serial patterning in *Threni*...may mitigate its oft-remarked austerity, and promote more effective reception.”<sup>129</sup> While Smyth’s article may encourage thought among theorists, his insistence on detailed, analytical discourse unfortunately limits its accessibility to non-specialists.

Smyth and others have recognized that numerology held a special interest for Stravinsky late in his career. In his aforementioned study, Smyth provided the following explanation:

It is easy to understand why a composer who first experimented with dodecaphonic technique in a ballet for twelve dancers was attracted to the Lamentations of Jeremiah. This text contains some of the Bible’s most highly organized numerical ciphers and acrostic designs.... Stravinsky indulged a lifelong penchant for numerical patterning and a predilection for symmetrical and palindromic constructions.... One might say that Stravinsky’s task in composing *Threni* was to recover and to recreate order out of the shattered acrostics of the biblical original.<sup>130</sup>

The Dutch composer and Stravinsky partisan Louis Andriessen, in partnership with Elmer Schönberger, also conducted a numerological investigation of *Threni*. In their enlightening and influential *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, they found numerous instances of the numbers 1, 3, and 5 in the overall structure and in the minute details

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

of *Threni*.<sup>131</sup> Andriessen's brief study reads like a geometric theorem, linking *Threni*'s numerical content to the Fibonacci series, to the Golden Ratio, and to a mathematical conception of God.

While this kind of note counting may intrigue some listeners, it may also strike others as dangerously close to the numerology that many believe lies at the heart of serialism. The physicist John Backus charged that the analyses contained in the German journal of serial music, *Die Reihe*, had as their foundation only "a microscopic residuum consisting of nothing more than a mystical belief in numerology as the fundamental basis for music."<sup>132</sup> Many critics and scholars have assumed that Stravinsky's musical thinking was based in numbers and was overtly mathematical. Many held fast to this idea, based on a misconception of serial technique or, perhaps, conceived in an attempt to make sense of Stravinsky's alien musical language that struck the uninitiated as cold, cerebral, logical, and certainly dictated by numbers, not inspiration.

The reigning specialist in Stravinsky's late music, Joseph Straus, in his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, did not mention *Threni* as belonging to either the first or second tier of the composer's late works.<sup>133</sup> Considering its imposing dimensions and the fact that it was Stravinsky's first purely twelve-tone work, *Threni* received surprisingly little attention in Straus's monograph. The composition is also shockingly absent from his discussion of expression and meaning in the late works. Of

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<sup>131</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, "Id est: Hermetic Music," *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 198-200.

<sup>132</sup> John Backus, "Die Reihe—A Scientific Evaluation," *Perspectives of New Music* I/1 (Autumn 1962), 160. Quoted in M. J. Grant, *Serial Music, Serial Aesthetics: Compositional Theory in Post-War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>133</sup> Joseph Straus, "Stravinsky the serialist," *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.



the expressive strategies Straus believed Stravinsky adopted to communicate meaning in his late works, *Threni* contains only one: canon. While Straus acknowledged the important ideas of Glenn Watkins, he broke surprisingly little new ground in this area.<sup>134</sup>

Straus identified the expressive association of canon in late Stravinsky as “The learned style...ritualistic evocation of Renaissance or Baroque masters.”<sup>135</sup> In *Threni*, as well as many other late Stravinsky works, canons impart a “somber, ritualistic quality.”<sup>136</sup> It is true, as Straus pointed out, that the pervasive use of canon in some of Stravinsky’s late works makes it difficult to draw specific connections as to the technique’s expressive meaning. This fact should not, however, dissuade Straus from interpreting canon in a broader, more globally expressive sense, as have other scholars, particularly as Stravinsky’s late works elevate the idea of canon as a conspicuously historic technique. Straus’s unwillingness to confront the broader historical influences brought to bear in Stravinsky’s late works, with the exception of the influence of the Second Viennese School, represents a central weakness of his study. Considering the careful detail of Straus’s investigations of Stravinsky’s serial techniques, his brief treatment of canon seems inadequate.

As with *Canticum sacrum*, many scholars have believed that understanding Stravinsky’s historic techniques and archaic references is key to understanding *Threni*. Malcolm Troup, who described it as an “archeological excavation,” is one of many who linked Stravinsky’s assumption of an austere expressive attitude with the composer’s in-

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<sup>134</sup> Glenn Watkins, “The Canon and Stravinsky’s Late Style,” *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist* ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 217-46.

<sup>135</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 186.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

terest in early sacred music.<sup>137</sup> Scholars have agreed that in early music Stravinsky found idioms and techniques that mirrored his own ascetic expressive agenda. The French composer Gilbert Amy, himself a student of Boulez and a twelve-tone devotee, wrote sensitively of Stravinsky's interest in early music and the consequences for expression in his late music:

In his religious music Stravinsky re-establishes links with a distant past and at the same time breaks new ground. The religious music displays specific characteristics and has its own color, reminiscent not so much of the glowing reds and gold of icons as of the cool, severe grisaille of stained glass windows."<sup>138</sup>

Gesualdo scholar Glenn Watkins, in his study of canon in Stravinsky's late music, saw the composer's use of the technique as "effecting a synthesis" between the worlds of the 1950s and the sixteenth century: "A composer always in search of rules whereby he might play the game, Stravinsky in the 1950s found in canon a wedge to the future as well as a bridge to the past. As with all stylizations, a source is acknowledged and a license is taken. In the interpretation, the fingerprints of a master are revealed."<sup>139</sup>

Stravinsky's polemics betray his interest in early sacred music as yet another alternative to Romantic ideas of the nineteenth century. Although the majority of Stravinsky's audience thought of religious music in terms of the sacred works of the nineteenth century, the Russian composer distrusted the secular impetus for this music. "When I call the nineteenth century 'secular,'" Stravinsky pronounced, "I mean by it to distinguish between

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<sup>137</sup> Malcolm Troup, "Serial Stravinsky: The 'Granite' Period (1956-1966)," *Twentieth Century Music*, New Revised and Enlarged Edition., ed. Rollo H. Myers (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), 49.

<sup>138</sup> Gilbert Amy, "Aspects of the Religious Music of Igor Stravinsky," *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 195.

<sup>139</sup> Glenn Watkins, "The Canon and Stravinsky's Late Style," 245-46.

religious-religious music and secular-religious music. The latter is inspired by humanity in general, by art.... Religious music without religion is almost always vulgar. It can also be dull.”<sup>140</sup> In light of the mainstreaming of early music in the late twentieth century, the novelty of Stravinsky’s historical outlook in the 1950s is largely lost on contemporary musicians. In a music culture where the gold standard for concert music remains Beethoven and Brahms, reception of Stravinsky’s late works is deeply enriched by an understanding of the composer’s profound technical and expressive links to the past.

One of the most effective and sympathetic discussions of Stravinsky’s late austerity comes from the Russian scholar Mikhail Druskin. Druskin is one of the few to look for aspects of similarity and contrast between Stravinsky’s late career and the late works of Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, Wagner, and Brahms. For skeptics of Stravinsky’s late style, Druskin found reassuring connections between the Russian composer’s last works and those of other, unquestionably venerated masters.

The feature most affected by the onset of old age seems to me to be richness of melodic invention, that is to say the quality of maximum emotional immediacy. But the loss of one quality is balanced by the gain of another, in this case an increase in the significance of thematic contra-puntal skill and other structural factors. Metaphorically speaking, as muscular power diminishes the sinews supporting the muscles stand out more clearly, and the breathing-rhythm becomes more staccato, deep chest-breathing being replaced by a close succession of short breaths. The patterning of the texture and its graphic character, the detailing of the main outline, a chamber-music quality and an inclination to speculative, abstract thinking—all these seem to be marks of a “late” style. The chief overall feature is an intellectualization of the emotions and it is this, however vague the expression may be, that seems to mark the characteristics of a late style such as I have tried to suggest.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations*, 142.

<sup>141</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii*, 144.

Druskin's deeply considered inventory is at the same time a virtual compendium of elements found in *Threni*. Anyone who has assimilated Stravinsky's Lamentations will see its features mirrored in Druskin's elegant prose. What is strikingly unappreciated, however, is how Stravinsky's longevity allowed his art to progress so much farther into this territory than have so many other great composers. The persistent suspicion of Stravinsky's dotage has no doubt diminished exploration of this line of thought.

## CHAPTER SIX

### INTERLUDE: STRAVINSKY AND THE SERIALISTS

In the 1950s and 1960s Stravinsky's twelve-tone scores attracted the attention of serial theorists from American colleges and universities, controversial scholars whose work would come to dominate studies of the composer's late music. Chief among these progressive academics were Milton Babbitt and Claudio Spies, both of whom penned seminal studies of Stravinsky's serial music. The composer's celebrity and prestige benefited these theorists and their budding academic programs, greatly increasing their visibility and respectability. The work produced by Spies and Babbitt formed the nucleus of an ever-increasing body of analytical scholarship, a highly exclusive corpus of literature that has grown steadily in the decades following the composer's death. Despite the work of a number of theorists, however, critical questions regarding Stravinsky's unique interpretation of serialism, issues that cut to the heart of understanding the composer's late works, remain.

A professor of music and mathematics at Princeton University, Babbitt represented the epitome of the academic serial composer and theorist in post-World War II America. The uncompromising, speculative quality of Babbitt's enormously complex music made it comprehensible to only a small minority of dedicated musical minds. Equally daunting, but certainly more influential was Babbitt's dense analytical prose devoted to explicating serial music, the style and tone of which has "permeated theory and analysis to the core."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Gritten, "The Progress of an Essay," *The Musical Times* CXXXIX/1862 (April 1998), 7.

In 1958, the same year as the première of Stravinsky's *Threni*, Babbitt's seminal essay "Who Cares if You Listen?" appeared in *High Fidelity* magazine. In this infamous polemic, the Princeton theorist argued passionately for an unprecedented elevation of both composition and musical discourse. If composers of serious music could be unshackled from obligatory compromises to popular tastes, Babbitt argued, contemporary music could realize the same stature as other advanced academic pursuits.<sup>2</sup>

Why refuse to recognize the possibility that contemporary music has reached a stage long since attained by other forms of activity? The time has passed when the normally well-educated man without special preparation could understand the most advanced work in, for example, mathematics, philosophy, and physics. Advanced music, to the extent that it reflects the knowledge and originality of the informed composer, scarcely can be expected to appear more intelligible than these arts and sciences to the person whose musical education usually has been even less extensive than his background in other fields.<sup>3</sup>

Babbitt's enormously controversial words expanded the already deep divisions between conservative and forward-looking musicians. "Who Cares if You Listen?" fed the common perception of the avant-garde as intellectual, elitist, and contemptuous of average musicians. In the minds of many, the "total serialism" practiced by Babbitt and others, with its apparently dictatorial rules and tyrannical lack of creative freedom, became a musical analogue to the totalitarianism that had threatened liberty around the globe.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares if You Listen?," *High Fidelity* VII/2 (February 1958), 38-40 & 126-27. Reprinted as "The Composer as Specialist," *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. Stephen Peles, with Sephen Dembski, Andrew Mead, and Joseph N. Straus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 48-54.

<sup>3</sup> Milton Babbitt, "The Composer as Specialist," 51.

<sup>4</sup> M. J. Grant, *Serial Music, Serial Aesthetics: Compositional Theory in Post-War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

Stravinsky cultivated personal relationships with both Babbitt and Spies<sup>5</sup>, each of whom gained access to the composer's private circle and were welcomed as guests while he stayed in New York City.<sup>6</sup> No doubt Stravinsky appreciated the company of musical minds that could keep pace with his own agile faculties, especially as his advanced age meant the deaths of more and more old friends. He granted these scholars the considerable honor of campus visits and unprecedented previews of his unpublished scores. Incredibly, Spies was tasked with proofreading the serial technique of the composer's late manuscripts before their publication, ensuring the serial derivation of each pitch.<sup>7</sup> Both Spies and Babbitt have offered remembrances of an extraordinary incident in which they were offered an early look at Stravinsky's *Movements* (1960) for Piano and Orchestra, the major work following *Threni*. As Spies recalled in a recorded interview:

An occasion which I can never forget, when Milton Babbitt and I sat in the Hotel Gladstone, now no longer in existence on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, and Stravinsky went into the next room and got out his charts for *Movements*. This was just before a performance of *Movements* and he wanted to show us his charts. Well now we sat over a table—the light was not very good—I saw that there were all sorts of Greek letters (alpha, beta, gamma, delta) before set tables and I couldn't begin to fathom what he was doing, and Milton didn't quite know what it was either, but he suspected, and afterwards we got together and for years we talked about this because we wanted to see this thing again and see what he was getting at...we began to piece together what might have been on that table.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Spies had first made Stravinsky's acquaintance as a student of Nadia Boulanger in May of 1943. Spies has described how the composer became almost a "father figure," even offering corrections to his student compositions. See Stephen Peles and Claudio Spies, "A Conversation with Claudio Spies," *Perspectives of New Music* XXXII/1 (Winter 1994), 297.

<sup>6</sup> Lillian Libman, *And Music at the Close: Stravinsky's Last Years* (New York: Norton, 1972), 71.

<sup>7</sup> Despite this fact, Straus has observed a number of serial mistakes and printed errors in the late scores. See Joseph Straus, "Stravinsky's Serial 'Mistakes'," *The Journal of Musicology* XVII/2 (1999), 231-71.

<sup>8</sup> Claudio Spies, recorded interview for "Program VIII: The Serial Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103-15 Sound Discs).

Babbitt has written of this same close encounter with Stravinsky, calling it a “charted voyage of rediscovery.”<sup>9</sup>

Babbitt and Spies capitalized on such contact, publishing detailed analyses of Stravinsky’s scores in *Perspectives of New Music*, a leading journal of contemporary music issued by Princeton University. These twelve-tone analyses are regarded as classics: ubiquitous in bibliographies and perpetually cited by leading experts. Furthermore, the work of Babbitt and Spies begot a tradition of analytical scholarship that has continued to the present day, culminating in the work of Joseph Straus, the leading authority on Stravinsky’s late music. Straus, in turn, has praised Babbitt as the father of serial theory, acknowledging that “Much of our common understanding of what twelve-tone music has been and can be derives from Babbitt’s influential theoretical writings and even more eloquent compositions.”<sup>10</sup> So too has Straus applauded the analyses of Spies, remarking that “More than thirty years after their publication, these remain among the best sources of analytical information about [Stravinsky’s serial] works.”<sup>11</sup> Over the past two decades, Straus has published an impressive body of scholarship in leading journals of musicology and music theory. His research coalesced in an important milestone: *Stravinsky’s Late Music*, published on the thirtieth anniversary of the composer’s death, the first monograph devoted exclusively to Stravinsky’s late works. Although written in a more accessible style than that of his predecessors, Straus’s monograph remains an extended analytical study, expanding on the work of its numerous antecedents.

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<sup>9</sup> Milton Babbitt, “Order, Symmetry, and Centricity in Late Stravinsky,” *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 248.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 75 note.



The analytical literature of Babbitt, Spies, Straus, and others is set apart from the balance of Stravinsky criticism by a number of unique characteristics. First, this literature makes extensive use of jargon: an exclusive, highly developed, and frequently evolving vocabulary. Studies typically feature their own complex, representational language of serial matrices and graphs that chart the permutations of the tone row and the various options available to the composer. For the non-expert, full comprehension of these highly detailed studies requires time and substantial patience. Strikingly, Babbitt and Spies eschew almost all value judgments of Stravinsky's late works in favor of pure, objective description. These articles contain little, if any, faultfinding or praise of the composer's products. There is a noticeable lack of concern for advocacy of the music that is the subject of analysis, a trend that has grown over the decades and has only been somewhat ameliorated in the work of Straus.<sup>12</sup>

The lofty tone, intricate complexity, and scientific objectivity of serial analyses developed in response not only to complex new music but also in accordance to the needs of Babbitt and his colleagues. Composers have always had to please a patron, whether ecclesiastic, aristocratic, or bourgeois. In Babbitt's case, the patron had become the academy, where a premium was placed on the rapid expansion of knowledge via speculative research. Babbitt has recalled the state of affairs that served as the impetus for his writings and those of his colleagues, circumstances that directly effected the tone of this literature:

Back in the early fifties when we saw that we were in trouble, when we saw that we didn't have the appropriate audience (and we do concern ourselves about such things, if only for selfish reasons), we thought that per-

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<sup>12</sup> Babbitt's neutrality is striking in comparison to his articles on Schoenberg, Varèse, and Bartók, which take on a tone of advocacy.

haps we could appeal to our fellow intellectuals by impressing them with the seriousness of our words. We thought we would attract them with our words about music and this would eventually lead them to the sound of our music.<sup>13</sup>

From the outset, this kind of analytical literature was designed to elevate the status of university musicians and their music by celebrating the intellectual content of their art.

Initially, Stravinsky embraced Babbitt's scholarship. Paul Horgan recounted Stravinsky's reaction to a lecture given by Babbitt, presented at the Santa Fe Opera's celebration in honor of the composer's eightieth birthday, a seminal study that would later be published as "Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky."<sup>14</sup> Horgan recalled how Babbitt's remarks held Stravinsky "spellbound, and I heard him declare later in thanking Babbitt that 'there is only one possible way to discuss music, and that is in technically musical terms.' Any other approach—association of ideas, images, analogies—bored him to extremity, even if delivered in the most loving jargon by non-musicians."<sup>15</sup> An examination of the composer's archive has shown that Stravinsky watched for newly published analytical studies devoted to his music, purchasing extra copies of journals that featured studies of his late works.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the composer collected the myriad of theses and dissertations submitted by graduate students who had completed serial analyses of his music.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Milton Babbitt, "The Unlikely Survival of Serious Music," *Milton Babbitt: Words About Music*, ed. Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 174.

<sup>14</sup> Milton Babbitt, "Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky," *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1972), 165-85.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Horgan, *Encounters With Stravinsky: A Personal Record* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972), 216.

<sup>16</sup> Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 250.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

The approach of Babbitt and Spies to criticism would seem tailor-made for Stravinsky, as the composer's own words dictated that critics take a descriptive or mathematical, rather than interpretive or poetic, approach to his music. From both performers and critics, Stravinsky demanded an approach that considered nothing but the notes on the page, leaving no room for added emotional interpretation. In a 1936 interview, he admonished, "Nothing is more difficult to talk about than music, and the moment one leaves the ground of its technique, one plunges into a wave where one flounders."<sup>18</sup> He particularly detested "purple" prose and the seemingly inevitable attempts to chart verbally the emotional affect of his music. To Stravinsky, such talk was unmusical nonsense and a tiresome legacy of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

And yet Stravinsky's outlook was not a perfect match for the methodical, positivistic approach of Babbitt and his fellow academics. As Heinrich Strobel pointed out, "Stravinsky, in reality, is the very opposite to the academician, a personality of such immediacy and spontaneity of expression in the most important as well as the least important things of life that he is almost incomparable."<sup>19</sup> Craft recorded the striking difference of attitude between Stravinsky and a group of Princeton students on the occasion of the composer's address to a seminar in contemporary music in August of 1959:

I. S. talks to the contemporary music seminarists in the morning. I have never been so proud of him: sensible, concrete, practical, witty, wise, informed, inventive, positive, modest. The young people, in contrast, are pretentious, abstract, negative, dull, uncertain. Oh, the aridity, the poverty of purely analytical discussions about music! Still another contrast: he is polite and gracious, as if he had not noticed that no one stood up when he

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<sup>18</sup> Igor Stravinsky, Radio-Paris 23 March 1936, quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 195-96.

<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Strobel, *Stravinsky: Classic Humanist*, trans. Hans Rosenwald (New York: Merlin Press, 1955), 39.

entered the room, and that some of the students lay sprawled on the floor throughout. (He tells me later that he was deeply shocked.)<sup>20</sup>

Although Stravinsky's precision and restraint found common ground in the outlook of the analytical theorists, the Russian composer's lightning wit, perennial spontaneity, youthful vigor, and infectious enthusiasm, evident in the invaluable film documentation of his last years, belies Babbitt's carefully calculated erudition. Scholars agree that the erudition of Babbitt and his school appealed more to Stravinsky's vanity than to any intrinsic interest in analysis. The composer took no pleasure in retracing the steps of analysts; he simply enjoyed the fact that his new music was again attracting the attention of a younger generation of musicians. For Stravinsky, these analyses "furnished a much needed imprimatur, reassuring him that he was still in the vanguard of new music at a time when the public's sympathy for what he was doing had dwindled."<sup>21</sup>

It is often overlooked that Stravinsky received no training in serial technique from Babbitt or any other member of the academic establishment. Stravinsky was entirely autodidactic in his acquisition of serial techniques. While it has been assumed that Craft acted as a tutor for the composer in the techniques of Webern and other serialists, Straus has discounted the potential role of the composer's amanuensis:

Craft was in a position to introduce Stravinsky to this music, to impart some of his own enthusiasm, and to explain, in a rudimentary way, how it was put together. But Craft had no particular interest in theoretical abstractions. He apparently understood little of twelve-tone composition and

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship*, revised ed. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 210. Quoted in Anthony Gritten, "The Progress of an Essay," 4.

<sup>21</sup> Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out*, 252.

twelve-tone theory beyond the basic facts of writing and manipulating the series.<sup>22</sup>

Early on, Stravinsky did receive inspiration and direction from the work of his fellow émigré Ernst Krenek, but only second hand. During the composition of *Threni*, Stravinsky studied the score of Krenek's dodecaphonic *Lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetae* and read the Austrian composer's primer in twelve-tone technique, *Studies in Counterpoint*.<sup>23</sup> Other than his investigation of Krenek's methods, however, he seemed to have been uninterested in the cutting-edge practices of his contemporaries. Charles Joseph, in his study of Stravinsky's archive, found that the composer possessed a formidable collection of the latest serial scores, purchased at the behest of Craft. "How closely Stravinsky studied these scores is not clear," Joseph admitted, "although it appears from his notations that he took only what was needed to set his mind in motion."<sup>24</sup> Craft has confirmed that Stravinsky kept a disinterested distance from the technical developments of contemporary serialists: "he did not keep abreast of developments in academic serial theory but simply borrowed what he required in order to write masterpieces."<sup>25</sup>

Stravinsky did not anticipate the hostility generated by his perceived alliance with Babbitt and his disciples or the potential lasting effects of the analytical literature they produced. Serial theorists and their analytic approach have long been the subjects of scathing criticism, both implicit and explicit. Van den Toorn, a leading theorist of

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Clare Hogan, "Threni: Stravinsky's 'Debt' to Krenek," *Tempo* CXLI (1982), 22-23. See also Ernst Krenek, *Studies in Counterpoint; Based on the Twelve-Tone Technique* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out*, 249.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Craft, "A Centenary View," *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (London: Lime Tree, 1992), 6.

Stravinsky's music, has acknowledged that many musicians have viewed serious analysis as "peculiarly suspect, a perverse kind of intellectualism, an act of desecration."<sup>26</sup> Overt critiques of serial analysis have often bordered on ridicule. The pianist and Schoenberg champion Glenn Gould (1932-1982) mockingly referred to the serial analysis found in journals as "babbitttry."<sup>27</sup> Taruskin has called Babbitt's work "very tortuous"<sup>28</sup> and derided Stravinsky's own attempt at analysis in the program notes for the première of his *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* as "gobbledygook."<sup>29</sup> Edward T. Cone, one of Babbitt's colleagues at Princeton and himself a pioneer in graphic analysis, came to lament the "unreadability" of much analytical writing and "the way music analysis was being sucked dry of its human content in favor of a sterile positivism."<sup>30</sup> In light of such doubt and derision, analytical studies dedicated to Stravinsky's scores became as potentially prejudicial to many listeners as they were promotional.

More thoughtful criticisms of Babbitt's approach acknowledge the vital importance of serial analysis but also recognize the limits of its absolute value. Walsh, who has himself gently derided such analysis as "that most facile and unrewarding of musicological operations,"<sup>31</sup> has offered this thoughtful and constructive appraisal:

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<sup>26</sup> Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), xix.

<sup>27</sup> Glenn Gould, quoted without documentation in Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out*, 252.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Stravinsky and Us," *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 275.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1673, note 99.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Gritten, "The Progress of an Essay," 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 239.

Given a sequence of notes, it [serial analysis] will tell us the connection between those notes and some original sequence or shape, but it will seldom give us compelling (that is, logical) reasons why that particular alternative occurred rather than one of a large number of possible alternatives.... When one has explained the entire serial apparatus of *Kontra-Punkte* or *Kreuzspiel*, one has explained precisely nothing about the music unless one can proceed from there to some account of what this apparatus delivers to the ear. The analytical tradition is to take such matters on trust.<sup>32</sup>

Decades earlier, even Schoenberg counseled against overestimating the absolute value of analysis. “I can’t utter too many warnings against overrating these analyses,” he cautioned, “since after all they only lead to what I have always been dead set against: seeing how it is done; whereas I have always helped people to see: what it is!”<sup>33</sup>

As the years passed, Stravinsky betrayed a growing leeriness of serial analysis, even lamenting that “his last works were more analyzed than performed.”<sup>34</sup> The composer once sarcastically referred to an analysis of his chamber work *Elegy for J. F. K.* (1964) as a “serial autopsy,” implying the morbid futility of such a task.<sup>35</sup> He also grew weary of the jargon employed by Babbitt and his peers. Commenting on “The New Terminology” of theorists, Stravinsky mocked that “I do not see why the young Turks of today fancy such neologisms as ‘dyads’ (the genitalia? – i.e., gonads?), ‘simultaneities’ (yclept ‘chords’ in days of yore; imagine asking an orchestra to ‘play the final simultaneity a little more simultaneously’), and ‘pitch priorities’ (‘and now you will hear the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>33</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, excerpt from letter of 27 July 1932. Arnold Schoenberg, *Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 164. Reprinted in Richard Taruskin, “Stravinsky and Us,” 274.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 246.

<sup>35</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 59.

*Beethoven in D-priority*’).”<sup>36</sup> In a more thoughtful comment, Stravinsky lamented the inadequacy of common charts, graphs, and matrices. In an interview with the *New York Review of Books*, he mused, “Nowadays [the musician] tries to talk about [composition] in graphs, statistical charts, symbolic codings, and other devices which may be more efficient—they are certainly more trenchant—than his statements in ordinary verbal syntax, but which brings him no nearer the music.”<sup>37</sup> Always a critic of his critics, Stravinsky’s infatuation with the writings of Babbitt and his acolytes seems to have been short-lived.

After Stravinsky’s death, Spies was surprisingly frank in his criticism of the serial technique the Russian composer employed in his late music. In a remarkable interview recorded for broadcast as part of the radio documentary *Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music*, Spies was openly dismissive of the composer’s limited command of serial technique, expressing thoughts not given voice in his scholarship published while the composer lived:

Now, still Webern’s explorations of twelve-tone matters go way beyond anything Stravinsky ever did. Stravinsky’s use of the twelve-tone system is a highly idiosyncratic thing, in which, although he himself might have thought he was writing twelve-tone music in every serious way, any serious student of twelve-tone theory would have to conclude that it is only in a very limited sense.<sup>38</sup>

Spies’s candid critique was strangely inconsistent with the spirit of the scholar’s careful analytical studies, in which Stravinsky’s limited technique was not discussed. In another

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>37</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 62-63.

<sup>38</sup> Claudio Spies, “The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.



portion of this same interview, Spies boldly suggested that Stravinsky's twelve-tone technique could have been improved by the tutelage of Babbitt:

But the point is, that he [Stravinsky] had no theoretical knowledge of twelve-tone matters, at all. And I often felt that had it only been possible for him to take a few hints from Milton Babbitt it would have saved him an enormous amount of time, it would have opened up vistas that he never even suspected, he operated at no efficiency whatsoever as regards twelve-tone technique or twelve-tone system, none. None whatsoever. We are talking about knowledge of what certain relations among pitch classes can do, how certain transformations can occur, what will be yielded, what things remain invariant under the basic operations of the twelve-tone system, etcetera, etcetera. Those things escaped his attention and escaped even his suspicion. Had he known that these were the things that are really the nugget of the system, in one sense, he would have written quite different music, he would have written much more, he would have been enormously stimulated. He was stimulated by the very minimum possible in the twelve-tone system.<sup>39</sup>

In light of such comments, one wonders if readers of Spies's analyses were incorrect in assuming, which many likely did, that the scholar's dedicated study did not imply at least some kind of endorsement of, if not the quality of the work, at least the capacity of its technique. How would Spies have regarded such serial works had they been the product of a student and not penned by the world's most famous composer? At any rate, it seems unlikely that sophomoric explorations of the twelve-tone system would have been found worthy of the attention of *Perspectives of New Music*.

Spies could never have openly criticized Stravinsky's technical proficiency and hoped to maintain a personal relationship with the composer. Many of those close to Stravinsky sensed that, despite the composer's often ingratiating kindness in the late years, their presence in his life was justified by the performance of a function, great or

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

small, to aid in the life of the master's music. Edwin Allen, who assisted as the composer's librarian in the last years, admitted, "We all performed services, from Ansermet on."<sup>40</sup> The composer demanded absolute loyalty from those close to him. For scholars, continued access to the composer was predicated on an understanding of his hypersensitivity to criticism; even a constructive comment or mild rebuke could be construed as a betrayal worthy of banishment from his inner circle. Given Spies's strong misgivings regarding Stravinsky's technique, the critical neutrality displayed in his writings was necessary to stay close to the composer.

Other scholars have recognized the simplicity of serial strategies employed by Stravinsky. These techniques were used with particular transparency in the composer's works before *Movements* for Piano and Orchestra. Hans Keller detected Stravinsky's highly conventional use of serial procedures in *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, claiming that the Russian composer applied Schoenberg's practices "far more strictly and, at the same time, more simply, primitively (no evaluation, this!) than Schoenberg's music ever did."<sup>41</sup> The English scholar Paul Griffiths observed that Stravinsky's technical lucidity continued with *Threni*, his first fully twelve-tone work. "If all the literature of serial technique were to become lost (what a thought)," Griffiths contended, "it would be possible to reconstruct the basic rules of twelve-note ordering and set transformation from *Threni* alone."<sup>42</sup> Taruskin charged that in acquiring his twelve-tone technique, Stravinsky "got hold of *Studies in Counterpoint* (1940) by Ernst Krenek...and began

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<sup>40</sup> Edwin Allen, "The Genius and the Goddess," *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 328.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Keller and Milein Cosman, *Stravinsky Seen and Heard* (London: Toccata Press, 1982), 15.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Griffiths, *Stravinsky* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1992), 177.

working his way through the exercises in it. You can see some of them right on the surface of *Threni*.”<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the staunchest champion of Stravinsky’s late style, the American composer Charles Wuorinen (born 1938) has also acknowledged Stravinsky’s limited use of serial methods. Exceptionally well versed in Stravinsky’s late style, Wuorinen was entrusted by Vera Stravinsky and Craft to compose *A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky* (1975), a memorial work employing the Russian composer’s final, unfinished sketches.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Spies, Wuorinen saw Stravinsky’s restricted serial technique not as a product of ignorance but as a deliberate means to his own artistic ends.

Stravinsky’s use of twelve-tone materials seems to me to have been a much more limited one, that is to say that the number of transformations and also the kind of transformations of the twelve-tone sets that he used were far more restricted than those employed by most twelve-tone composers...he seems to have felt himself at liberty to range freely over a very limited array, plucking from it whatever sought his fancy...he seemed to sense that a much less rationalized or structured selection of materials—segments, incomplete set forms, what have you—from this limited array would provide, or would compensate, for, in a certain sense, or serve the same kind of function as a much more elaborate, cyclical, and more highly schematized paths through much larger arrays that characterize the work of most twelve-tone composers.<sup>45</sup>

Wuorinen’s analysis provides a remarkable contrast to the common perception of Stravinsky’s serial music as the cold, inhumane product of mechanical rules. Instead,

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Taruskin, “Stravinsky and Us,” 274.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Lieberon, compact disc liner notes for Charles Wuorinen’s *A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky*, performed by the London Sinfonietta, conducted by Oliver Knussen (Deutsche Grammophon 447 068-2, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Charles Wuorinen, recorded interview for “Program VIII: The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda. (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977). (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

Wuorinen suggested that the composer's late style involved a good deal more freedom and choice than was generally supposed. What follows, then, is the notion that, perhaps, the serial works were much more personal than has been assumed.

For Stravinsky, who enjoyed obfuscation in all matters biographical and musical, serial clarity was short-lived, as he began to brag after *Threni* about his increasingly elusive serial methods, as if he were playing a game of cat and mouse with analysts. The composer boasted to Craft that his *Movements* were:

the most advanced music from the point of view of construction of anything I have composed. No theorist could determine the spelling of the note order in, for example, the flute solo near the beginning, or the derivation of the three F's announcing the last movement simply by knowing the original order, no matter how unique the combinatorial properties of this particular series.<sup>46</sup>

Theorists did find the composer's last works more challenging in terms of analysis; both Spies and Straus have admitted to the difficulty in retracing Stravinsky's idiosyncratic paths through his serial charts and arrays in his last works.

Beyond its relative simplicity of means, a closer look at key values found in Schoenberg's music demonstrates other unique aspects of Stravinsky's approach to serialism. Boulez, in his provocative and frankly titled polemic, "Schoenberg is Dead," identified three hallmarks of the Austrian composer's style: a developmental ideal, atonality, and an obsession with counterpoint.<sup>47</sup> Of these three Schoenbergian traits, Stravinsky's serial music incorporates only one unequivocally: a preoccupation with

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<sup>46</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 100-01.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

counterpoint. But even here there are differences, as Stravinsky preferred stark, two-part counterpoint, while Schoenberg favored dense, multi-voiced polyphony. Of Stravinsky's relationship to Schoenberg's developmental ideal and atonality, each bears examination.

Boulez identified in Schoenberg's music "the principle of perpetual Variation, or non-repetition."<sup>48</sup> A legacy of the great Germanic symphonic tradition of the Classic and Romantic Eras, perpetual variation, or development, saturated the works of Schoenberg and his school, creating continually changing and evolving musical arguments with little, if any, literal repetition of ideas. For Stravinsky, however, development was an alien and even distasteful practice. Unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky embraced repetition, even during his serial years. In *Threni* significant portions of music are repeated with little alteration. On a smaller scale, Walsh has identified the "spiraling recurrence" in Stravinsky's manipulation of tone rows, which imparts "a hypnotic quality wholly different from the fluid, protean, character of serial Schoenberg."<sup>49</sup> Again and again, scholars have observed the fundamentally static, anti-developmental character of Stravinsky's music, an ideal he maintained in his serial works. Stravinsky's limited use of the elaborate serial transformations valued by Babbitt and Spies was in line with his own non-developmental ideal.

Perhaps most important, Boulez identified in Schoenberg's music a "preponderance of 'anarchic' intervals—those which yield the greatest tension in terms of tonality—and the gradual elimination of that tonal interval *par excellence*, the octave."<sup>50</sup> Here Boulez was describing the most controversial aspect of Schoenberg's music, namely ato-

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<sup>48</sup> Pierre Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," 210.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 240.

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," 210.

nality, or in the Austrian composer's preferred terminology, "pantonality." Another outgrowth of the Germanic tradition, Schoenberg's break with tonality represented the culmination of decades of harmonic intensification via increasing chromaticism, a practice given unprecedented importance by Richard Wagner and carried further by the generation of Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) and Richard Strauss (1864-1949). Unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky practiced an extended form of tonality, termed variously centrality or polarity, throughout his creative life. Even in his serial music, Stravinsky's strategic use of tonally stable intervals, including octaves, provided audible echoes of tonality. Of this aspect of his serial music, Stravinsky explained "The intervals of my series are attracted by tonality; I compose vertically and that is, in one sense at least, to compose tonally."<sup>51</sup>

Numerous scholars, including Boucourechliev, Druskin, Vlad, Whittall, and Walsh, have argued that Stravinsky's serial music maintained significant elements of tonality. Vlad, himself a serial composer, described Stravinsky's approach as the "tonal investigation of serial space."<sup>52</sup> In describing *Requiem Canticles*, the composer's final work, Vlad identified "a tonal polarity, which is easily recognizable, even if it cannot easily be defined or fitted into normal analytical schemes."<sup>53</sup> Roberto Gerhard (1896-1970), a student of Schoenberg, described Stravinsky's dodecaphonic music as a "fusion of opposites": "He writes twelve-note music in the *spirit* of diatonicism."<sup>54</sup> Druskin has

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<sup>51</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 22.

<sup>52</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Frederick Fuller (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 253.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Roberto Gerhard, "Twelve-note Technique in Stravinsky," *Gerhard on Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Meirion Brown (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2000), 156. Reprinted in Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 253.

maintained that Stravinsky “always remained a tonal composer, adopting serialism and at the same time quarrelling with it, using some of its methods while rejecting its atonal essence.”<sup>55</sup> Taruskin has also observed strong tonal elements in the music: “In short, Stravinsky succeeded in ‘overpowering’ the serial method—or rather, in foiling it. He figured out how to wheedle and cajole from it a new brand of symmetrically disposed, centric but not tonally functional, music.... In effect, Stravinsky was feeling his way to a kind of ‘twelve-tone tonality’.”<sup>56</sup>

For Wuorinen, Stravinsky’s most significant achievement in the late music was his unique marriage of serialism with the legacy of tonality. According to Wuorinen, the Russian’s serial works “do not simply treat the received twelve-tone system to the celebrated Stravinskian ‘ear’—or, worse, bend it unwillingly and ungracefully to the attractive Stravinsky aesthetic.”<sup>57</sup> Instead, audible echoes of tonality in Stravinsky’s last works suggest that the composer was developing another unique synthesis of new and old:

What the act of synthesis showed, in my view, was that there was not a chasm between the music of the twentieth century and the music that preceded it, that there was not an unbridgeable gulf, or even a significant canyon, separating the world of post-tonal and the world of tonal music. And I think the importance of that is self-evident and cannot be over emphasized.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works, and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 148.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky in the Russian Traditions*, 1674.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Wuorinen and Jeffrey Kresky, “On the Significance of Stravinsky’s Last Works,” *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 262.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Wuorinen, “The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.

Babbitt, nonetheless, expressed strong objections to the possible presence of tonal elements in serial music, a position that has informed much of the serial analysis of Stravinsky's late music. In a typically verbose exposition, Babbitt insisted that the "formal systems" of tonality and serialism were "so different in structure as to render the possibility of a work being an extended instance of both unthinkable.... But the mere individual presence of such [tonal] events cannot be a sufficient condition for tonality or even for a significant 'tonal allusion.'"<sup>59</sup> Babbitt's insistence on such a division, while perhaps a matter of his principled precision in regard to theoretical terminology, seems more the result of his own preconceived categories than an actual response to Stravinsky's music. The Princeton theorist's insistence on a strict dichotomy of musical systems resonates in the work of other serial analysts. In his investigation of *The Flood*, Lynn Rogers was genuinely surprised to find tonal allusions in the score.<sup>60</sup> "If Stravinsky at this stage of his life," Rogers concludes, "is viewed as a composer who retained diatonic and even tonal impulses, then taking into account the audible results of these impulses will contribute substantially to an understanding of his serial music."<sup>61</sup> Remarkably, Straus does not confront the claims made by Wuorinen in *Stravinsky's Late Music*. While he acknowledged that Stravinsky's manipulation of rotational arrays created centricity, this aspect receives remarkably slim coverage. Straus does not confront centricity as a recurrent stylistic feature of works such as *Threni*. Instead, he highlighted instances in which the

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<sup>59</sup> Milton Babbitt, "Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky," 184.

<sup>60</sup> Lynne Rogers, "A Serial Passage of Diatonic Ancestry in Stravinsky's *The Flood*," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* CXXIX/2 (2004), 220-39.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.



composer used specific pitch centers to create poetic references, such as centrality on A as a symbol of love or F as symbolic of death.<sup>62</sup>

Scholars outside of the analytical tradition have suggested other ways of understanding Stravinsky's unique approach to serialism. Cone stressed continuity in Stravinsky's music, highlighting those stylistic constants that remained the composer's hallmarks before and after his adaptation of serialism. Cone suggested that "When he uses the twelve-tone method it is again, so to speak, as an outsider adopting a historically defined mode."<sup>63</sup> But rather than adopting the aesthetics and techniques of Schoenberg wholesale, Stravinsky "reinterprets and transforms it so radically to fit his own needs that it remains only superficially related to the original."<sup>64</sup> Boucourechliev has also written on this theme, emphasizing how adopting serialism provided Stravinsky with a whole new world of stylistic mannerisms and preconceptions for the composer to manipulate:

What, then, did Stravinsky see in serialism if he rejected its original hallmarks? A new field of operations, and one particularly well-suited to realizing his own long-standing ideas about style and aesthetics in general, a field that had its own internal order and coherence yet was wide open to speculative possibilities—and finally a network of conditions that invited the elaboration of new *conventions*, both stricter and more up-to-date, if not much more inventive, than those that controlled the *Concerto in D*.<sup>65</sup>

Walsh has emphasized how the links of serialism to early music appealed to Stravinsky and how the elaborate technical apparatus of dodecaphony served the Russian com-

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<sup>62</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky's Late Music*, 193-208.

<sup>63</sup> Edward T. Cone, "The Uses of Convention: Stravinsky and His Models," *The Musical Quarterly* XLVIII/3 (1962), 295.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>65</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meie, 1987), 23.

poser's outlook regarding expression: "It is important to realize that for Stravinsky serialism served a function not dissimilar to that of comparable techniques in medieval music—a sense of ritual and immutability as far removed from the transience of subjective emotion as one can possibly conceive."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Walsh, "The Choral Music," *Tempo* 81 (1967), 48.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### “THE MOUNTAIN BROUGHT FORTH A MOUSE”

Stravinsky's popularity as a world figure was, perhaps, never greater than during the early 1960s. The musical world celebrated the fiftieth anniversaries of three of his most beloved works: *L'oiseau de feu*, *Petrushka*, and *Le sacre du printemps*. Despite his age Stravinsky now joined the ranks of the jet set, traveling the world as a celebrity conductor and living deity of classical music. His impressive travel itinerary during the early 1960s included appearances in such far-flung destinations as Egypt, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, Switzerland, Rome, Hamburg, Israel, Caracas, Toronto, and Mexico City. The world's most powerful men received the composer as an honored guest. In January of 1962 President Kennedy honored Stravinsky's eightieth birthday with a dinner in "Camelot." In September of that same year the composer met with Nikita Khrushchev as part of a spectacular return visit to his native Russia. But while Stravinsky relished the limelight, he was well aware that it was not interest in his new music that brought such renown. In regard to his White House birthday celebration, the composer remarked wryly, "No one in Washington has any real regard for my music, but only for my name."<sup>1</sup> As the world embraced the persona of the great composer, Stravinsky the artist continued his course of growing solitude in his serial idiom. Two new works were given in 1962 with particularly troubled receptions. In February a new sacred cantata, *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*, was heard in Basel, Switzerland. June saw Stravinsky's latest work, *The Flood*, broadcast nationwide into American

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Stravinsky, letter to Nicolas Nabokov. Quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 461.

homes via the CBS television network. What might have been one of his greatest triumphs was reviled as the composer's biggest flop, a painful failure lambasted in the press.

*A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*

*A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* was commissioned by the wealthy Swiss conductor and archivist Paul Sacher (1906-1999), who made the initial request for a new work in 1954.<sup>2</sup> A champion of both pre-classical and modern music, Sacher had commissioned a number of distinguished works, including Stravinsky's *Concerto in D* (1947), Bartók's masterpiece, *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* (1936), as well as works by Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), Arthur Honegger (1892-1955), and Richard Strauss (1864-1949). Characteristically, Sacher had to wait as Stravinsky manipulated and cajoled various patrons for higher fees and better terms, only settling with the Swiss patron in 1959 for the handsome fee of \$20,000.<sup>3</sup> Eric Walter White has described a letter Stravinsky sent to Sacher detailing his long-promised cantata.<sup>4</sup> In the letter Stravinsky identified *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* as the New Testament companion to the Old Testament *Threni*. As the composer explained, hope and forgiveness would be central themes of the new work, expressed through the story of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stravinsky did not complete the work until January of 1961. The Basel

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 361.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 510.

Chamber Orchestra and Chorus introduced *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* on 23 February 1962, with Sacher conducting.

Stravinsky's style had undergone considerable change since the composition of *Threni* in 1958. In the interim Stravinsky had written *Movements* for Piano and Orchestra, widely regarded as the most advanced, abstract, concentrated, and complex score of his late period. As Stravinsky himself proudly remarked, "the *Movements* are the most advanced music from the point of view of construction of anything I have composed."<sup>5</sup> White has described *Movements* as

one of the most hermetic of all Stravinsky's major works. Some of the difficulty in coming to terms with it resides in its brevity, for here the serial process has resulted in an even greater terseness and concentration than usual. The composition lasts ten minutes in performance, but has the specific gravity of a tonal work of three times that duration.<sup>6</sup>

This newfound intensity evoked the music of Stravinsky's fellow serialists—particularly that of Babbitt and Boulez—more than any other of the Russian composer's late works. Most, though not all, scholars agree that *Movements* represents Stravinsky's strongest break with tonality. Not surprisingly, *Movements* was highly regarded by Claudio Spies. In a recorded interview Spies announced, "Now I find that *Movements* is the most interesting of the late works, by a long stretch."<sup>7</sup> If it is indeed ever fair to speculate that Stravinsky bowed to the tastes of Babbitt and the other expert serialists, such a capitulation came with *Movements*.

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<sup>5</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 100-01.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 504.

<sup>7</sup> Claudio Spies, recorded interview for "Program X: The Final Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

Van den Toorn has identified *Movements* as marking the beginning of a second phase in Stravinsky's final period, a phase marked by four new stylistic features.<sup>8</sup> First, after *Threni*, there was an increase in the sophistication of Stravinsky's serial procedures, marked by the composer's reliance on a hexachordal rotation technique inspired by the practices of Ernst Krenek. Second, van den Toorn determined an intensification of rhythmic complexity and abstraction in *Movements* and the works that follow. Third, the works of this second phase display an even greater compression of musical ideas and a corresponding concision of time scale. Finally, van den Toorn noted that Stravinsky's works after *Threni* display fewer and fewer of what had been regarded as the composer's stylistic hallmarks, with the exception of block forms and structural juxtapositions.

Although *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* retained characteristics of *Movements*, it is a significantly more approachable score. The English text was collected from various Biblical and literary sources by Craft. The work also employs a narrator, a device Stravinsky had used previously in *Histoire du soldat* (1918), *Oedipus Rex* (1927), *Persephone* (1934), and *Babel* (1944). In the serial context of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*, however, the effect of the narration is subtly different, making the listener wonder if this aspect did not represent the Russian composer's answer to Schoenberg's *Sprechstimme*, which according to Babbitt, Stravinsky detested. On hearing *Pierrot lunaire* in Berlin in 1912, Stravinsky "expressed the wish that the woman on the stage would stop talking so that he could hear the music, or—much later in Hollywood—the wish that a recording of *Pierrot* would be issued without the *Sprechstimme*, so that the listener

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<sup>8</sup> Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 428-29.

could, or could not, supply it himself: *Pierrot Lunaire* minus *eine*.”<sup>9</sup> Although in performance *Sermon*’s roughly sixteen minutes is virtually the same as *Canticum sacrum*, it gives the impression of a much shorter work, owing to its much more consistent textures and less episodic structure. And yet, for all of its accessibility, *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* remains probably the least performed of Stravinsky’s late works. For many years Stravinsky’s original recording—nasty edits and all—was the only version available, and then only as part of a costly, multi-disc set of the composer’s complete recordings. Craft’s 2002 recording was a godsend, but it has since gone out of print.

Stravinsky employed a relatively conventional ensemble for the piece, with alto and tenor soloists, chorus, and orchestra with standard winds and brass, augmented by harp, piano, and three tam-tams. As with *Threni*, Stravinsky’s *Sermon* disposes its large forces stingily; the result is a chamber-like work without a single orchestral tutti. The stark, contrapuntal textures heard throughout the work magnify this effect. The angular, disjunct melodic lines, along with the fitful, erratic rhythms and frequent use of hocket conspire to mask further the ensemble’s large numbers. The printed score is abbreviated by the omission of all bars of rest, further removing even a hint of orchestral padding. This visual presentation of the score, first seen in *Movements*, enhances the aural impression of the music as pithy, skeletal, and distilled.

Not only was Stravinsky’s title more congenial than the cryptic Latin designations of *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni*, it is also indicative of a much simpler musical structure. He cast his new cantata in three movements, a structure that at times strikes the listener as

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<sup>9</sup> Milton Babbitt, “Contribution to ‘Stravinsky (1882-1971): A Composer’s Memorial’,” *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. Stephen Peles, with Stephen Dembski, Andrew Mead, and Joseph N. Straus. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 265-66.

more of a haphazard collection than a unified conception. The work begins with selected verses from the Epistles of Saint Paul. This first movement opens with one of the many self-referential gestures of Stravinsky's late years, a sudden–energetic yet anti-sensational–crescendo, which is strikingly similar to the opening gesture of *Movements*. After this brief instrumental introduction, which recalls the pointillism of Webern, the entrance of the chorus, in an imitative texture, brings welcomed stability and solidity. Yet the texture, aptly described by one scholar as a “quiveringly erectile skeleton,” remains remarkably spare.<sup>10</sup> The dark colors of tenors and basses enhance the ritual atmosphere, as well as Stravinsky's use of parlando sotto voce. The considerable impact of the voices is diminished by the contrasting, almost incongruent, orchestral parts, which feature more angular lines and frequent Webernesque effects. The explicit indications of dynamics and articulation—also reminiscent of Webern—make *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* seem fussy in comparison to Stravinsky's previous scores.

The second movement relates the martyrdom of St. Stephen from the Book of Acts in a fashion that is considerably more emphatic than Stravinsky's chosen title would imply. Some scholars have noted its almost operatic quality, comparing this *Narrative* to a scena from the bel canto tradition. Such a melodramatic scenario seems at first a curious choice for Stravinsky, whose most successful dramatic works had also been his most abstract. But as in the “Sacrificial Dance” from *Le sacre du printemps*, Stravinsky finds compelling ways to depersonalize the action while maintaining the drama. The narrative voice is artificially divided between speaker and alto, overlapping only at pivotal phrases in the text. Despite the abstract approach, there are traditionally expressive

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<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Troup, “Serial Stravinsky: The ‘Granite’ Period (1956-1966),” *Twentieth Century Music*, new revised and enlarged ed., ed. Rollo H. Myers (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), 53.



touches, notably brief but powerful instances of text painting. The orchestral accompaniment is lean, but able at a moment's notice to provide an astounding sense of depth with an absolute minimum of sound. Notwithstanding the reticence of the serial idiom, Stravinsky manages moments of pathos that recall *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, particularly in the aftermath of Stephen's stoning, which is one of the more beautiful moments in all of the composer's late music.

The final movement is a setting of a text from *Four Birds of Noah's Ark* by English playwright Thomas Dekker (1570-1641). Here the accumulated artifices of the first two movements—notably the orchestral Webernisms and the narrator—disappear, and listeners are left with the kind of slow, solemn, ritualistic chorale that Stravinsky does best. The deeply plaintive melodies of the alto and tenor soloists are borne aloft by the remote, congregational sound of the chorus, supported by the unforgettable resonances of contrabasses, harp, piano, and tam-tams. As in the best Stravinsky codas, time seems suspended as this collective ritual melts away to repeated statements of “Alleluia.” The movement carries a memorial dedication to the Reverend James McLane, an Episcopalian minister and friend to the composer during his California years.<sup>11</sup>

Peter Heyworth's review of the Basel première for *The New York Times* was remarkably lucid on several fronts.<sup>12</sup> Heyworth expressed appreciation for the clarity of the new cantata, praising the simpler choral writing and greater accessibility of *Sermon* in comparison to the composer's recent works. He found the form accessible as well: “It is in essence a meditation on the New Testament virtue of hope and the title itself gives a

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<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Morton, “Current Chronicle: Ojai, California,” *The Musical Quarterly* XLVIII/3 (1962), 395.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Heyworth, “Stravinsky's ‘Prayer’ and Expression of Faith,” *The New York Times* (4 March 1962), 2: 9.

fair notion of its shape.... Like everything Stravinsky undertakes the conception is clear, complete and satisfying. And the music is worthy of the conception.”<sup>13</sup> Of the extreme compression of the score, Heyworth observed that even at sixteen minutes, Stravinsky’s new work “amounts to considerably more than a minor piece.” He further ventured:

It is possible that this score will come to be regarded as a culminating point to which Stravinsky’s music has been moving in the past decade. This is not to imply that it is necessarily the finest work he has written in that period (though it is certainly among the most profound), but rather that the various stylistic threads that feature in his later music seem to have found a final integration.<sup>14</sup>

Heyworth was uncertain of the effectiveness of Stravinsky’s dramatization of the stoning of St. Stephen found in the “Narrative.” Although he allowed that this doubt may have been the result of an inadequate performance, he maintained that “The Narrative packs an immense variety of action and incident into an exceptionally brief space, and it remains uncertain whether Stravinsky has found a compelling shape for the whole.”<sup>15</sup> One quality Heyworth found strikingly absent from *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* was Stravinsky’s usual ritual tone. The clarity of the work’s message, however, seemed to make up for this loss, as Heyworth contended, “the new score makes a strong immediate impression, because, in contrast to the ritualistic quality that one associates with Stravinsky’s music, secular as well as sacred, it is a direct personal expression of faith.”<sup>16</sup> Heyworth identified another unexpected quality in this new Stravinsky: a surprising em-

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

phasis on melody. An obvious Stravinsky devotee well versed in the Russian composer's oeuvre, Heyworth heard echoes of the *Symphony of Psalms* in the "Alleluias" that concluded Stravinsky's new cantata:

Compared with the solemn hieratic Alleluias that end the *Symphony of Psalms*, convey a sense of rapt inner communion. But Stravinsky remains Stravinsky. There is no trace of loose emotionalism; the intensity of feeling is channeled in a rigorously sustained canonic form, and in its gentleness and strength this is one of the most impressive examples of twentieth-century religious art.<sup>17</sup>

Walsh has noted how Sacher's well-organized performance differed from the chaotic conditions that accompanied the Venice premières of *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni*.<sup>18</sup> Such a listener-friendly performance seems to have aided Stravinsky's new work.

The review for *Musical America*, penned by Willi Reich, reported the enthusiasm of the Swiss audience, who demanded that Stravinsky's new cantata be repeated.<sup>19</sup> Reich recorded that the Basel Chamber Orchestra and Chorus were joined by alto Jeanne Deroubaix, tenor Hugues Cuénod, and narrator Derrik Olsen. In *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*, Reich detected the shadow of Webern. "A glance at the score," Reich observed, "reminds one immediately of Webern: the economical, often soloistic, use of the numerous instruments, . . . the use of twelve-tone technique; and the nature of the melodic figuration."<sup>20</sup> As others have registered, however, there are often subtle fingerprints of Stravinsky that are more easily heard than seen lurking in the score beneath its

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 452.

<sup>19</sup> Willi Reich, "Switzerland: Stravinsky Premiere," *Musical America* LXXXII/5 (May 1962), 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Webernesque façade. According to Reich, “Actual performance, however, reveals the genius with which Stravinsky has adapted all these technical means to his own entirely personal musical language.”<sup>21</sup>

Schoenberg sympathizer Hans Keller witnessed the first English performance of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* on 31 May 1962 at the festival of the International Society of Contemporary Music in London. In his account for *The Musical Times*,<sup>22</sup> Keller was exceptionally enthusiastic about Stravinsky’s new work and hailed it as a contemporary classic of serialism, on par with Schoenberg’s *Variations*, Opus 31 (1928), which was featured on the same program:

It may seem absurd to call a work a “classic” which nobody has yet heard except for those who attended its premiere at Basle on February 23 this year. But any work Stravinsky writes nowadays is bound to become a classic: indeed, even the most cursory examination of the new 16-minute score confirms such a trusted prognosis.<sup>23</sup>

Dispelling any lingering suspicions of the composer’s dotage, Keller praised the clarity of the new work, which could only have been produced by “a mature master-mind inspired by genius.”<sup>24</sup> Keller was happy to identify a surprising new lyricism in Stravinsky’s music, a feature long thought by critics to be beyond the composer’s capacity:

there is a new melodic distinction, achieved with the help of words on the one hand and, more profoundly, of the 12-note method on the other. For the first time, perhaps, we realize that had Stravinsky not been born and

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Hans Keller, “The Note-Row on May 31,” *The Musical Times* CIII/1431 (May 1962), 315-16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

bred into a melodic crisis, the charge of melodic poverty might never have been leveled against him.<sup>25</sup>

Keller insisted that what he identified as the slow, measured development of serial technique from Schoenberg to Stravinsky lent solidity to dodecaphonic music, despite the fact that the innovations of the total serialists were already regarded as passé.

*A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* was given its American première at the final concert of the Sixteenth Annual Ojai, California Festival on 20 May 1962. The German-born American composer and conductor Lukas Foss led the performance, which featured alto Margery MacKay, tenor Mallory Walker, speaker James Tippey, and the innovative Roger Wagner Chorale. In addition, the program included the “Bedlam” scene from *The Rake’s Progress* and ten excerpts from Mozart’s opera seria, *Idomeneo*. Albert Goldberg’s review of the Ojai festival for *Musical America* contained only a few unenthusiastic comments in regard to the new cantata. The critic for *The Los Angeles Times*, Goldberg had reacted against the mathematical intellectualism of *Canticum sacrum* a few years before. Of the Russian’s composer’s latest work, Goldberg wrote, “The music utilizes Stravinsky’s most advanced and uncompromising serial techniques, and is mainly dour and grim, rising to a moment of drama only in the brief orchestral interlude depicting the stoning.”<sup>26</sup> Goldberg, in fact, showed little enthusiasm for any of the modern works presented at the festival, including important compositions by Edgard Varèse and John Cage. Most telling, Goldberg reserved some of his strongest praise for Mozart’s *Idomeneo*, which concluded the festival.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Albert Goldberg, “National Report: Ojai–Mozart and Moderns,” *Musical America* LXXXII/7 (July 1962), 12.

The American musicologist Lawrence Morton reviewed the Ojai Festival premiere for *The Musical Quarterly*.<sup>27</sup> The director of the progressive Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles during the 1950s and 1960s, Morton was a frequent and valued guest of the Stravinsky household during the composer's Hollywood years. As such, Morton's review must be read in light of his friendship with Stravinsky, a relationship that could have been easily jeopardized by a harsh comment. In fact, Dorothy Lamb Crawford has observed how Stravinsky's friendship could influence his potential critics, how "Morton's early criticisms of Stravinsky's music turned to total acceptance as he became a close friend of the composer and a faithful member of the composer's inner circle."<sup>28</sup>

Although Morton was unquestionably biased toward Stravinsky, one wishes that he had been given more opportunities to review the composer's late works, particularly in such substantial forums as *The Musical Quarterly*. Because Morton was not particularly interested in serial analysis, he could have provided a counterbalance to the work of Babbitt and other theorists. As Morton remembered, "I never paid much attention to the machinery of his [Stravinsky's] serial practices. I am no Champollion of the tone row, and once I found out what he was doing with his alpha, beta, gamma, and delta rows, with his diagonals and verticals and all the other upholstery of his pieces, I was quite content with just listening to the fabulous and always fresh sounds he concocted."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Morton, "Current Chronicle: Ojai, California," *The Musical Quarterly* XLVIII/3 (1962), 392-96.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 252.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Morton, "Stravinsky at Home," *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 344.

While Morton was not interested in the vogue for serial analysis, he possessed an expert knowledge of early music, the very repertory that Stravinsky heard regularly at the Monday Evening Concerts. Morton could have contributed greatly to critical understanding of how specific early works may have influenced Stravinsky's late style. The scholar planned to write a monograph on Stravinsky, but the book never materialized due in part to misgivings as to how such a work would be received by the composer.<sup>30</sup> In private, Morton expressed doubts about the effect of Stravinsky's age on the quality of his compositions.<sup>31</sup>

Morton's reaction to *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* is a good deal more accessible than most scholarly assessments of Stravinsky's late works. Morton, who disclosed that the composer interrupted work on *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* to complete some of arrangements of madrigals by Don Carlo Gesualdo, collected in Stravinsky's *Monumentum pro Gesualdo di Venosa ad CD annum*, eschewed detailed serial shoptalk; he used his historical expertise to offer a pithy metaphor for Stravinsky's treatment of the tone row:

When Stravinsky uses the full series he usually exposes it prominently, as a vocal or instrumental solo, and generally at its original pitch. An analogy with old polyphonic techniques might be made—the twelve-tone serving as a *cantus firmus*, the hexachordal developments providing the counterpoints.<sup>32</sup>

The review illuminated a number of expressive features of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*, although its author was certainly well aware of the composer's aversion to such

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<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof*, 216.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 500.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Morton, "Current Chronicle," 393.

commentary. Morton described a particularly touching passage at the expressive peak of the *Narrative*.

The two dramatic climaxes, when Stephen's accusers "gnash on him with their teeth" and stone him, are brief but brutal.... After the second climax the music is rapidly extinguished, ending in unaccompanied dialogue between the solo voices. This *dénouement* is profoundly touching, scaled to the simple poetry of the final words of Scripture, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." There is a brief instrumental postlude, at once commentary and solemn curtain music.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of its place in Stravinsky's late style, Morton recognized that *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* represented something of a break; it did not continue the progression that had already produced the *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni*. Morton instead identified *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* as a sibling work to *Movements*, alike in "concentrated, aphoristic applications of serial methods."<sup>34</sup> He seemed to have sensed the change of style in *Movements* and *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* that would later be defined by Van den Toorn. But while these two works were similar, Morton identified the latter as being more accessible. "But its accessibility is literary rather than musical," he cautioned, "Anyone can tell what *Sermon* is about—faith, martyrdom, and trust in the Lord. *Movements* is about nothing but itself. It insists on its toughness, whereas *Sermon* hides its rigors behind its text."<sup>35</sup> Morton praised the resurgence of Stravinsky's dramatic powers, noting that the composer "has lost neither the skill nor the imagination that have made his dramatic music so compelling."<sup>36</sup> At the conclusion of the essay, the scholar

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 395-96.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.



mused openly at the prospect of Stravinsky's next work, a dramatic presentation of the Biblical story of Noah and the great flood: "One waits impatiently for *The Flood*, which will have been heard by the time these lines appear. And one hopes that after *The Flood* there might be a *Falstaff*: Stravinsky is at just the right age to compose one."<sup>37</sup> Scarcely ever has a critic uttered so ironic a pronouncement for a work by Stravinsky.

Authors of the major monographic surveys of Stravinsky's music have expressed both high admiration and deep reservations for *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*. The French composer and scholar Boucourechliev lauded it as one of the "most endearing" of Stravinsky's late scores.<sup>38</sup> Vlad found this work both expressive and exceptionally meaningful: "The quality of pathos in the cantata is that of a work in which the ultimate experience of human life is distilled."<sup>39</sup> Druskin offered only the briefest of descriptions, although the Russian scholar admitted that the cantata was a "remarkable" work.<sup>40</sup> The English scholar Neil Tierney praised Stravinsky's cantata as "a superb example of twentieth-century religious art."<sup>41</sup> Despite accolades, many scholars have wondered at the continued unpopularity of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*, which remains one of Stravinsky's least performed works.

Among scholars, the central portion of the score, the depiction of the stoning of St. Stephen, has evoked the most controversy. Walsh was highly critical of this movement. He objected to Stravinsky's alternating vocal forces, including solo alto, tenor, and

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 283.

<sup>39</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Frederick Fuller (London: Oxford, 1978), 231.

<sup>40</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works, and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 152.

<sup>41</sup> Neil Tierney, *The Unknown Country: The Life of Igor Stravinsky* (London: Robert Hale, 1977), 253-54.

narrator, as “superficial” and “too self-conscious.” Despite occasional and effective text painting, Walsh judged that the music never rises above the level of “anecdote”: “The trouble with all these procedures...is that they imply an artificial work of ritual which is consistently denied by the matter-of-fact Sunday-school atmosphere of the work as a whole.”<sup>42</sup> In contrast, White has found that Stravinsky’s vocal “gradations are managed with great skill.”<sup>43</sup> Boucourechliev believed that Stravinsky’s *Narrative* was the perfect example of the composer’s aesthetic of sacred music:

‘Narrative’ is a perfect example of one musical conception of the sacred.... No hint of pathos, no trace of “expressiveness” is permitted, only a few hieratic conventions of grief, as changeless as those found in icons. Any note of the theatrical, any suggestion of romanticism or realism in the handling of such a theme would constitute an outrage; and Stravinsky is possibly the only twentieth-century composer capable of mastering not only a text of this kind but, even more importantly, the perilous musical form of a scena with narrative.<sup>44</sup>

The final portion of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* is one of the most emphatically lauded creations in all of Stravinsky’s late music. After the formidable demands of the first two movements, the finale rewards listeners with some of the composer’s most familiar gestures. Many scholars have recognized this movement as a point of continuity in his overall style. The final “Prayer” has often been compared with the last movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*, especially due to the strikingly similar choral settings of “Alleluia.” “For a moment,” Vlad wrote, “we seem to see the Stravinsky of the *Symphony of Psalms*, though here the direct, staggeringly impressive power of the

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 257.

<sup>43</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 511.

<sup>44</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, 284.

Symphony has been decanted, tamed, sublimated.”<sup>45</sup> Although Walsh was impressed by the final “Prayer,” calling it the “most beautiful and moving part of the work,” this does not, on balance, outweigh his misgivings. Of the last movement, Walsh recorded that Stravinsky “transforms a potentially morose expression into a profoundly solemn moment of devotion—one of those unpredictable strokes which separate the genius from ordinary mortals even when he is not altogether on top form.”<sup>46</sup> Such a wry, unenthusiastic attitude underlies much of Walsh’s writing on Stravinsky’s late choral works.

Of course, Stravinsky’s *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* attracted a good deal of attention from scholars working in the analytical tradition of Babbitt and Spies. Stravinsky had, in fact, introduced his new cantata to Babbitt while the work was still in its formative stages. At Stravinsky’s death Babbitt recalled his private preview of the sketches in a scenario much like the one in which he and Spies had been introduced to the composer’s serial methods for *Movements*. As Babbitt recalled,

There was a night, in the winter of 1960, when he was showing me, with that violently intense volubility so typical of his private discussions of his own music, the score, sketches, and schemata of his then work in progress: *Sermon, Narrative, and Prayer*. For over an hour he discussed the derivation of the instrumental dispositions from the pitch-class collections, and when he had finished I could say only: “It’s a great pity that you never consented to teach. You would have been, because you are, a marvelous teacher.” Stravinsky smiled: “My dear, it is very much easier to write music than to teach it.”<sup>47</sup>

Surprisingly, whatever lessons Babbitt learned from Stravinsky’s impromptu demonstration were not shared by the Princeton scholar in his “Remarks on the Recent

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<sup>45</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 231.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 256.

<sup>47</sup> Milton Babbitt, *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, 266.

Stravinsky.”<sup>48</sup> Babbitt referred to *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* only as “intricate and novel,” the same evaluation he offered for *Movements* and *The Flood*.<sup>49</sup> Colin Mason, Martin Boykan, Thomas Clifton, and Robert D. Harris have each published highly detailed analytical studies of this piece, as well.<sup>50</sup>

Joseph Straus has made a myriad of analytical points about the composition but also shared excellent insights into the poetic nature of the work, in particular its expressive use of canon. In the broad scope of the late style, Straus argued that canon served a number of expressive functions. Straus pointed to the diminutive *Greeting Prelude*, Stravinsky’s reworking of the popular tune “Happy Birthday to You” for the eightieth birthday of Pierre Monteux, as one particularly novel use of canon. In the *Greeting Prelude*, as in portions of *Agon*, Stravinsky’s canons represented virtuosity for its own sake. These “playful, light-hearted” canons offered Stravinsky a chance to stretch his compositional chops and enjoy craft for its own sake, independent of any other expressive agenda.<sup>51</sup> Straus also identified how canon served “as an emblem of an over-intellectualized pedantry, the ‘learned style’ carried to a self-mocking extreme.”<sup>52</sup> (As seen, many critics accused Stravinsky of actual pedantry in his ritualistic use of canon in *Canticum Sacrum* and *Threni*.) According to Straus, Stravinsky treated canon in this

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<sup>48</sup> Milton Babbitt, “Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky,” *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1972), 165-85.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>50</sup> See Colin Mason, “Stravinsky’s New Work,” *Tempo* 59 (Autumn 1961), 5-14; Martin Boykan, “‘Neoclassicism’ and Late Stravinsky,” *Perspectives of New Music* I/2 (1963), 155-63; Thomas Clifton, “Types of Symmetrical Relations in Stravinsky’s *A Sermon, Narrative, and A Prayer*,” *Perspectives of New Music*, IX/1 (Fall/Winter 1970), 96-112; and Robert D. Morris, “Generalizing Rotational Arrays,” *Journal of Music Theory* XXXII/1 (Spring 1988), 75-132.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Stravinsky’s Late Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 220.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

manner in “A Narrative” as a kind of text painting. During the portion of the *Narrative* that describes St. Stephen’s conflict with the Pharisees, a canonic texture is heard in the winds, mocking the overtly legalistic stance of Stephen’s accusers. Straus pointed out that the prominent canons heard in *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni* occur only infrequently in Stravinsky’s music after *Movements*. Stravinsky compensated for this, however, by his highly repetitious, and therefore canonic, hexachordal rotation technique. “Once Stravinsky came to rely on his rotational arrays,” Straus observed, “he scarcely ever again employs an explicit canon...the arrays themselves embody a kind of six-voice canon.... In that sense, canons have been sublimated into the arrays, so deeply, in fact, as to be virtually inaudible.”<sup>53</sup>

### *The Flood*

On 14 June 1962 millions of American households tuned in the CBS television network to view a highly touted new work of contemporary art in primetime. Broadcast on the eve of Stravinsky’s eightieth birthday, *The Flood*, a retelling of the Biblical account of Noah from the Book of Genesis, promised to be a potent statement for its time. Bringing together the talents of the world’s greatest living composer and the brilliant choreography of the legendary George Balanchine, *The Flood* was envisioned as a powerful allegory for an America living under the shadow of a Soviet nuclear threat. Just four months later, President Kennedy would face down Nikita Khrushchev over the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba and bring the world’s two superpowers closer to cataclysm than ever before or since. But on that summer’s evening *The Flood* proved to be

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

the real catastrophe. Millions of viewers who had never seen *Le sacre du printemps*, much less *Oedipus Rex* or *The Rake's Progress*, were dumbfounded at Stravinsky's highly stylized and radically compressed retelling of one of the most familiar tales of Western Civilization. *The Flood* proved to be the greatest theatrical failure of Stravinsky's career. Although he weathered this horrific embarrassment in characteristic style, never again would one of his premières be anticipated with such enthusiasm. *The Flood* remains, nearly fifty years after its unveiling, the least respected of all Stravinsky's late works.

Recent biographical studies of Joseph and Walsh<sup>54</sup> have illuminated many details of the conception, commission, and composition of *The Flood*. Joseph has argued that *The Flood* was part of a campaign on the part of broadcast executives to rehabilitate the reputation of television, a medium tarnished by quiz show scandals of the 1950s and carrying the stamp of vacuous simple-mindedness. Efforts at reform included the commissioning of original musical works for television, most notably the highly successful *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951) of Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007). Stravinsky had hoped to collaborate with T. S. Eliot on the libretto. When Eliot declined, however, the task fell to Craft. Stravinsky's protégé dutifully constructed the libretto from portions of medieval miracle plays, a source suggested by Eliot. Charles Joseph has argued that Craft's acknowledged role in *The Flood* has been greatly underestimated. Beyond his work as librettist, Joseph has found archival evidence that Craft influenced Stravinsky in

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<sup>54</sup> See Charles M. Joseph, "Television and *The Flood*: Anatomy of an 'Inglorious Flop,'" *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 132-61 and Stephen Walsh, "Sinking the Ark," *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 433-48.

terms of instrumentation, timings, and even musical styles for the various portions of the work. According to Joseph:

Craft's influence in charting a compositional blueprint for Stravinsky to follow is indisputable. He assumed the multiple roles of collaborator, librettist, attaché, and agent to the television producers Stravinsky viewed so contemptuously. Had it not been for Craft's intercession, especially after Eliot's bowing out, it is likely *The Flood* would have been abandoned as were so many of Stravinsky's aborted film projects. The final score demonstrates that Stravinsky followed most of the textural and even musical recommendations made by Craft.<sup>55</sup>

The score was completed and recorded for production by the end of March, leaving only two months to stage and videotape the work.<sup>56</sup> Also last minute was the producers' decision to air Stravinsky's twenty-five minute score in an hour-long timeslot. Filling the remainder of the time required the assemblage of rehearsal footage, an anthropological prologue describing flood myths around the world, and even a filmed appearance by the composer, all of which were crammed together in only two days of studio time.<sup>57</sup>

Described by the composer as "A Musical Play," *The Flood* featured ballet, pantomime, and vocal music performed by masked actors on highly stylized sets and filmed with the latest camera techniques. Stravinsky professed a desire to create an entirely new "musico-dramatic form" by taking advantage of the concision made possible by film. The composer described his new concept of film and music drama in the following manner:

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out*, 151.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-53.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Herman Adler, "Music: The Silent Stepchild," *Saturday Review* LII/17 (26 April 1969), 24.

Visually it offers every advantage over stage opera, but the saving of musical time interests me more than anything visual. This new musical economy was the one specific of the medium guiding my conception of *The Flood*. Because the succession of visualizations can be instantaneous, the composer may dispense with the afflatus of overtures, connecting episodes, curtain music. I have used only one or two notes to punctuate each stage in *The Creation*, for example, and so far I have not been able to imagine the work on the operatic stage because the musical speed is so uniquely cinematographic.<sup>58</sup>

In striking contrast to Stravinsky's desired brevity, the scope of Craft's libretto was considerable, spanning the Creation, the fall of Adam and Eve, Noah's building of the ark, and the subsequent flood. As in some of Stravinsky's greatest theater pieces, a narrator provided the connecting thread that unifies the many divergent features of the work.

Many aspects of *The Flood* may be attributed to the spirit of the medieval miracle plays that were his textural source. Although this link has never been fully explored, Druskin acknowledged its importance, calling attention to the "naïve faith and rough buffooneries," of such morality plays, along with an "ambivalent unity combining the lofty and the commonplace, the devout and the vulgar."<sup>59</sup> In one of the many ironic parallelisms between the two composers, Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) turned to a similar text for his children's opera *Noye's Fludde* (1958). While it was by no means as approachable as Britten's opera, *The Flood* was the most approachable works of Stravinsky's late years.

Musically *The Flood* offers a remarkably entertaining mix of instrumental episodes, dialogue, choruses, and vocal music; a curious parade of highly accessible gestures, couched in Stravinsky's idiosyncratic serial language. As the composer explained, "I tried hard to keep *The Flood* very simple as music: it was commissioned for television

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<sup>58</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 79.

<sup>59</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii*, 161.



after all, and I could not regard this commission cynically.”<sup>60</sup> After a brief but scenic instrumental prelude depicting chaos, a chorus of soprano, alto, and tenor voices sings a short “Te Deum.” This chorus, representing a host of angels, sings in asymmetrical, syncopated dance rhythms that recall Stravinsky’s *Les noces*. The composer cleverly identified this “Te Deum,” which is one of the few instantly attractive of all Stravinsky’s serial creations, as “not Gregorian but Igorian chant.”<sup>61</sup> There is a preponderance of spoken dialogue, resulting from Stravinsky’s conception that the “celestials” of the drama sing “while the terrestrials should merely talk.”<sup>62</sup> The creation story was told in spoken narration, with brilliant punctuation and text painting provided by the orchestra. The voice of God enters, sung by two solo bass voices, over the rumbling of a bass drum. Lucifer, whom the composer described as a “slightly pederastic” tenor,<sup>63</sup> represents the last incarnation of Stravinsky’s many devils, recalling similar roles in *Histoire du soldat* and *The Rake’s Progress*. Two of the most striking portions of *The Flood* are instrumental: “The Building of the Ark” and “The Flood.” Both picturesque sections feature striking allusions to *Le sacre du printemps*, with stratified rhythms, ostinatos, and static harmonies.

“‘Noah’ Submerged” was the headline offered by *The New York Times* in the aftermath of *The Flood*.<sup>64</sup> Jack Gould’s scathing review placed the blame for Stravinsky’s

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<sup>60</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 144 note.

<sup>61</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary*, 72.

<sup>62</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions*, 140.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>64</sup> Jack Gould, “‘Noah’ Submerged: Program Shows a Lack of Cooperation between TV and Leaders in Arts,” *The New York Times* (24 June 1962), 2: 19.

“bizarre marriage of assorted forms and formats” on the character of its medium and on the complicity of the artists involved. A central problem with the broadcast, in Gould’s opinion, was the elaborate padding required to stretch Stravinsky’s musical play into a full hour’s worth of viewing. The length of the prelude and postlude had the effect of reducing Stravinsky’s work to merely an “incidental feature” of the broadcast. “The rest was given to an aural and visual embroidery,” Gould complained. “The appended mélange began with Jack Richardson’s stilted primer on creation, to which Laurence Harvey brought the pear-shaped ostentation traditionally reserved for delivery of an important television commercial.”<sup>65</sup> In assigning blame for the failure of *The Flood*, Gould first considered the role of television, which in recent years had been responsible for a number of “memorable inadequacies.” Gould placed the highest blame, however, at the feet of the artists, who in this case seemed to have acquiesced responsibility in hopes of financial gain. As evidence, Gould pointed to the curious fact that the recording of *The Flood* was released commercially even before the CBS telecast of the work. It is a shock to Gould that Stravinsky would allow the release of such a mediocre product. Gould asked rhetorically, “Would the composer consent to a concert appearance with a full awareness and agreement on what would occur before and after his participation?”<sup>66</sup> On the stage, the usual working environment for Balanchine and Stravinsky, Gould was certain that such an inferior work as *The Flood* would never have been presented without revision and correction. As with many such reviews, there was an obvious concern for

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

the validity of television as a media. In light of the failure of *The Flood*, Gould pronounced:

At the very least, it would seem incumbent on major artistic figures, especially those with enormous bargaining power, to recognize that while expedient acquiescence may be understandable it can not simultaneously be hailed as impressive artistic leadership. What television needs most desperately is the vigorous help and guidance of such persons, not their resigned compliance.”<sup>67</sup>

Reporting on the television première for *Musical America*, John Ardoin found glaring faults with Stravinsky’s latest work, which he misidentified as *Noah and the Flood*. Ardoin, too, protested the “vicious commercialism” represented by many aspects of the production. “No attempt was made,” Ardoin wrote, “to present the advertisements with a dignity befitting the occasion or in a manner which would have made a viewer grateful for the sponsor’s support.”<sup>68</sup> Ardoin further complained of the “lack of conscience on the part of CBS and the sponsors,” who chose to extend *The Flood* into an hour program. To provide the necessary filler, the producers cooked up a “sophomoric preamble which superficially discussed the flood legend in various cultures” and a poorly edited and directed benedictory tribute to Balanchine and Stravinsky; of the music, Ardoin recognized that, while *The Flood* is “perhaps not a major score, it is certainly one of the venerable composer’s most accessible in recent years,” despite its “craggy” vocal writing and “sparse disjunctness.”<sup>69</sup> A far greater source of concern is the libretto, which Ardoin called the “fly in the ointment.” “The text,” Ardoin explained, “assembled by

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> John Ardoin, “Noah and the Flood Premiered on CBS-TV,” *Musical America* LXXXII/7 (July 1962), 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Robert Craft, is too sorely compressed, and is a strange amalgamation of Biblical, contemporary metaphysical, and 15th century literary sources which fail to jell convincingly.”<sup>70</sup> In addition, the brevity of Stravinsky’s score worked against the effectiveness of the production, as in the comedic dispute between Noah and his wife, which Ardoin assessed “too fleeting to register or be amusing—it is only awkward.” Nor could the production be saved by Balanchine’s choreography or the “fussy and uncongenial” sets. “In short,” Ardoin concluded, “each element worked against the other, rather than fusing into a meaningful or exciting artistic expression. It is disappointing not to be able to single any one aspect of the production as being completely successful or enjoyable, but such was the case.”<sup>71</sup>

In the wake of *The Flood*, a number of magazines published still photographs taken from the production, including *Saturday Review*, which placed images of Noah and his children on the cover.<sup>72</sup> *The Music Magazine and Musical Courier* included two pages of photographs, along with a review by editor Peter Jacobi. Jacobi mused openly on Stravinsky’s future, asking rhetorically if the composer’s name will be counted among that of Bach, Mozart, Brahms, Verdi, and Wagner: “Only tomorrow can tell the size of the Stravinsky star, its dimension in the firmament.... Time will not eclipse him, though it may decrease his magnitude.”<sup>73</sup> Like many critics, Jacobi protested the network hoopla preceding *The Flood*, promotion that built unreasonable expectations for the new work:

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Saturday Review* XLV/24 (16 June 1962).

<sup>73</sup> Peter Jacobi, “Igor, Noah, and a Flood of Good Wishes” *The Music Magazine and Musical Courier* CLXIV/7 (August 1962), 7.

“This was to have been the greatest day for the arts: mass exposure of a ‘Prepared for television’ cultural extravaganza involving the biggest names in music, ballet, drama, and television.”<sup>74</sup> Jacobi quoted the dance critic Rosalyn Krokover, who observed pointedly:

The unfortunate thing was that *Noah and the Flood* turned out to be a badly-organized and even pretentious bore, in which the genius of neither creator peeped through. As such, it set back the cause of music and ballet on television. For—after all the ballyhoo—the mountain brought forth a mouse, and the general public could well be excused for asking to be counted out of any future such productions.<sup>75</sup>

In regards to the music, Jacobi judged Stravinsky’s score “acceptable,” though it did not represent the composer at his “pristine or patriarchal best,” and implied that the medium of television is responsible for the failures of *The Flood*. “In the opera house,” Jacobi observed, “in the theatre, in the publishing house, anywhere else—the germ of such a work would have been carefully studied and reworked until it approached creative entity and artistic unity.”<sup>76</sup> Like many other critics, Jacobi shared harsh views of the television production, with its ungainly elongation of Stravinsky’s work into an hour-long program. In Jacobi’s final estimation, “*Noah* as written is a minor creation by two major creators worth seeing. *Noah* as presented on television—despite the good intentions of network and sponsor—was a blow to the progress of the performing arts.”<sup>77</sup>

Like most critics, Quaintance Eaton could not reconcile the glaring discrepancy between the promotion of *The Flood*, which promised a masterpiece, and the reality of

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<sup>74</sup> Peter Jacobi, “Notes and Sharps,” *The Music Magazine and Musical Courier* CLXIV/7 (August 1962), 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

the finished product, which was anything but masterly: “As the long hour flowed sluggishly past, a patchwork of disjointed elements, one began to wonder where it went wrong: in the mind of the sponsor, the network, or the artistic directors? Some culpability must be laid at the door of all three.”<sup>78</sup> The work, in Eaton’s estimation, was a disjointed patchwork of poor ingredients, including bad sets, little choreography, and bad camera effects. As for Stravinsky’s contribution, Eaton charged that the score “seemed arid, distilled almost to the point of disappearing, but later heard in recorded form, took on more substance. Still, with all that can be said in examination, it remains a minor contribution.”<sup>79</sup> Much worse in Eaton’s estimation was the assembled text: “Craft’s text provided one of the true embarrassments of the half hour.... A strange mixture of styles and elements, it obtruded frequently in such lines as: ‘The flood is flowing in full fast / For fear of drowning we are aghast.’”<sup>80</sup>

The soundtrack of *The Flood* was released just before the broadcast. Craft conducted the majority of the recording, with last minute edits under the direction of Leonard Bernstein.<sup>81</sup> Irving Kolodin’s review of the disc appeared just two days after the television premiere. Kolodin, who had obviously not viewed the television production at the time of his writing, described the score as a “remarkable example of comprehension with compression.”<sup>82</sup> Kolodin logged a number of touches in *The Flood* that recalled

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<sup>78</sup> Quaintance Eaton, “Audio-Visual: Stravinsky’s ‘Flood’ Leaves Scorched Earth,” *Showcase* XLII/1 (Fall 1962), 26.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out*, 152.

<sup>82</sup> Irving Kolodin, “*The Flood* on Disc,” *Saturday Review* XLV/24 (16 June 1962), 33.

Stravinsky's earlier works. Presented in the score was "a panorama of Stravinsky from *Les Noces* (choral chanting in Latin) through *The Rake's Progress* (a countertenor-sounding Satan, a 'calling' of the animals which recalls the Auctioneer's selling-off of Tom Rakewell's properties); the rhythmic details akin to *Agon*."<sup>83</sup> While Kolodin found the ending of Stravinsky's score "aurally unresolved," he withheld condemnation, allowing that the visual presentation of the work might compensate.

C. J. Luten's reviewed Stravinsky's recording for *The American Record Guide*. Stravinsky's new work was considered in conjunction with a new recording of Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde*, which Luten judged much more palatable.<sup>84</sup> Luten's wry tone was in part a response to the composer's constant bashing of his critics, the latest volley of which Luten mentions in his review. Luten was not won over by Stravinsky's new work on record, although he admitted the isolated score is stronger than it appeared when married to the television production:

Shorn of its spectacle, *The Flood* is a dramatic cantata which offers three short pieces of instrumental music awash in a sea of narration and vocal flotsam frequently in the somewhat awkward manner of *Les Noces*. Considered strictly as music, *The Flood* is a good deal more meaningful than it was as a television show."<sup>85</sup>

Luten, like many other critics, considered the diminutive proportions of Stravinsky's score far too slight for the Biblical scale of the scenario. He recorded that Stravinsky's score was of "such modest proportions and quality that it can hardly be claimed to be the

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> C. J. Luten, "A Deluge of Floods," *The American Record Guide* XXIX/1 (September 1962), 20-22.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

sort of thing capable of animating its far-from-modest subject matter.”<sup>86</sup> With *The Flood* was a new recording of Stravinsky’s *Mass* (1948), a work in which Luten heard much more spiritual and musical substance.

Bandmaster, composer, and critic Richard Franko Goldman, in his review for *The Musical Quarterly*, called *The Flood* “perhaps one of the saddest hours in the history of art. Sad not because of any weakness in the Stravinsky score, but for almost every other aspect or implication of the production.”<sup>87</sup> Goldman condemned the “self-consciousness” and “insufferable pretentiousness” of the production, as well its oppressive commercialism. “*The Flood*,” observed Goldman, “brought home again the idea that we live in an age in which rhetoric, meaning, and language have destroyed themselves, in which the vocabulary of advertising has reduced values to bargains and popularization has reduced art from mystery to manipulation.”<sup>88</sup> Goldman also offered biting criticism for Craft’s libretto. “Why the *pastiche*,” Goldman asked, “assembled from Genesis, the York and Chester miracle plays, and some ‘additional original material’? Is the purpose to show off the librettist’s erudition? Or merely to be different? Why could not a simple text, based on the King James version, have served?”<sup>89</sup> Lurking behind Goldman’s suspicions of the “librettist’s erudition” was the persistent mistrust of Craft, regarded by many as a sinister influence on Stravinsky. Ultimately, Goldman’s strongest objection to *The Flood* was in the composer’s disregard for genuine communication with the audience. As

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Richard Franko Goldman, “Current Chronicle: United States,” *The Musical Quarterly* XLVIII/4 (October 1962), 514.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 514-15.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.



Goldman chided, “certain concepts of art preclude the possibility of being simple or even straightforward, and a greater value is attached to the obscure than to the direct.”<sup>90</sup>

Objecting to the obscure sources for *The Flood*, Goldman dismissed Stravinsky’s use of medieval miracle plays as a “ransack” of the past. “What we now have is *The Flood* not as morality, but as Art. As such it is meaningless.”<sup>91</sup>

The English press was spared viewing the televised version of *The Flood*. The first stage production was mounted by the Hamburg State Opera, conducted by Craft, on 30 April 1963. John Warrack, critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, submitted a brief but thoughtful report on the first performance for *Tempo*. At the outset Warrack pointed out an important fact lost on many musicians: the seminal importance of Stravinsky in bringing new music to the people: “If any understanding of the newest music has been spread beyond professional circles, I would suggest it is less through such things as those company prospectus programme notes...than by the example of Stravinsky.”<sup>92</sup> Warrack heard the Russian Stravinsky in the ritualistic tone of *The Flood* and judged the brilliant imagery displayed by the composer to be astounding, especially in the serial context:

the sheer vividness of the narration is as sharp as anything in his whole output—the molecules of sound exploding and re-forming as the animals are created, Lucifer’s prinking rhythm (nimbleness but less motive than God’s), the worm’s writhing shown by two horns in the bass, the fantastic activity in the construction of the Ark, the waters hissing round it: I am sorry, but this is not music which only expresses itself.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> John Warrack, “First Performances: Stravinsky’s *The Flood*,” *Tempo* 65 (Summer 1963), 13.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

While Warrack acknowledged that the score was not the most profound that Stravinsky had fashioned, he agreed that its quality was in keeping with its creator's stature. The operatic production, however, chose to ignore the diminutive proportions of the score and instead inflated *The Flood* to the scale of grand opera.

Despite the exaggerated staging, the German critic Heinz Joachim cited *The Flood* as the highpoint of Hamburg season, noting how composer and performers received a "warm ovation" at the première.<sup>94</sup> The Hamburg State Opera took *The Flood* on tour, in a program that also featured Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. Of the performance at La Scala, the Italian musicologist Claudio Sartori (1913-1994), praised the "ingenious effects" Stravinsky displayed in *The Flood* but was ultimately disappointed by the thinness of the score:

There is so little music in *The Flood* that any favorable comments can soon be made.... Where the spoken parts, narration written on placards, the mime and the ballet permit, rigidly serial music takes over with masterly economy, but also with complete detachment, in the choruses and, more particularly, in the solo writing."<sup>95</sup>

Many more British critics experienced *The Flood* as a concert piece. Shorn of any staging, *The Flood* was heard in England on 2 October 1963, performed by the BBC Orchestra and Chorus, under the direction of Antal Dorati (1906-1988). Edmund Tracey, writing for *The Musical Times*, observed that Stravinsky "surprisingly returns to that mixture of speech and music which, referring to *Perséphone*, he has himself described as

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<sup>94</sup> Heinz Joachim, "Germany: Stravinsky on Stage," *Musical America* LXXXIII/6 (June 1963), 15.

<sup>95</sup> Claudio Sartori, "Italy," *Opera* XIV/9 (September 1963), 622-23.

a sin that ‘cannot be undone, only forgiven’, and which works no better here.”<sup>96</sup>

Acknowledging the American television première, Tracey ironically lamented, “it is a pity that our first experiences of it should have been in the concert hall or on a gramophone record.”<sup>97</sup> Tracey tempered some criticisms with the consideration that the score may have been designed for television production. One such feature is its brevity, which in Tracey’s opinion was “inadequate and scrappy.”<sup>98</sup> Arthur Jacobs, reviewing the concert performance for *Opera*, compared Stravinsky’s *The Flood* with Britten’s *Noye’s Fludde*: “But there is a world of difference between Britten’s very straightforward and good-natured entertainment and Stravinsky’s oracular, eclectic mixture of the arts. In *Noye’s Fludde* we join in; in *The Flood* we respectfully hear a sermon.”<sup>99</sup> Bernard Jacobson responded to *The Flood* with the headline, “Sub-Stravinsky”:

I find this piece an intolerable bore (and this, although I love *Threni*, *Agon*, and the *Canticum Sacrum*). The passages of melodrama, like most melodramas, are unsatisfactory because the attention of the listener is torn between the two disjunct media of speech and music.<sup>100</sup>

Surprisingly, the brilliant instrumental writing praised by so many critics fails to impress Jacobson, who judged the orchestration “unremarkable” and “most fatal of all, the form is crudely stuck on from outside instead of growing from musical material.”<sup>101</sup> In contrast, Arnold Whittall, writing for *Musical Opinion*, applauded *The Flood* for its “constant va-

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<sup>96</sup> Edmund Tracey, “First Performances,” *The Musical Times*, CIV/1449 (November 1963), 801.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 802.

<sup>99</sup> Arthur Jacobs, “Concert Performance,” *Opera XIV* (November 1963), 778.

<sup>100</sup> Bernard Jacobson, “Sub-Stravinsky,” *Music and Musicians XII* (November 1963), 61.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

riety of slender means.”<sup>102</sup> Whittall praised Stravinsky as a “master of orchestration” and a “wholly inventive craftsman” but lamented the lack of dramatic impact of *The Flood*, which he estimated “too ‘bitty’, not fully unified.”<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately, the concert program paired *The Flood* with both *The Firebird* and *Oedipus Rex*. Rather than identify points of continuity between these far-flung works, British critics only appropriated these earlier masterpieces, especially *Oedipus Rex*, as convincing proof of the flaws in *The Flood*.

English composer, critic, and Schoenberg authority Anthony Payne penned a substantial study of *The Flood* for *Tempo*, a journal of new music produced by Boosey & Hawkes, Stravinsky’s publisher.<sup>104</sup> Although analytical in content, Payne’s study was considerably more accessible than similar studies by Babbitt or Spies. Unlike Babbitt, Payne is quick to recognize the “tonal polarisation” heard in Stravinsky’s twelve-tone writing, of which *The Flood* is the “most overt” instance so far.<sup>105</sup> Payne even identified an instance of serial tone painting from the instrumental introduction to *The Flood*, which represented chaos before the Creation:

In the opening pages of the work however, which belong with the finest the composer has given us, the series is totally absent, and it is here that he makes one of his shrewdest points. Representing as it does the chaos before God’s creation of the world, it sets out all the twelve notes of the chromatic scale in a tremolando chord. The analogy is the obvious one of presenting the raw material before imposing serial order.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Arnold Whittall, “The London Concert and Recital World,” *Musical Opinion* LXXXVII (November 1963), 73.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Anthony Payne, “Stravinsky’s *The Flood*,” *Tempo* 70 (Autumn 1964), 2-8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The composer's statement that "'chaos' may also be thought of as the antithesis of 'serial'" would seem to support Payne's observation.<sup>107</sup> Payne also praised Stravinsky's depiction of the voice of God, a device the critic called "visionary," and yet other critics accused Stravinsky of crabbing his portrayal from Britten's *Abraham and Isaac*. As Payne defended him:

Nevertheless Stravinsky's characteristic employment of the device is apt to the point of being visionary. Firstly the phrases are foursquare and almost ugly in their prosaic contours, and even when the parts are not crossing over each other, as they do later on, they possess no linear features to distinguish them. There is also the unrelenting quaver ostinato on the bass drum. All these features are directed towards a flatness of utterance that presents the sheer is-ness of God. The slightest sensuousness or embellishment would have suggested symbolic representation of an idea—the first step to falsity. As it is we are given the divine idea and communication absolutely pure.<sup>108</sup>

He also singled out for high acclaim the instrumental portrayal of the flood, created "purely by means of geometric shape and phrase-growth."<sup>109</sup>

Since its initial reception *The Flood* has not achieved redemption in publications of scholars. Shorn of the television spectacle, critics have focused on purely textural and musical evaluations. Due to striking similarities of presentation, scholars tend to equate *The Flood* with its immediate predecessor *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*, despite important expressive differences. In both works, scholars have scrutinized Stravinsky's texts, his text settings, and the lack of expressive depth.

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<sup>107</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions*, 142.

<sup>108</sup> Anthony Payne, "Stravinsky's *The Flood*," 5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

English scholars have been particularly critical of the texts and text settings in both pieces. Neil Tierney has argued that the effectiveness of *The Flood* is greatly reduced by the brevity of the text, which covers a broad sweep of Biblical history in a minimal amount of time. Not only was the text too short, but it seems pieced together from a “strange collation of biblical, contemporary, metaphysical and fifteenth century literary sources” that do not coalesce effectively.<sup>110</sup> What is more, Tierney considered the libretto “disturbing in its comic naïvety.”<sup>111</sup> Two English critics, Walsh and Griffiths, have been particularly critical of Stravinsky’s text settings for *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* and *The Flood*. Although their criticisms are likely responses to Stravinsky’s characteristic disregard for natural speech inflections when it is applied to their native tongue, such was not generally a problem for Stravinsky’s other English language works, including *The Rake’s Progress*, *Cantata*, *Three Songs of William Shakespeare*, *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*. What caused particular misgivings for both scholars was Stravinsky’s reliance on spoken narration to communicate so large a segment of the text in both works. Griffiths compared both *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* and *The Flood* to *Babel* (1944), the first work in which Stravinsky made use of English-language narration. Griffiths identified Stravinsky’s return to the “didactic” manner of *Babel* as one cause of the “flatness” of both pieces.<sup>112</sup> Walsh was even more critical of Stravinsky’s use of narration:

Stravinsky’s own recordings...with their beefy American accents, arouse in English listeners uncomfortable memories of what might be called the

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<sup>110</sup> Neil Tierney, *The Unknown Country: The Life of Igor Stravinsky* (London: Robert Hale, 1977), 255.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Paul Griffiths, *Stravinsky* (London: Dent & Sons, 1992), 183.

Cecil B de Mille Bible; but this is not only a problem of accent.... The truth seems to be that these wordy attempts to get rapidly yet artistically through a somewhat complicated story are an embarrassment, treating the audience like children and the composer like a silent-cinema pianist.<sup>113</sup>

Such reactions are likely due, in part, to the exaggerated, almost cartoonish portrayals effected by the actors in the original recording of *The Flood*, conducted by Craft under the supervision of the composer. No doubt part of this condemnation was also a result of the continued misgivings of Craft's role as librettist. Although Craft had had a hand in the composer's textual choices for several late works, his role was never so prominent as in *The Flood*. It remains a mystery why Stravinsky, who had collaborated with the greatest poets of his age, would place so much responsibility on Craft, especially after his initial offer to T. S. Eliot. While Stravinsky's protégé was a talented craftsman of terse, erudite prose, he was no poet. Furthermore, Craft had been a polarizing figure for many of Stravinsky's detractors, those who had been the frequent target of the composer's polemics.

Scholars also faulted *The Flood* and *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* for their lack of ritual tone, a hallmark of Stravinsky's works from *Le sacre du printemps* to *Threni*. Since his neoclassical heyday, the composer had chosen Latin for its impersonal ritual tone, using the language for such acclaimed masterworks as *Oedipus Rex* and *Symphony of Psalms*. During his American years Stravinsky began to set English texts for both dramatic and sacred works. While some English and American critics appreciated the opportunity to hear Stravinsky's text settings of their native language, others felt that the composer's music had lost something in the translation. Griffiths, for exam-

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<sup>113</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 256.

ple, has charged that both *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* and *The Flood* do not impose themselves as rituals, largely because of Stravinsky's use of English texts:

the use of a non-sacred language, English, and of speech, directly following *Babel*, goes along with the apparent wish to instruct rather than to show. The speaking voice fixes attention on narrative, rather than on the way in which narrative is being presented, and the reasons why these stories are being told—the story of Stephen's stoning in *A Sermon* and of Noah in *The Flood*—are not so clear. The vernacular and expository plainness make these disconcertingly Protestant achievements for a composer so musically Orthodox, even though *A Sermon* is a liked triptych like the *Symphony of Psalms* and a document of faith like the *Canticum sacrum*.<sup>114</sup>

Walsh has criticized both pieces along the same lines as Griffiths: "...they go directly against Stravinsky's proven genius for ritual word-setting and purely statuesque drama...the dependence of a work like *The Flood* on straight-faced narration looks like a rare (for Stravinsky) case of artistic indecisiveness."<sup>115</sup> With the mystery of the text translation removed, Walsh and Griffiths found *The Flood* and *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* more prosaic than profound. Stravinsky may have felt the same way about setting English texts. In his next sacred work, *Abraham and Isaac*, Stravinsky returned to another sacred, ritualistic language, this time Hebrew.

Some have cited the accessibility of *The Flood* as one of its remarkable features. The English scholar Malcolm Troup, who praised the roughhewn, monumental, inaccessible quality of Stravinsky's late works, found the approachability of *The Flood* a refreshing change: "Stravinsky has couched *The Flood* in his most unashamedly 'serialism without tears' style, for easy TV viewing so as to generate a plethora of C# cadences,

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<sup>114</sup> Paul Griffiths, *Stravinsky*, 182-83.

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 256.



thus providing the listener with what he calls ‘a sure sense of topographical location’.”<sup>116</sup> Troup was also impressed by the plethora of picturesque, “almost baroque symbolism,” that Stravinsky unleashed in *The Flood*. According to Druskin, *The Flood* offers a “kaleidoscopic succession of ‘objectified’ situations” giving the music “a kind of sham, illusory character. Descriptive imagery—generally rare in Stravinsky’s music—plays an important part, and *The Flood* is in fact the most ‘visual’ of all his works.”<sup>117</sup> Although Druskin remained largely dubious to *The Flood*, he offered this pithy observation:

What we have is some twenty minutes of highly variegated music, a succession of episodes in which the serious alternates with the comic, the sacred with the profane; scenes of action are followed by static episodes and instrumental and vocal passages are interrupted by the spoken word. This richly episodic character is not wholly unlike the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, in which scenes of the most diverse characters are combined on different planes or levels of the canvas.<sup>118</sup>

For Druskin, the accessibility and diversity of *The Flood* represent a stylization of medieval miracle plays; nevertheless, he pronounced the work as a “not wholly successful” experiment.

In the final estimation, critics have remained doubtful of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* and *The Flood*. Griffiths looked for a plausible explanation for the arbitrariness of these works. He suggested that this lack of stylistic resolve in Stravinsky was either a feature of his advanced age or a reflection of the general musical uncertainty of the times. “The looseness,” Griffiths reflected, “however untypical, can therefore be un-

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<sup>116</sup> Malcolm Troup, “Serial Stravinsky: The ‘Granite’ Period (1956-1966),” *Twentieth Century Music*, new revised and enlarged ed., ed. Rollo H. Myers (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), 56.

<sup>117</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky*, 161.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-62.

derstood. But the naivety, in Stravinsky, is almost shocking.”<sup>119</sup> The thoughts of Walsh are again remarkably similar to those of Griffiths:

the illustrative function of much of the music constantly raises the questions: why this sort of line, why this texture, why this chord rather than that? The serial analyst is at no loss to give us what he regards as an adequate answer...we remain unconvinced and end up finding the music shallow, bitty and at times (what one might have thought impossible for Stravinsky) empty.”<sup>120</sup>

Time has somewhat softened Walsh’s harsh criticisms of *The Flood*, at least in its original televised form. Although he called the original telecast an “extremely archaic specimen,” he has admitted that the work still has some value.<sup>121</sup> In context, *The Flood* represented “one of the few genuinely entertaining works” written with serial techniques and remains one of the few serious musical works written for television that have survived their original production.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Griffiths, *Stravinsky*, 183.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 259.

<sup>121</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 458.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 458-59.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TUNING THE FUNERAL DRUMS

Stravinsky's long life was haunted by death. The composer's notorious hypochondria was inspired by his lifelong struggle with serious illness, beginning with grave bouts of tuberculosis in his youth and middle age. A host of family members had preceded the composer in death: his eldest brother Roman, his father Fyodor, his eldest daughter Lyudmilla, his first wife Catherine, and his mother Anna. As Craft recalled,

Stravinsky's life was spent with doctors.... He was—all his life—ill. And this threat: in his family either you lived to be 113 or you died at 20. But it is a testament to the man's incredible constitution that in 1937 he was near death, see, but he went on. Seventy-five to eighty-four—that last decade—is really breathtaking. Particularly since it was all under the sign of the possibility of paralysis, of death. He was gravely ill.<sup>1</sup>

From Rimsky-Korsakov to Dylan Thomas, Stravinsky had witnessed the deaths of a legion of fellow musicians, collaborators, and patrons. The composer's final years saw an acceleration of such losses. As Stephen Walsh observed, the composer "had arrived at an age when telegrams announced deaths more often than births."<sup>2</sup> Despite this cloud of mortality, the remarkable music of Stravinsky's final years suggests "the creative variety and vitality he had known fifty years before."<sup>3</sup> Two particularly death-haunted works of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Craft, recorded interview for "Program X: The Final Years," *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103 – 15 Sound Discs).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 483.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Griffiths, *Stravinsky* (London: Dent & Sons, 1992), 188.

this “Indian summer”<sup>4</sup> have received uncharacteristically sympathetic receptions from critics: *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles*.

After the disastrous television première of *The Flood*, Stravinsky and Craft continued their world travels, further promoting the composer’s celebrity and providing much needed income for the aging master. Time spent in travel increasingly reduced time spent in Stravinsky’s Hollywood composition studio. Despite such restrictions, however, he managed to produce a steady stream of new works, many of which were miniatures. He marked the death of a president with *Elegy for J. F. K.* (1964), a curiously abstract setting of a haiku by W. H. Auden. Richard Franko Goldman, writing for *The Musical Quarterly*, recorded that many listeners found the *Elegy for J. F. K.* “trivial, neutral, and ...offensive”; Goldman himself pronounced it a “curious artifact from one of the advanced glaciers of a new ice age.”<sup>5</sup>

More significant was *Abraham and Isaac* (1964). Commissioned by the state of Israel for a fee of \$15,000,<sup>6</sup> this “sacred ballad” for baritone and chamber orchestra dealt with another patriarchal story from Genesis, told this time in the ritualistic language of Hebrew. *Abraham and Isaac* was first heard in Jerusalem on 23 August 1964, totally out of earshot of the American and British musical press. Closer to home, its English and American premières were greeted with disdain. After critics had lambasted Stravinsky’s attempts at accessibility in *The Flood*, the composer had returned to the ritualistic, hermetic austerity of *Threni* and *Canticum sacrum*, only to elicit old complaints from critics.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 260.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Franko Goldman, “Current Chronicle: New York,” *The Musical Quarterly* LI/2 (April 1965), 406.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 453-54.

Sarah Thomas of *Musical Events* called *Abraham and Isaac* the “most inaccessible of Stravinsky’s recent compositions.”<sup>7</sup> Writing for *Musical Opinion*, Peter French described the twelve-minute work as a “lifetime of torture—for me if not the performers and the rest of the audience too.”<sup>8</sup> Richard Franko Goldman described *Abraham and Isaac* as “greyish monotony” and found it “difficult to imagine these notes, each one unquestionably placed on the page with logic and ingenuity, never conveying a hint of drama or of passion.”<sup>9</sup>

*Introitus: T. S. Eliot in Memoriam*

Stravinsky met T. S. Eliot for the first time in 1956. The relatively late date of this historic encounter belies the considerable interest the two men had long shared for one another. Writing in 1921, Eliot had called Stravinsky “our lion” and the “Lucifer of the season, brightest in the firmament.”<sup>10</sup> The mix of modernity and “primitive ceremony” Eliot so admired in *Le sacre du printemps* resonated in the poet’s own groundbreaking work. There were several failed attempts at collaboration between Stravinsky and Eliot, most notably for the television production of *The Flood*. As a gift to the poet, Stravinsky composed the diminutive *Anthem*: “The Dove descending breaks the air...” (1962), a brief a cappella setting of lines from Eliot’s “Little Gidding” from

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah Thomas, “Music Survey: B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra,” *Musical Events* XXIII (March 1968), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Peter French, “The London Concert Scene,” *Musical Opinion* LXXXVI/1086 (March 1968), 311.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Franko Goldman, “Current Chronicle,” 405.

<sup>10</sup> T. S. Eliot, “London Letter,” *Dial* (27 June 1927), quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 537.

*Four Quartets*. Eliot died in early January of 1965; within six weeks of the poet's death, Stravinsky had completed *Introitus: T. S. Eliot in Memoriam*.<sup>11</sup>

*Introitus* is a setting of the Latin "Introit" from the Requiem Mass for male chorus and a chamber ensemble of harp, piano, viola, contrabass, timpani, and tam-tams.

Stravinsky, once again demonstrating his sonic mastery, elicited extraordinary timbres from a minimal medium. The composer limited his compass roughly to the male voice range,<sup>12</sup> exploiting the contra octave of the piano and the cryptic colors of muted strings and timpani *coperti*. Coming on the heels of such linear, contrapuntal works as *Movements* and *The Flood*, the homophonic textures are disarmingly direct. The harmonic solidity of the work is ensured by Stravinsky's frequent admonitions against arpeggiation of his sonorities and the subterranean resonance of a pair of tam tams. The rhythmic fleetness and abstraction of his recent works is replaced with simple meters and the return of a palpable tactus. Over these solemn depths the tenors and basses—first separately, then in harmony—intone strikingly lyrical, "tranquillo" phrases, each of which Stravinsky likened to the cantus firmus of old.<sup>13</sup> The ritual tone of *Introitus* is further enhanced by spectral parlando sotto voce and by Stravinsky's rejection of any drama or development.

The first performance of *Introitus* took place on 17 April 1965 at Orchestra Hall in Chicago. Craft led the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in première performances of both *Introitus* and *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)*, and, increasingly frail Stravinsky conducted a complete performance of *Pulcinella* (1920). Although notice of

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<sup>11</sup> Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 538.

<sup>12</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 62.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

the occasion was scant in the national press, venerated Chicago critic Robert C. Marsh reported on the event for *High Fidelity / Musical America*. No doubt humbled by the tremendous distinction afforded to Chicago by Stravinsky, Marsh gave a glowing review of the performance: “Few who were present for the world premieres of Stravinsky’s *Variations* and *Introitus: T. S. Eliot in Memoriam* (April 17) would deny that this was the finest night of the seventy-fourth Chicago Symphony season.”<sup>14</sup> He had assessed Stravinsky’s recent works “uncompromising”; he, nevertheless, held up *Variations* and *Introitus* as “a clear affirmation of the fact that distinguished music is being written today.”<sup>15</sup> Marsh noted striking similarities between Stravinsky’s newest works and recognized masterworks: “it is clear that the influence of twelve-note music is now fully absorbed into his artistic imagination, and he is writing in a manner that strikes the ear as a natural development of the *Symphony in Three Movements* of the Mass.”<sup>16</sup> The critic was apparently not alone in his thoughts, as he also described the ovation given to Stravinsky as one of the greatest ever heard in Orchestra Hall. Eric Walter White reported on the Chicago première for the British journal *Tempo*. White characteristically eschewed critical judgments of Stravinsky’s new works and instead focused on objective description. White’s extraordinary knowledge of the composer’s works is evident, nevertheless, as he noted the similarity of the all-male chorus employed in *Introitus* to the voice of God

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<sup>14</sup> Robert C. Marsh, “Two Seasons by Matinon,” *High Fidelity / Musical America* XIV/7 (July 1965), 111.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

heard in *The Flood*.<sup>17</sup> White was particularly impressed by the harmony of *Introitus*, which he identified as “some of the most brooding” in all of serial Stravinsky.<sup>18</sup>

Organized by Lukas Foss, the June 1966 Stravinsky Festival at Lincoln Center in New York City featured some of the most powerful figures of the day. Leonard Bernstein, Kyril Kondrashin, and Ernest Ansermet conducted, while a performance of *Histoire du Soldat* (1918) featured Aaron Copland as narrator, Eliot Carter as the Soldier, and John Cage as the devil.<sup>19</sup> Bernard Jacobson’s review of the Festival for *Musical America* spoke volumes as to the composer’s perceived standing in contemporary music:

The idea of a festival centered on the music of Stravinsky aroused, in prospect, both delight and apprehension. Delight, because the devotion of such resources to a major living composer was an unprecedented act of faith, offering a wonderful opportunity to take a long, slow look at his work in the revealing context of actual performance. Apprehension, because of one little, gnawing worm of suspicion: was it possible that so cruelly concentrated an examination might show him to be a smaller figure than we had always thought—was it possible that the hero might go up in smoke?<sup>20</sup>

Jacobson was quick to tell readers that his fears were unfounded, that instead it was Stravinsky’s music that routed the other composers represented on the same programs, but the implication of doubt was clear. The critical estimation of Stravinsky as a slick conjurer without durable substance was still much in evidence.

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<sup>17</sup> Eric Walter White, “First Performances: Two New Memorial Works by Stravinsky,” *Tempo* 74 (Autumn 1965), 18-21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 519-20.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Jacobson, “New York Report: Stravinsky—His Heritage and His Legacy,” *Musical America* XVI/X (October 1966), 9.



Despite the enlightened leadership of Foss, only a single festival program, “Stravinsky in Recent Years,” embraced the composer’s serial music. This concert featured the New York première of *Introitus*, along with works by Boulez, Babbitt, Carter, and Foss. Festival organizers plainly felt that Stravinsky’s latest work was more akin to Boulez and Babbitt than to the Russian composer’s earlier works. Of the *Introitus*, Jacobson provided only a few words: “Stravinsky has spoken of Eliot as ‘that kindest, wisest, and gentlest of men’; this a kind, wise, and gentle piece, but not a substantial one—it does not rival the eloquence of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*.”<sup>21</sup> Jacobson was more disdainful of the other works on the program, dismissing Boulez’s *Éclat* as a “disappointment, since the music’s sole concern seemed to be for surface effect” and ridiculing Babbitt’s *Ensembles for Synthesizer* as “the musical equivalent of a wife-swapping party—it is a desperate attempt to find new uses for old and jaded materials.”<sup>22</sup> Remarkably, the festival did not sponsor any other recent music by Stravinsky, an oversight Jacobson did not protest.

Despite the pitiable initial disinterest toward the *Introitus* première, Stravinsky’s tribute to Eliot has elicited considerable accolades from scholars. *Introitus* forms a natural companion to *Requiem Canticles*, Stravinsky’s final major work. Craft has even recommended that both works should be performed together.<sup>23</sup> Scholars have often discussed *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles* in tandem, recognizing in these two works the composer’s return to a more accessible musical language. Walsh has identified in these works a “wish to restore both melodic and harmonic cohesion within the limitations im-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Robert Craft, “The Final Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.

posed by words and voices.”<sup>24</sup> The intensity and complexity that reached its heights a few years before with *Movements* was relaxed in *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles*, as Stravinsky began to work with slower pacing and allowed for repetition of gestures.

After the abstractions of *Movements* and the perceived emptiness of *The Flood*, scholars commended Stravinsky’s unashamed return to powerful and evocative ritual colorings. Walsh praised the “disturbing beauty”<sup>25</sup> of *Introitus* and has found in the work “the flavour of some antique ceremony of Old Believers.”<sup>26</sup> Walsh also emphasized important expressive similarities between *Introitus* and the final movement of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*:

the “muffled drums” are a specifically late obsession. They crop up in the Dekker “Prayer” of the *Sermon...* and again in the Interlude of the *Requiem Canticles*, which Stravinsky tells us was the first part of that work to be composed. They may be only the latest example of a lifelong preoccupation with procession, which goes back at least to the vanished *Chant funèbre* of nearly sixty years before. But while the idea of a “virtual” liturgy may not be particularly new with Stravinsky, the *Introitus* seems to mark a fresh stage in that history, and one with a completely novel stamp.<sup>27</sup>

Boucourechliev emphasized both the sonic magic of *Introitus* and the score’s ability to evoke the composer’s Russian period: “The timbre of the work is most impressive—a funeral toll constructed of almost nothing.... The use of harp, piano and tam-tams together is comparable to the final tolling in *Les Noces*.”<sup>28</sup> Druskin has also admired the timbre of

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 269-70.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Walsh, “The Choral Music,” *Tempo* LXXXI (1967), 50.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 270.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271.

<sup>28</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 298.

*Introitus*, writing that “The colour of the music is dark and enigmatic, with a suggestion of Dante’s *Inferno*, and in fact Stravinsky exhibits in this short piece truly inexhaustible resources of sonorous imagination.”<sup>29</sup> In applauding the Russian aspects of harmony found in both *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles*, Druskin maintained that “there is certainly no doubt that since Scriabin no Russian composer has produced such unusual, complex yet crystalline-sounding chordal complexes.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Requiem Canticles*

Throughout that autumn of 1966 the virtuoso photographer Arnold Newman (1918-2006), given unprecedented access to Stravinsky, captured images of the composer and his retinue in a myriad of public and private moments. These photographs –lovingly collected in the visual chronicle *Bravo Stravinsky*<sup>31</sup>–document the première of *Requiem Canticles*, Stravinsky’s last major work, at Princeton University’s McCarter Theatre on 8 October 1966.

At Princeton Stravinsky had entered the lion’s den of American musicology. In photographs taken during rehearsals at the Henry Hudson Hotel in New York City,<sup>32</sup> Craft is seen at the podium, while Stravinsky supervises from a seat directly behind him. Stravinsky is flanked by three of the most influential composers and theorists from the American academy. To the composer’s right are seated Milton Babbitt and Edward T.

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<sup>29</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 152.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft, and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

Cone, both members of the Princeton faculty. Babbitt shares a view of Stravinsky's manuscript score. Claudio Spies, then a visiting professor at Princeton, is at the composer's left. Newman's photograph captures the culmination of one of the most important alliances of Stravinsky's last years. The première of *Requiem Canticles* at Princeton represented the ultimate coup for Babbitt, Cone, and Spies. Not only had their scholarship defined Stravinsky's late music for their peers, they were now responsible for a major work of twentieth-century music that would forever be associated with their accomplishments.

By the mid-1960s fewer and fewer patrons were willing to sponsor Stravinsky's new compositions. Although the iconic creator of *Le sacre du printemps* was still sought after for concert appearances, the serial composer of *The Flood* was less in demand. The composer's *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)* had been completed without commission and had been dedicated to the *Brave New World* author as an afterthought.<sup>33</sup> Craft, even in his early days with the composer, had identified a fear of poverty among Stravinsky's many phobias.<sup>34</sup> Now, after years of plenty, circumstances once again raised the specter of financial strain. As Walsh has stressed, "he needed commissions. He lived in fear of the time—plainly not far distant—when he would no longer be able to conduct, while his already grotesque medical bills continued to mount."<sup>35</sup> Salvation came in the form of a commission from academia. The family of a wealthy benefactress,

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 494.

<sup>34</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 387.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 497.

Helen Buchanan Seeger, had left a substantial sum of money to Princeton, \$25,000 of which was offered to Stravinsky for the work that was to become *Requiem Canticles*.<sup>36</sup>

Finances were not the only concern for the aging composer. After the death of Eliot and the completion of the elegiac *Introitus*, Stravinsky's preoccupation with mortality deepened, aroused by his own frailties and by the passing of numerous friends and associates. Craft observed in the composer's surroundings the "presence of so many reminders of death: the portraits of the composer by the late Giacometti, the photographs of Pope John, President Kennedy, T. S. Eliot, Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, and of Celeste, Stravinsky's beloved cat."<sup>37</sup> Funereal thoughts accompanied Stravinsky during the composition of *Requiem Canticles*, as Arnold Newman documented in photographs of the composer's sketchbook. Opposite embryonic notations for various movements are affixed newspaper clippings of obituaries for Edgard Varèse, Alberto Giacometti, and Evelyn Waugh.<sup>38</sup> Where once entire works had been dedicated to the memory of Dylan Thomas, President Kennedy, or Aldous Huxley, the shortness of time and the growing number of the dead dictated that Stravinsky dedicate no more than a single, heartfelt movement to each of the deceased. As Craft remembered,

And then, it's very touching to see his notebook-sketchbook at that time: everyday something pasted in from the obituary columns. His co-evils, his youngers, and friends—all the deaths that happened—during that year that he wrote it. He didn't also like to talk about the piece. But there they all are: this gallery: Varese and Sommerset Maugham. It seemed to him

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>37</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Retrospectives and Conclusions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 4.

<sup>38</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft, and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky*, 48-59.

that each one of these pieces was being composed for somebody he knew.<sup>39</sup>

Characteristically, the composer avoided speaking of any elegiac impetus, instead maintaining blandly that the origin of the *Requiem Canticles* lay in “Intervallic designs that I expanded into contrapuntal forms and from which, in turn, I conceived the larger form of the work.”<sup>40</sup> At the same time, however, Stravinsky admitted misgivings about setting the funeral Mass with the remark that “a *Requiem* at my age rubs close to home.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, *Requiem Canticles* was performed at Stravinsky’s Venice funeral on 15 April 1971, along with a requiem setting by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), organ works by Andrea Gabrieli (c.1510-1586), and the chant from the Greek orthodox liturgy.

Walsh has taken a more skeptical view of Stravinsky’s eulogistic intentions. Walsh has questioned Stravinsky’s depth of feeling for Dylan Thomas and President Kennedy, considering the composer met each man only once.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, some of the figures memorialized in the *Requiem Canticles* Stravinsky had merely admired from afar; they were not close associates. Walsh has further suggested that, though the theme of death certainly weighed heavy on the composer’s mind, Stravinsky’s focus on others was a way to depersonalize the act of composing a requiem in his eighty-fifth year.<sup>43</sup>

In his *Requiem Canticles* Stravinsky confronted one of the sacred cows of music. Like opera and the symphony, the age-old Requiem Mass had been cultivated and remade

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Craft, “The Final Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky*.

<sup>40</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft, and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky*, 114.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 498.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 523.

by musicians of the Romantic Era. The swan song of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) had been a Requiem, a work that had spawned a macabre legend that inspired a host of nineteenth-century musicians. Smitten by the gothic flavor of the Requiem Mass, Romantic composers set the ancient text with their own penchant for drama and monumentality, creating non-liturgical, elephantine works for the entertainment of middle-class audiences in the concert hall. Romantics often set the text as if it were the libretto of a grand opera, creating concert dramas in which humanity faced the terror of judgment and cried for salvation in works that could last well over an hour. Such Romantic practices became ossified as conventions and colored the expectations of audiences well into the twentieth century. While Stravinsky professed inspiration in some details of text and music from the *Missa da Requiem* of Giuseppe Verdi,<sup>44</sup> his *Requiem Canticles* presented a distinct challenge to the Romantic approach to the genre. Just as the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1926) had thwarted cherished nineteenth-century conventions for the symphony, *Requiem Canticles* refuted audience expectations for the Requiem. While other twentieth-century composers, notably Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), cultivated unique approaches to the Requiem Mass, none went so far as Stravinsky in his *Requiem Canticles*.

Like most of Stravinsky's late works, *Requiem Canticles* is brief; nine distinct movements are compressed into a work that lasts a mere fifteen minutes. In its diminutive proportions, this composition is suited perfectly for the age of recorded sound, where attention spans are conditioned by three-minute popular songs and the most difficult music may be repeated on demand. By ruthlessly editing the liturgical text, Stravinsky re-

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<sup>44</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: In Pictures and Documents*, 478.

duced some of the cherished prayers to a single sentence and omitted others entirely. The texture of *Requiem Canticles* is also miserly in the extreme, yielding a score that is visually reminiscent of a Schenkerian reduction in which only the middle-ground structures remain. His block structures were, perhaps, never articulated as clearly as in *Requiem Canticles*. In fact, the denuded score bears a striking resemblance to Cone's analytical reduction of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, featured in the seminal study in which the Princeton scholar first elucidated the block structures in Stravinsky's music.<sup>45</sup>

Bernard Jacobson reviewed the *Requiem Canticles* Princeton première for *Musical America*.<sup>46</sup> Craft led performances of *Requiem Canticles* and *Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)*, both of which were beyond the composer's conducting technique. Stravinsky conducted the remainder of the program: *Mass* (1948), *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1921), and *Three Sacred Choruses: Pater Noster* (1926), *Credo* (1932), and *Ave Maria* (1934). Jacobson demonstrated a familiarity with Stravinsky's recent music, as the critic correctly recognized in *Requiem Canticles* a continuation of the composer's recent trend towards simplification, "away from the extreme tautness of rhythm and expression shown in works like the *Movements* for piano and orchestra completed seven years ago."<sup>47</sup> Jacobson's primary objection to *Requiem Canticles*, however, was one of scale. While he acknowledged that *Requiem Canticles* was "more expansive" than Stravinsky's recent works, the critic complained that such growth was only relative: "I feel that Stravinsky's present style is still inappropriate to the dramatic gestures for which

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<sup>45</sup> Edward T. Cone, "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, revised ed., ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1972), 157.

<sup>46</sup> Bernard Jacobson, "Princeton Report: Stravinsky's New *Requiem Canticles*," *Musical America* XVI/12 (December 1966), 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



he has aimed in the *Dies irae* and the *Rex tremendae* and for the intended emotional impact of the *Lacrimosa*.”<sup>48</sup> Just as critics had protested Stravinsky’s telling of the story of Noah and the flood in a radically compressed time scale, so too did Jacobson complain of the brevity of *Requiem Canticles*. “And there is certainly a disharmony,” Jacobson argued, “between the big effects for which Stravinsky seems to have striven and the somewhat constricted idiom with which he is working—constricted more in breadth of phrase than anything else.”<sup>49</sup>

Most damning in Jacobson’s review are concerns the critic voiced under the heading, “Miscalculations.” Here Jacobson suggested that Stravinsky’s age had perhaps weakened his judgment for choral arranging:

Outrageous though it may be to accuse so consummate a technician as Stravinsky of misjudgment, it seems to me that there are also two specific miscalculations in this score. The first occurrence of the ‘*salva*’ in the *Rex tremendae*, on a downward leap in rapid eighth-notes, is a dangerous piece of word setting, since it is bound to sound like a wrong entry. And though the combined singing and speaking of the *Libera me* is an imaginative conception, I do not think that in any performance it could be heard for what it is till the third sung phrase, where for the first time the soprano goes high enough to bring the solo quartet through the spoken choral part.<sup>50</sup>

Despite these reservations, Jacobson found Stravinsky’s skills assured throughout the rest of the work and even praised “the sap of musical invention” which even then “runs more copiously than in many composers a third his age.”<sup>51</sup> Jacobson concluded his review

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

with a greater sense of perspective: “if this grave and beautiful piece had come from any other pen I should have hailed it straight off as the miracle of subtlety and originality it is and given much less prominence to the quibbles.”<sup>52</sup> Even so, Jacobson’s review suggests a turning point in reaction to Stravinsky’s late works. While the composer’s detractors may have vilified his musical or expressive choices, no critic, especially one who was generally sympathetic, had ever so openly questioned Stravinsky’s competence. That Jacobson should not question the quality of performance or withhold judgment before further hearings is telling.

Stravinsky’s Princeton première received a lukewarm reception in the pages of the *Music Journal*. Ainslee Cox admitted that the new work was “by Stravinsky’s standards—easy music to perform and to listen to” and was “not as austere as the *Mass*.”<sup>53</sup> At the same time, however, *Requiem Canticles* “also seemed an unsatisfying piece, full of evasions and a few miscalculations.”<sup>54</sup> Just as critics had objected to the spoken narration of *The Flood*, so too did Cox object to the choral speech of *Requiem Canticles*. Not only did Cox find the speech device “more expedient than organic” but believed that Stravinsky misjudged balances in the score; objectionable were the vocal melismas heard in the “Tuba mirum” and “Lacrimosa,” which Cox criticized as “curiously naïve.”<sup>55</sup> Like Jacobson, Cox objected to the brevity of *Requiem Canticles*. “Everything is so distilled,” Cox contended, “that one eventually longs for extended development of the pregnant

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Ainslee Cox, “New Jersey,” *Music Journal* XXIV/9 (November 1966), 71.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

ideas exhibited.”<sup>56</sup> While Cox praised the instrumental portions of Stravinsky’s new work, as well as the “Dies irae,” in the end he believed that “the work is too much one of essences. Stravinsky creates, by whatever prodigies of techniques, a coal which the listener’s mind must blow into flame by remembering the composer’s style in past works.”<sup>57</sup>

David Steinbrook of *American Choral Review* received Stravinsky’s *Requiem Canticles* more positively. Steinbrook offered readers a generous description of Stravinsky’s new work, as well as a tantalizing description of the composer’s widely disparaged conducting and the greatly nuanced performance he elicited from the ensemble.<sup>58</sup> Taking a step back, Steinbrook praised the “freshness of conception” and “clarity of direction” Stravinsky brought with each new work.<sup>59</sup> Although Steinbrook too took note of the brevity of *Requiem Canticles*, he did not immediately condemn this aspect, praising instead the “striking degree of contrast” Stravinsky managed within such a compressed time frame.<sup>60</sup> Steinbrook, moreover, approved a portion of *Requiem Canticles* criticized by both Jacobson and Cox as a technical misjudgment:

In the *Libera Me* the chorus declaims the first and last couplets of the text in rapid, prayer-like fashion while all four soli sing the entire text over sustained accompaniment; the combination of the two types of text setting is startlingly awesome, a sensation which is maintained in the instrumental *Postlude*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> David Steinbrook, “Princeton,” *American Choral Review* IX/ 2 (Winter 1967), 29-31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Some of those who witnessed the première of *Requiem Canticles* at Princeton's McCarter Theatre recognized that the event represented a significant turn of fortune for Stravinsky. Professional ensembles that had once vied for Stravinsky premières were now content to stand by as pick-up ensembles and student groups performed the master's new works. Eric Salzman, reviewing the performance for *The Musical Quarterly*, described the establishment's neglect of Stravinsky in the following manner:

Nothing so well illustrates the split between Establishment musical life in this country and new ideas than the fate of Stravinsky's recent work. To take a few cases in point, *A Sermon, A Narrative, and A Prayer* has never been performed in New York and the same would be true for the remarkable orchestral *Variations* of 1964 if it were not for George Balanchine (but music critics do not review ballet performances and the work remains unnoticed by the New York musical press). The recent *Requiem Canticles*, commissioned through and first performed at Princeton University, has passed equally unmarked, not only by the more popular media but by the general intellectual and artistic world as well. And this is, after all new music by Igor Stravinsky! Think of all the rest of us down here below.<sup>62</sup>

But if the "Establishment" had indeed rejected Stravinsky, the composer was now being courted by a new establishment, this one centered in academia. A number of high-powered musical intellectuals now sought communion with the composer. In a particularly telling photograph by Arnold Newman, Stravinsky familiars Craft and Lawrence Morton are joined by four of the most powerful men in academic music: Babbitt, Cone, Arthur Berger, and Glenn Watkins.<sup>63</sup> Acknowledging his new connection to these academic luminaries, Stravinsky began referring to *Requiem Canticles* as his "Princeton

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<sup>62</sup> Eric Salzman, "Current Chronicle, United States: Princeton," *The Musical Quarterly* LIII/I (January 1967), 80-85.

<sup>63</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky*, 96-97.

Requiem.”<sup>64</sup> No such admission was made for *Canticum sacrum*, *Threni*, *The Flood*, or any other late work.

In total, the criticism printed in *The Musical Quarterly* toward Stravinsky’s late premières was curiously uneven in terms of perspective. *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, *The Flood*, and *Abraham and Isaac* had each been lambasted by the traditionally minded editor of the journal, Richard Franko Goldman, himself a student of the anti-serial lioness Nadia Boulanger. The overly cautious and tepid John Weissmann had reviewed *Canticum Sacrum* and *Threni*. In contrast, *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* was valued by the musicologist Lawrence Morton, an ally of Stravinsky. While Eric Salzman penned an insightful review of *Requiem Canticles*, it is not difficult to perceive his loyalties: a former student of Babbitt at Princeton and Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luigi Nono at Darmstadt, Salzman was undoubtedly predisposed to serial thinking and to his alma mater.

Salzman was among the first critics to acknowledge the significance of Stravinsky’s writing a Requiem at such an advanced age. Stravinsky’s historic composition of a Requiem, inspired by a commission from Princeton, “one of the country’s great intellectual music centers” and performed for an audience that numbered “about three younger generations’ worth of composers” made for a much more significant event than had been recognized by critics.<sup>65</sup> Salzman supplied additional insights into Stravinsky’s new work, starting with its brevity. He observed, “*Requiem Canticles* are allusive and

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<sup>64</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

simple. Here is brevity with density, the gestures almost with the consequences.”<sup>66</sup> But despite its economy, Salzman recognized the substance of the new work: “The *Requiem Canticles* constitute a very big small piece...a series of precise and unequivocal messages—like shorthand entries in a diary—in the briefest time space.”<sup>67</sup> Salzman’s commentary was also remarkable because it was the first to recognize the retrospective quality of *Requiem Canticles*. From the repeated notes of the “Prelude,” which recalled the iconic “Dance of the Adolescents” from *Le sacre du printemps*, to the text of the “Exaudi,” which is identical to the first movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*, Salzman identified moments in *Requiem Canticles* that recall a lifetime of the composer’s music.<sup>68</sup>

In a way, it is the persistently retrospective quality that is—along with the dogged, elliptical brevities and the (intentionally) naive simplicities—so difficult. The work is, like much of Stravinsky’s music, the result of an interiorization and transformation of certain kinds of musical experience—art about the experience of art; but here the experiences seem to be those of Stravinsky’s own earlier music!<sup>69</sup>

Unlike other critics who found technical miscalculations in the “Liberate me” of *Requiem Canticles*, Salzman praised this movement as “simple in the extreme but exceptionally effective.”<sup>70</sup>

The Chilean-born composer and theorist Claudio Spies participated in the premiere of *Requiem Canticles* as a visiting member of the Princeton faculty. In photo-

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

graphs taken by Newman, Spies is seen offering a supportive arm to Stravinsky, accompanying the composer to rehearsals at the Hotel Henry Hudson.<sup>71</sup> As Craft conducts the rehearsal, Spies is observed seated to the composer's left, following a score of *Requiem Canticles*<sup>72</sup> and even casting a concerned look from behind Stravinsky as the composer rehearses *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*.<sup>73</sup> During Stravinsky's last years Spies served as analyst-in-chief to the composer, proofreading works for serial errors and in turn publishing definitive analyses of several late works. Spies's analytical essay on *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles* was first published in *Perspectives of New Music*, the journalistic voice of Princeton University.<sup>74</sup> Spies offered a number of observations on both micro and macro aspects of *Requiem Canticles* and *Introitus*. With an objective, analytical tone he eschewed dwelling on poetic considerations or extra-musical concerns. He provided a number of serial charts and graphs, along with a remarkable map that clarified the form of *Requiem Canticles*.<sup>75</sup> In a rare moment of historical perspective, Spies speculated on links between aspects of Stravinsky's requiem setting and that of Verdi.<sup>76</sup> The "Lacrimosa" was undoubtedly Spies's favorite movement, which he called "among the most eloquent moments in the work."<sup>77</sup> He also identified occasional, "circumspect" allusions to classic requiem settings: "the outburst of *Dies irae*, the requisite scoring of

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<sup>71</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft, and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky*, 84.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>74</sup> Claudio Spies, "Some Notes on Stravinsky's Requiem Settings," *Perspectives of New Music* V/2 (Spring-Summer 1967), 98-123.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

*Tuba mirum*, the apposite (and only) choral largeness in the *Rex tremendae*, the inflection of the word *Lacrimosa*, the congregational prayer-murmuring of the *Libera me*, and the doubly knelling Postlude.”<sup>78</sup> Spies occasionally noted the difficulty in deciphering Stravinsky’s serial plans, notably in his use of rotating hexachords of the twelve-tone set and his verticals.<sup>79</sup> Particularly problematic was the “*Libera me*,” which Spies claimed was “difficult (or impossible)” to relate to serial charts.<sup>80</sup>

After Stravinsky’s death Spies leveled more candid criticisms of *Requiem Canticles*. In a 1977 radio documentary Spies openly expressed strong reservations in regards to the “Princeton Requiem.” For Spies, one major point of concern with Stravinsky’s new work was its brevity:

Let’s just look at the proportions of the piece. Here are nine extremely brief—extremely brief—movements. In almost all of which, I must say, I find that things hardly begin to happen before the end is reached. There is only one movement which has some sense of unfolding and that’s the “*Lacrimosa*”.... But the rest of the piece, for me, is far too brief and far too undeveloped. There I sense that there’s a real cautiousness of age.<sup>81</sup>

Spies made no mention of such concerns, however, in his published analysis of *Requiem Canticles*. The theorist gave credence to his criticism by suggesting that Stravinsky too believed his new work to be too brief.

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>81</sup> Claudio Spies, recorded interview for “Program X: The Final Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).



In fact in the rehearsals we even said to one another, and Stravinsky heard this...he didn't say much, there wasn't really very much to say, it was all very straight forward and I think he was perhaps disturbed by the general breathlessness of the performance...also that it went by terribly quickly. I had the feeling—this is, again, one of those things that one couldn't talk about—but I had the feeling that he may have himself felt that the proportions of the piece were not quite right.<sup>82</sup>

Like other critics, Spies expressed serious misgivings about the conception of the “Libera me.” Again, these concerns were never given voice in the pages of the scholar's analysis of the work.

And I think that there's one very serious miscalculation and that's the “Libera me,” which the first time around in rehearsals struck me as being misconceived. Because of this talking against a background of instrumental sounds in which you don't know what to listen for. It's the kind of thing that I suspect was not very carefully thought through. I mean in the recording it works better because a way was devised to keep people relatively synchronized in reciting their text. But in rehearsals it sounded like the stock exchange.<sup>83</sup>

While Spies's precarious proximity to Stravinsky made such omissions from his published analysis understandable, such pretermissions certainly call into question the sincerity of judgments made by the scholar in print.

Stravinsky seemed to have been indeed listening to the judgments of Spies and his fellow Princeton faculty members. In a published dialogue Craft asked the composer if his new *Requiem Canticles* sounded as he had anticipated.<sup>84</sup> Such a sophomoric lack of tact on Craft's part can only be explained by Stravinsky's desire to refute the snarls of critics who found miscalculations or signs of dotage. In Stravinsky's response to Craft's

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft, and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky*, 114.

prompt, the composer avoided all mention of the “Libera me,” instead supplying a classic evasion that focused on corrected vibraphone parts and an eliminated part for harmonium.<sup>85</sup>

The *Requiem Canticles* had to wait another year for its New York première. This performance took place on 22 October 1967 at Carnegie Hall and featured the French National Orchestra. Jean Martinon assumed Stravinsky’s place at the podium, as ill health had prevented the composer’s appearance. Martinon and Craft shared conducting duties on the program, which, in addition to the *Requiem Canticles*, included the *Symphony of Psalms* and *Le sacre du printemps*. David Hamilton, who reviewed the concert for *Musical America*, found the event a decided disappointment.<sup>86</sup> Hamilton observed that “the New York première of the 1966 *Requiem Canticles* did not come off very satisfactorily; the combination of inaccurate playing, unfocused choral sound, inadequate soloists, and mucilaginous tempos proved nearly fatal to Stravinsky’s finely detailed ‘mini-Requiem’.”<sup>87</sup> While a few “sonorous inspirations” were effective, Hamilton charged that the “Libera me” was a complete failure. He reported that, even though the vocal quartet had been augmented for the performance, the effect was still not correct, and “it merely sounded as if the back rows of the chorus had tired of the piece and were getting restless.”<sup>88</sup> Owen Anderson was equally unimpressed. Writing for the *Music Journal*, Anderson charged that, in the composer’s attempt to distill the Requiem

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> David Hamilton, “French National Orchestra (Martinon),” *Musical America* XVIII/1 (January 1968), 10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

text down to a mere fifteen minutes, the spirit of the music seemed to have vanished.<sup>89</sup> Anderson found *Requiem Canticles* “less monumentally austere as colossally arid,” despite Stravinsky’s obvious skill or the poetically charged text.<sup>90</sup>

The English press received the *Requiem Canticles* with a great deal more enthusiasm than did its American counterpart. The work was first heard during the 1967 Edinburgh Festival, a remarkable three-week long event that celebrated Stravinsky’s eightieth birthday. The festival included an impressive roster of performances, some of which were danced by the New York City Ballet: *L’oiseau de feu*, *Petrushka*, *Pulcinella Suite*, *The Rake’s Progress*, *Symphony in Three Movements*, *Symphony of Psalms*, *Symphony in C*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Histoire du soldat*, among others. Winfred Blevins called the evening of the *Requiem Canticles* première a “high point” of the festival.<sup>91</sup> The program, conducted by Boulez, paired *Requiem Canticles* with *Le sacre du printemps*, *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, and *Song of the Nightingale*. Any performance problems with Stravinsky’s new Requiem seem to have been resolved by Boulez and his ensemble, which comprised the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the John Alldis Choir, contralto Yvonne Minton, and bass Günther Reich.

Predictably, Blevins was most enthusiastic about Boulez’s performance of *Le sacre du printemps*, which the critic characterized as “An extraordinary performance by a man who has certainly proved that he is an exceptionally gifted conductor.”<sup>92</sup> Although

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<sup>89</sup> Owen Anderson, “New Works,” *Music Journal* XXV (December 1967), 73.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Winfred Blevins, “Edinburgh Report: High Camp, Straight Bach & Stravinsky,” *High Fidelity/Musical America* XVII/11 (November 1967), 24-25 & 29.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

*Requiem Canticles* stood in the shadow of Boulez, Blevins did observe that the work, despite its serial technique, offered “the impression of tonality. In spirit it seems impersonal and detached.”<sup>93</sup> John Warrack, writing for *The Musical Times*, offered a more substantial estimation of the Edinburgh première.<sup>94</sup> Calling the first performance a “novelty,” he was, nevertheless, impressed:

It is the simplest, most personal devotion of his career, built with all the old mastery out of tiny gestures (a cunningly spaced chord, a single change in a harmony note) and boldly opposed blocks of sound. No brief account can do justice to music that, however small its gestures, concentrates on to a small, intensely lit area the bright light of Stravinsky’s personality.<sup>95</sup>

Warrack cited many beauties in Stravinsky’s new work, including the “Dies irae,” which he called “the most violent explosion of Stravinsky’s later manner, and is forceful as anything he can devise.”<sup>96</sup> Of the bell-like sounds of the “Postlude,” Warrack observed, “It beats out the music not with the celebratory clang of the last page of *The Wedding* but as a mourning bell.”<sup>97</sup> In the final estimation, Warrack offered Stravinsky his highest praise by comparing the Russian composer to Johann Sebastian Bach:

Like Bach, Stravinsky has turned in his last years to music that engenders sublimity from concentration on the purest musical skill; but whereas Bach’s music always seems, as in the final chorale preludes, to be moving

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> John Warrack, “Stravinsky,” *The Musical Times* CVIII (October 1967), 922-23.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 922.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 923.

with firm tread towards God, the no less devout Stravinsky seems here to be pulling around himself a shroud.<sup>98</sup>

English composer and Schoenberg authority Anthony Payne penned a thoughtful analysis of *Requiem Canticles for Tempo*.<sup>99</sup> Payne's essay, which was published as part of a special issue of *Tempo* dedicated to Stravinsky's eighty-fifth birthday, balanced detailed analysis of twelve-tone features with more accessible insights. Although Payne admitted to finding some seemingly arbitrary serial choices in the score, he asserted that there was "no consistent attempt at twelve-note saturation," and the result was a unique kind of "extended tonality or bitonality."<sup>100</sup> Payne heard reminiscences of the "wrong note" technique of Stravinsky's Russian and neoclassic periods, now justified by the dictates of serial practice.<sup>101</sup> Of the particular movements, Payne praised the "Prelude" for its evocation of "uneasy petition in its chant-like imagery,"<sup>102</sup> and the "Dies irae" for creating a "vision" that was "pungent but fleeting, the extreme formal compression allowing tension to accumulate quickly and as quickly dissipate itself."<sup>103</sup> It was this quickness that Payne identified as the key to the success of so brief a work.

The extreme compression which marks the *Requiem Canticles* means that the formal success depends perhaps more than usual with Stravinsky on the ability of each swiftly marshaled block of sound to make an immediate impact, and an initial examination of the score suggests that as so often in

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Anthony Payne, "Requiem Canticles," *Tempo* 81 (Summer 1967), 10-19.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

the past the composer is true to his Russian ancestry in inventing musical images of colour, concision and immediacy.<sup>104</sup>

Any developmental style, Payne concluded, would have needed a great deal more time to create the enormous impact Stravinsky managed in *Requiem Canticles*.

Scholars have embraced Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles* with more enthusiasm than any other of the composer's late choral works. One of the central themes explored in the work is its unprecedented concision. Jeffrey Perry, who has produced the single most thoughtful study of *Requiem Canticles*, called the work "not so much an incomplete Requiem as an entirely new creation making use of key portions of the burial liturgy."<sup>105</sup> Perry noted that Stravinsky wrote the extremely brief movements in the 1960s, reflecting "the age of transistorization."<sup>106</sup> Though *Requiem Canticles* was thoroughly modern, at the same time it struck Perry as "reverberations of an unheard liturgy; listeners, like postulants waiting in the outer portion of an early Christian basilica, can overhear only fragments of a rite in progress within."<sup>107</sup> Perry also illuminated the novel demands that *Requiem Canticles* placed on listeners:

Stravinsky has created a new liturgy full of lacunae, which seems to demand that listeners fill in the blanks, as it were, and use the hints the composer provides to compose the Requiem anew for themselves...the *Requiem Canticles* stands at once removed from the liturgy itself, which must be pieced together by the listener from the clues provided.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey Perry, "A 'Requiem for the Requiem': On Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*," *College Music Symposium XXXIII/XXXIV* (1993-1994), 239.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

Walsh, generally suspicious of Stravinsky's late choral works, became another partisan of *Requiem Canticles*: "It has the quality of succinctness and reserve one associates with the late periods of great artists; but it is not merely concise—as if brevity were a virtue in itself, without consideration of what is being briefly said."<sup>109</sup> One element that makes the succinctness of *Requiem Canticles* succeed is the gravity of the text, which Walsh pointed out could be abridged without a loss of impact. Stravinsky paired this effective text with "strong, instantaneous musical images" that had their origins in the *Introitus*.<sup>110</sup>

Scholars have grown to cherish the brevity of *Requiem Canticles*. Neil Tierney described its various movements as "chiseled blocks of sound" that are "so firm of substance, and so ingeniously varied that they produce an effect altogether disproportionate to their size."<sup>111</sup> Druskin has suggested that the terseness of *Requiem Canticles* represented the ultimate manifestation of Stravinsky's lifelong propensity for exposition over development.<sup>112</sup> The Dutch composer Louis Andriessen has broadened the discussion to point out the important place of *Requiem Canticles* in the history of the genre:

*Requiem Canticles* is the Requiem for the Requiem. After that, every composer who writes a liturgical requiem for large choir and orchestra, preferably in his old age, will seem like a taxidermist. He will be stuffing a skeleton with ersatz meat and then be putting a black top hat on it....

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<sup>109</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 272.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-73.

<sup>111</sup> Neil Tierney, *The Unknown Country: The Life of Igor Stravinsky* (London: Robert Hale, 1977), 257.

<sup>112</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii: His Life, Works and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 157.

Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles* is Berlioz's *Grand Messe des morts*, shriveled to an aphorism.<sup>113</sup>

Andriessen's comment suggests that Stravinsky's last major work is perhaps much more important to the history of its genre than is generally accepted and may come to exert the influence of comparable works by Mozart or Brahms.

Commentators have found striking recollections throughout the *Requiem Canticles* of the composer's most iconic works from his Russian and neoclassical periods. Druskin has recorded that the "panorama of Stravinsky's whole life as a creative artist" was reflected in *Requiem Canticles*.<sup>114</sup> Boucourechliev offered an inventory of the extraordinary allusions to Stravinsky's oeuvre heard in the piece:

*Requiem Canticles* are memories...as though in his old age the composer were casting a keen glance over the past, reviewing and evoking all his music. In the 'Prelude' it is the continuous-discontinuous pulsations of the *Sacre*; in 'Exaudi' the hovering polyphony of *Symphony of Psalms*; in 'Dies Irae' the wild sound of the cimbalom of *Renard*; in 'Tuba mirum' the icy fanfares of *Oedipus Rex*; in the 'Interlude' the 'Chorale' of the *Symphonies* in memory of Debussy; in 'Lacrimosa' the intonation of the 'Chant dissident'; in 'Libera me' the murmured chanting of the *Mass*—and finally in the 'Postlude' the timeless, siteless bell of *Les Noces*.<sup>115</sup>

Characteristically, the composer feigned innocence as to any planned inclusion of so many recollections. "What I did not expect," he claimed, "were the echoes other people professed to hear in it: *Oedipus Rex* in the *Tuba Mirum*, *Les Noces* in the *Postlude*, the inmate noises from *Marat / Sade* in the mumbled congregational prayer at the back-

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<sup>113</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, "1966—Requiem Canticles," *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>114</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii*, 172.

<sup>115</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 304.



ground of *Libera me.*”<sup>116</sup> Despite Stravinsky’s slightly hollow protestations, scholars have continued to advocate a retrospective view of *Requiem Canticles*.

The nine movements of *Requiem Canticles* have each elicited remarkable comment from scholars. The string “Prelude” has evoked widely diverging responses. Many have heard in this movement echoes of the iconic “Dance of the Adolescents” from *Le sacre du printemps*. As Stravinsky recalled, “The prelude puzzled its first audience. Some thought it too ‘light, while others said it was ‘like Bartók’ and even the beginning of Mozart’s Dissonant Quartet. I think, myself, that its preluding manner is precisely suited to the musical matter to be expounded.”<sup>117</sup> Perry has written that the “Prelude” recalls the *Symphony in C*.<sup>118</sup> Andriessen has even suggested that Stravinsky’s “Prelude” is reminiscent of Vivaldi’s “Winter” from *The Four Seasons*.<sup>119</sup>

The vocal movements that follow the prelude—“Exaudi,” “Dies irae,” and “Tuba Mirum”—have roused similar responses. The serial composer Gilbert Amy has found comparable rhythms and inflections in the emaciated “Exaudi” and the first portion of the *Symphony of Psalms*—movements that share the same text.<sup>120</sup> In the “Dies irae” Jeffrey Perry heard echoes of *Zvezdoliki*, a relatively obscure choral work from the composer’s Russian period.<sup>121</sup> Vlad has heaped the highest accolades on the “Dies irae”: “In my opinion, Stravinsky reaches in this movement one of the peaks of his achievement, and not

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<sup>116</sup> Arnold Newman, Robert Craft, and Francis Steegmuller, *Bravo Stravinsky*, 114.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Jeffrey Perry, “A ‘Requiem for the Requiem’,” 240.

<sup>119</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Gilbert Amy, “Aspects of the Religious Music of Igor Stravinsky,” *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 202.

<sup>121</sup> Jeffrey Perry, “A ‘Requiem for the Requiem’,” 243.

only of his recent work. In all musical literature there is no other Dies irae in which a like dramatic power is combined with such economy of means.”<sup>122</sup> Many scholars have likened the brief “Tuba mirum” from bass soloist and brass to the sound world of *Oedipus Rex*. Perry has linked the vocal style in this movement to Stravinsky’s *Mass* or even perhaps Byzantine or Ambrosian chant.<sup>123</sup>

The central movement of *Requiem Canticles* has made the most immediate, positive effect on critics and has continued to be revered by subsequent generations of commentators. It is a gentle instrumental interlude, a kind of halting procession that features the unique combination of four flutes, four horns, and four timpani. Perry likened this movement to a “funeral procession”: “The drag step of the timpani, horns, and flutes alternates with passage-work in the flutes and bassoons which is self-controlled to the point of being self-effacing—no wailing or weeping, just good, solid part-writing.... No one talks during the ceremony, as it were.”<sup>124</sup> Walsh has favored the “exquisite chorales” of this movement, adding that the “solemn radiance” of the music was reminiscent of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Symphony of Psalms* and “seemed to exist outside time and beyond dull care.”<sup>125</sup> Boucourechliev celebrated this “Interlude” as “one of the most beautiful episodes in *Requiem Canticles*,” and has also linked this music to that heard in the memorial chorale for Claude Debussy that concludes the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Frederick Fuller (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 256.

<sup>123</sup> Jeffrey Perry, “A ‘Requiem for the Requiem’,” 241.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile*, 514.

<sup>126</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, 302.

Three vocal movements follow the central interlude: the “Rex tremendae” for chorus, the “Lacrimosa” for contralto, and the “Libera me,” for vocal quartet and parlando chorus. Gilbert Amy heard the highly praised “Lacrimosa” as “overwhelmingly evocative of the deep voice of Jocasta in the second act of *Oedipus Rex*.”<sup>127</sup> The “Libera me,” which had been the source of serious doubt in initial reviews, has been redeemed by scholars. Perry considered it to be the emotional dénouement of *Requiem Canticles* and likened the movement to other great “crowd scenes” from contemporary music, including Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw* and Ligeti’s *Requiem*.<sup>128</sup> Boucourechliev has written of the movement that “It is hard to conceive a simpler and more effective device than this, which leaves the listener uncertain as to whether what he hears is being spoken or sung—an almost frightening, catacomb-like chant.”<sup>129</sup>

The instrumental “Postlude” is one of the most remarkable creations of Stravinsky’s career. Written for the novel combination of celesta, vibraphone, tubular bells, flute quartet, piano, harp, and solo horn, this movement is at once the most inert and the most expressive music of Stravinsky’s last period. Boucourechliev called this movement, “Stravinsky’s farewell to music” and likened its effect to the conclusion of *Les Noces*.<sup>130</sup> Of the “Postlude,” Vlad mused “all personal feeling is dissolved, absorbed into a sense of universal piety and solidarity in the face of looming night in which all

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<sup>127</sup> Gilbert Amy, “Aspects of the Religious Music,” 196.

<sup>128</sup> Jeffrey Perry, “A ‘Requiem for the Requiem’,” 241.

<sup>129</sup> André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, 303.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

earthly existence is destined to vanish.”<sup>131</sup> Perry described this movement as a “distant, ice-cold bell-tolling processional” and speculated on its spiritual message:

It is this movement which sounds the most impressive in a large, resonant space, and the one which suggests most clearly the degree to which Stravinsky’s personal view of death diverges from the triumphant, uncorrupted fleshy resurrection of Christian orthodoxy...seeks not rejuvenation but liberation from his aging flesh, and transmutation into a more durable form, so the celebrant of Stravinsky’s imagined Mass for the Dead, of which the *Requiem Canticles* are a fragmentary glimpse.... The ritual enacted here presents the possibility of continuity, not triumph; of completion, not return.<sup>132</sup>

Andriessen has argued that the actual ritual of *Requiem Canticles* was played out in its purely instrumental movements. His investigation of the numerology of the “Postlude” revealed within its seventy-seven beats intriguing connections to the symbols of the mystical tradition.<sup>133</sup>

In the final estimation a number of composers and scholars have lauded *Requiem Canticles*. The twelve-tone composer Charles Wuorinen admitted to being “an unabashed, unashamed partisan of the *Requiem*.”<sup>134</sup> Druskin called it “Stravinsky’s greatest achievement.... The musical language is clearer and more graphic, and it has greater emotional variety; and he has left behind the eclecticism of *Canticum Sacrum* and the uniform archaic austerity of *Threni*.”<sup>135</sup> Walsh was more measured in his praise:

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<sup>131</sup> Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, 257.

<sup>132</sup> Jeffrey Perry, “A ‘Requiem for the Requiem’,” 241-42.

<sup>133</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, 9-10.

<sup>134</sup> Charles Wuorinen recorded interview for “Program X: The Final Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

<sup>135</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky*, 157.

The *Requiem Canticles* may not be Stravinsky's finest score; it would be asking a lot of a composer in his eighty-fifth year...that he should approach, let alone surpass the achievement of works like *The Rite of Spring*, *The Wedding*, *Oedipus Rex* or the *Symphony of Psalms*. But in its own context the *Requiem Canticles* is not unworthy of standing beside those masterpieces.<sup>136</sup>

Perry, perhaps, the greatest partisan of *Requiem Canticles*, stated that the work "stands apart from virtually all other religious or devotional compositions." While Perry maintained that other death-haunted pieces of the 1960s, including George Crumb's *Black Angels* and Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* are "almost photo-journalistic, Stravinsky's death rite is less timely, more of all time."<sup>137</sup>

Taruskin has posited an alternative interpretation of *Requiem Canticles*. The view of Stravinsky as perennially Russian, ubiquitous among the listening public due to the overwhelming popularity of ballet scores like *L'oiseau de feu* and *Le sacre du printemps*, has been given eloquent advocacy by Taruskin. While Taruskin has celebrated the works of Stravinsky's first maturity, he has been largely dismissive of the serial music of the composer's old age.

Only *Requiem Canticles* received qualified praise from Taruskin, as he argued that the work represented a dramatic, eleventh-hour return to the composer's Russian roots. In contrast to the hermetic extremes of *Movements* and *Variations*, Taruskin observed that the "*Requiem Canticles* are strikingly direct and uncomplicated in texture and rhythm. They are homophonic and pulsate in the old Stravinsky manner."<sup>138</sup> Second,

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<sup>136</sup> Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky*, 271-72.

<sup>137</sup> Jeffrey Perry, "A 'Requiem for the Requiem'," 238.

<sup>138</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), II, 1649.

Taruskin cited the numerous references to the composer's Russian works in *Requiem Canticles* as evidence that Stravinsky was indeed looking back to his homeland. Another point of evidence for a Russian return, Taruskin argued, was the quality of immobility, or stasis, that is heard in *Requiem Canticles*. What is more, Taruskin has also found chords in *Requiem Canticles* that are prominent in *Le sacre du printemps* and *Petrushka*, as well as a strong presence of octatonicism in Stravinsky's requiem setting. The "Libera me" featured "a kind of harmony he might have composed without effort or qualm at an earlier phase of his career."<sup>139</sup> Taruskin speculated that composer may well have been on the verge of a new Russian period, if his time had not run out.<sup>140</sup>

Taruskin's Russian-centered view of *Requiem Canticles* was prefigured by the work of Druskin, who observed important similarities between the composer's Russian and serial periods: "It is as though these two periods were telescoped, one appearing as an extension of the other."<sup>141</sup> Druskin also noted how, in his last years, Stravinsky preferred to talk of his early Russian period rather than his decades as a neoclassicist.<sup>142</sup> "In this last stage of his musical career Stravinsky," Druskin commented, "enriched by the experience of a lifetime, revived some of the features of his former method of composing."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 1652.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 1674.

<sup>141</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinskii*, 146.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

Taruskin's view of the composer's late life has become increasingly influential in recent years, as can be heard in the assessment of Stravinsky's last years from *New Yorker* critic Alex Ross: "The more significant transformation came right at the end when the old Russian tone, which had been absent for decades, crept back in. The reason for its return was undoubtedly Stravinsky's momentous tour of the Soviet Union in 1962."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Alex Ross, "Prince Igor: Reexamining Stravinsky's Reign," *The New Yorker* LXXVI/33 (6 November 2000), 92.

## CHAPTER NINE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Critics did not immediately recognize the seismic shift to serialism Stravinsky made with *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*. Observers of first performances in Los Angeles, Boston, and London failed to perceive its serial nature, suggesting that the resulting upheaval sparked by the composer's conversion was provoked more by musical politics than a perceptible change in his style. It was only after the score's publication, with the inclusion of analytical marks showing its serial construction, that critics began to respond to the composer's change of technique. Even then commentators relied on preconceptions of Schoenberg's music, judging Stravinsky's first essay in serialism according to values championed by the Viennese master. Critics chastised the simplicity and clarity of Stravinsky's serial means, charging that the composer was artlessly conforming to Schoenberg's method as a student producing an academic exercise devoid of vision. Implicit in the reception of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* was the well-worn notion that Stravinsky had at last exhausted his inspiration and was relying on academic formulas for creative stimulus. Some critics suspected that Stravinsky was pandering to the avant-garde. Others perceptively recognized *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, despite its serial construction, as expressively distinct from the music of the Second Viennese School, having more in common with medieval music than the works of Schoenberg, Berg, or Webern.

The Venice première of *Canticum sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci nominis* in St. Mark's Basilica stifled what could have been a riotous reception to rival the one that greeted *Le sacre du printemps*. With his adoption of the twelve-tone method a matter of



public record, the composer's new technique and its implications for musical politics became a large part of the critical narrative. Ironically it was Stravinsky's first fully twelve-tone movement, the "Surge, aquilo," that received the most praise from critics, primarily due to the composer's newfound lyricism. Many reacted most vehemently to the lack of organic unity in *Canticum sacrum*—a hallmark of Schoenberg's school, not of Stravinsky's. Some repeated old complaints, notably the suspicion that *Canticum sacrum* was yet another elaborate conjurer's trick. Others went so far as to question the sincerity of Stravinsky's religious faith as expressed in the fractured, dissonant, and learned music of *Canticum sacrum*. In the decades that have followed its initial reception, Stravinsky's creative reuse of gestures from early music in *Canticum sacrum* has been the subject of praise and derision. Some scholars have marveled at the breadth of Stravinsky's historical allusions while others have found the composer's uses of history too academic in inspiration.

Critics had long denounced the hermetic austerity of Stravinsky's music, a quality that found its greatest expression in *Threni: id est Lamentationes Jeremiae prophetae*. American critics received *Threni* more civilly than *Canticum sacrum*, its impressive proportions dispelling suspicions of the composer's waning faculties. In contrast, the English press attacked *Threni* on a number of fronts, particularly its asceticism and its apparent lack of Stravinsky's distinctive compositional voice. The American press praised Stravinsky's highly personal implementation of serial technique, while some English critics were disappointed by his inclusion of tonal elements. Stravinsky's recording of *Threni* was received with more enthusiasm; further listening revealed the score's continuity with the composer's previous works and his highly personal, tonally-

oriented treatment of serial technique. In the decades following *Threni*'s première, the work has commanded respect among scholars but no champions. Later investigations have focused on Stravinsky's text painting, numerology, and stylistic links to the composer's Russian period.

After *Threni*, interest in Stravinsky's new music dwindled in the press. The composer gained an audience, however, among serial composers and theorists from academia. Milton Babbitt and Claudio Spies produced a seminal body of specialized analytical literature devoted to the composer's late works, a tradition of scholarship that has culminated in the writings of Joseph Straus, today's leading authority. Although he relished the attention from these academics, Stravinsky showed little interest in their highly developed methodology and analysis. While the unprecedented compression, abstraction, and rhythmic sophistication of *Movements* for piano and orchestra likely resulted from the influence of Babbitt and other integral serialists, the Russian composer's increasing technical idiosyncrasies may also have been a foil to their attempts at analysis. After Stravinsky's death, Spies openly criticized the naïveté of the composer's serial technique. Spies's admission raises the suspicion that the analytical attention granted Stravinsky's serial music was an instance of opportunism among some scholars, an effort by fledgling academic programs to share in the fame and respectability of the world's greatest composer. Despite rigorous analysis, experts often disagree on crucial aspects of Stravinsky's serialism, particularly the composer's retention of gestures reminiscent of tonality. This quality, observed by many critics and celebrated by the composer Charles Wuorinen, has been strangely ignored in the analytical tradition.

The early 1960s represented, perhaps, the apex of Stravinsky's popularity as an international celebrity. The composer's innumerable appearances in concert halls around the world, however, could not remedy the critical failures of his new music. The Swiss première of *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* garnered far less press than was afforded to the first performances of *Canticum sacrum* or *Threni*. Although *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* remains one of the composer's most analyzed scores in terms of serial technique, scholars have expressed deep reservations, despite its emotional immediacy and its return to relative simplicity.

*The Flood* nearly sank in the fiasco of its American television première, a potentially landmark artistic event universally decried as a catastrophe. The commercial aspects of the production, as well as contributions by collaborators, especially Craft's libretto, took the brunt of the criticism, largely overshadowing Stravinsky's score. The recording of the work, shorn of its television spectacle, was comparatively well received. English critics responded more positively to *The Flood* as a stage work, praising its ritual tone, reminiscences of the composer's Russian past, and vivid imagery, while others lamented its thinness and brevity. Scholars have found little to praise in *The Flood*, criticizing the naïveté of its libretto and Stravinsky's reliance on spoken English text, a point that worked against his genius for abstract, ritualistic drama. Ultimately, *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* and *The Flood* have been perceived as unsure, vacuous, and the least satisfying efforts from Stravinsky's last period.

Stravinsky's swan song came with two remarkable works: *Introitus* and *Requiem Canticles*. *Introitus* was introduced in Chicago to scant national press, in sad contrast to the attention that had been granted *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* a decade before. Critics

recognized *Introitus* as representing a new level of integration of serialism with Stravinsky's overall style. Even at this late stage, many harbored the suspicion that Stravinsky's work was no more than an elaborate sleight of hand. In later years, scholars have come to praise *Introitus* for its return to simplicity, its ritualistic tone, and its echoes of the composer's Russian period.

The first performance of *Requiem Canticles* took place on the campus of Princeton University, highlighting the influence of elite academic musicians on the ageing composer. While critics initially praised the accessibility of Stravinsky's "Princeton Requiem," there was nearly universal faultfinding with its brevity. Critics complained that, like *The Flood*, the scale of Stravinsky's diminutive *Requiem Canticles* was insufficient for its monumental subject matter. Many critics openly questioned the composer's technical prowess, charging that aspects of choral balance seemed shabby and ill conceived for performance. The English press received the work more favorably, perhaps in part due to the greater competency of its first performance. Subsequently scholars have praised *Requiem Canticles* more than any other of the composer's late choral works. Compared to traditional requiem settings, Stravinsky's offered a new and radical approach, rejecting the excesses of the past in favor of a compressed style reflecting the technological age that brought it forth. Scholars have celebrated the retrospective quality of *Requiem Canticles*; no other Stravinsky work sums up its creator's career so succinctly. Even Taruskin, who has been dismissive of Stravinsky's serial music, has praised *Requiem Canticles* as a return to the composer's Russian roots. Taruskin has even speculated that the composer was on the cusp of a new Russian phase, a fourth creative period that might have bloomed had his time not ran out.

On the eve of the millennium, the editors of *Time* magazine compiled a roster of the quintessential artists and entertainers of the twentieth century, a select company that included James Joyce, Louis Armstrong, Pablo Picasso, T. S. Eliot, Bob Dylan, Charlie Chaplin, and The Beatles. Of all the classical composers of this tumultuous era, only Stravinsky was selected for *Time*'s list.<sup>1</sup> The composer's renown in multiple spheres, from the elite world of serious music to the broader context of popular entertainment, remains a remarkable and resilient phenomenon. Stravinsky will likely remain the center of gravity in modern music for years to come, as well as the popular face of a fine-art tradition that grows more alien to the culture at large with each passing year. That his late scores—his most challenging and arguably some of his finest music—are recognized by only a slim minority of musicians is extraordinary. The dubious standing of compositions such as *Canticum sacrum*, *Threni*, *The Flood*, and *Requiem Canticles*, even among fervent musicians, throws into bold relief a central crisis of contemporary music: twenty-first century musicians are embarking on a new creative epoch without having fully come to terms with the expression of the last century.

For decades serial theorists have misjudged Stravinsky's late works according to values of the Second Viennese School, finding fault with his simplicity of technical means, his disavowal of organic development, and his rejection of atonality. What is more, Babbitt, Spies, and others have shown little interest in promoting the scores to a larger audience. Instead, the elitist character of their scholarship has undoubtedly checked the broader acceptance of the music. Their high-toned analyses, which remain difficult for even many educated musicians, exaggerated Stravinsky's Apollonian de-

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<sup>1</sup> *Time* CLI/22 (8 June 1998).

tachment to a ridiculous extreme, confirming accusations that his music was snobbish, sterile, pedantic, and inhumane. Perhaps most damning, the scholarship of Babbitt, Spies, and more recently Straus has effectively kept the music within the serial school, a position not justified by either the expressive character or the technical sophistication of the music. As such, these works have appeared to many listeners as unpalatable and unfashionable as the music of Babbitt, Boulez, or Stockhausen.

Stravinsky relished conversing in a blend of Russian, French, German, Italian, and English, delightfully discovering in translation the full expression of a word or thought. In opposition to the analytical tradition, many composers, critics, and scholars have argued that serialism offered Stravinsky a similar challenge, an opportunity for the composer to translate, and thereby clarify and enrich, his essential musical message. These voices have minimized the disruption brought about by his adoption of twelve-tone technique. “In his so-called serial compositions,” Carlos Chávez (1899-1978) argued, “there is much more Stravinsky than there is serialism. The man went to serialism as he went to Pergolesi, or Tchaikovsky, or to Jazz, or to Russian songs.”<sup>2</sup> This perspective—pioneered by Edward T. Cone and amplified by White, Boucourechliev, Druskin, Walsh, and Cross—has gained a foothold in the popular imagination. Writing for *Time* magazine’s millennial tribute to the composer, Philip Glass (born 1937) wrote that “Over the years, Stravinsky experimented with virtually every technique of 20<sup>th</sup> century music: tonal, polytonal and 12-tone serialism. He reinvented and personalized each form while adapting the melodic styles of earlier eras to the new times. In the end, his own musical

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<sup>2</sup> Carlos Chávez, “Stravinsky: A Composer’s Memorial,” *Perspectives of New Music*, IX/2 (1971), 51.

voice always prevailed.”<sup>3</sup> But while these voices have done much to bring works like *Threni* and *Requiem Canticles* into the mainstream of Stravinsky’s output, they have not yet offered compelling arguments for the value of the late music on its own terms.

Historical musicologists have been woefully neglectful of Stravinsky’s late music, content to leave serious investigation of the scores to twelve-tone analysts while more salient aspects of the music have remained largely unexplored. Scholars have too readily accepted at face value the composer’s edicts against expression, thereby ignoring this crucial aspect of the music. Jeffrey Perry, in his study of the expressive content of *Requiem Canticles*, remarked that “Despite the extensive and valuable studies of pitch patterning and related technical matters by van den Toorn, Arthur Berger, Claudio Spies, Milton Babbitt and others, very little work on this aspect of late Stravinsky has been attempted.”<sup>4</sup> Such remains the case: scant investigation has been undertaken of the rich poetic content of major works like *Canticum sacrum; Threni; A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*; or *The Flood*. Elucidation of such aspects could do much to ameliorate intrinsic difficulties in Stravinsky’s late style or to make plain the many hidden beauties of this repertory.

The influence of the early music revival has been relatively minimized in studies of the music. The composer’s denial of explicit inspiration from Renaissance masters in *Threni* is curiously reminiscent of his disavowal of the presence of Russian folksong in *Le sacre du printemps*. Just as scholars have shed light on the composer’s early ballets by exploring his creative reuse of folk materials, so too may the late works be illuminated

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Glass, “The Classical Musician: Igor Stravinsky,” *Time* CLI/22 (8 June 1998), 142.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Perry, “A ‘Requiem for the Requiem’: On Stravinsky’s *Requiem Canticles*,” *College Music Symposium* XXXIII/XXXIV (1993-1994), 238.

by a detailed investigation of Stravinsky's inspiration from early music. A careful study of the early music heard at the Evenings on the Roof and Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles may further reveal his inspiration for *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*, *Agon*, *Canticum sacrum*, *Threni*, and a host of other chamber pieces from his last years. With further research, Stravinsky's late works may come to be appreciated as a crown jewel of historical musicology, revealing the tremendous stimulus that the composer drew from contemporary musicological research.

Acknowledging Stravinsky's inspiration from early music could have important implications for the performance practice of his late works. Since the 1960s the choral repertory of the Renaissance has benefited enormously from the development of specialized ensembles, choruses whose steely precision and expressive restraint have enhanced appreciation of the music immeasurably. Stravinsky's late choral compositions merit performance by early music specialists, just as do other Medieval-inspired works by Arvo Pärt, John Tavener, and Steve Reich. Recordings of *Canticum sacrum* and *Threni* too often are reminiscent of early recordings of Renaissance polyphony, with performers clinging to the vibrato and expressive notions of the nineteenth century. Stravinsky's carefully chiseled lines of polyphony deserve to be heard as clearly as those of Dufay or Josquin, without the ornament or drama required to animate less sophisticated textures.

A deep vein of cynicism, moreover, runs throughout criticism of the late music, a profound distrust of Stravinsky's motives that has poisoned perceptions for decades. Time and again the music has been received with suspicions of inauthenticity. Many have suspected that the great creator was a charlatan, a slick cheat, and an emperor whose new serial clothes would prove meretricious. The composer's media skirmishes with



critics—aided masterfully in the late years by Craft—did much to fuel cynics. Still potent is the allegation that Stravinsky’s serial conversion was driven primarily by his concern for appearances. Alex Ross has recently repeated the charge that the composer made the switch to serialism as a capitulation to the tastes of the avant-garde: “What mattered was Stravinsky’s perception of the music, and other’s perceptions of it, and his perception of their perceptions.”<sup>5</sup> Such views ignore the fact that Stravinsky continued his adventure with dodecaphony well into the 1960s, by which time his acquaintanceship with Boulez had cooled and serialism was regarded by many as a spent force.

In addition, ageism has been a major factor in the negative reception of Stravinsky’s late music. The composer’s courtship of youthful associates, most notably Craft, Babbitt, and Boulez, highlighted his advanced age. For skeptics, impugning the efforts of a septuagenarian or octogenarian, given commonly accepted notions of ageing and decline, was far easier than challenging the work of an artist in his or her prime. While the lion of *Les noces* or *Symphony of Psalms* would have been given the benefit of the doubt, the obvious physical infirmities of the elderly celebrity proved an easy mark. Had Stravinsky adopted serial technique twenty-five years earlier, few critics would have dared express such uncertainties. Perhaps most important, by focusing on elegiac themes, archaic practices, emotional reticence, and technical blemishes, critics have framed scores like *Canticum sacrum*, *Threni*, *The Flood*, and *Requiem Canticles* as an old man’s music. This stance has minimized the composer’s youthful vigor, sharp wit, and titanic energy, all evident until the very last years of his life, as well as the fact that his struggles with ill health had been life long.

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<sup>5</sup> Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 384.

In his final years Stravinsky developed a deep reverence for the late piano sonatas and string quartets of Beethoven, passing evenings in his Hollywood home listening to phonograph records, playing works at the piano, and studying scores in silent wonder. “At eighty I have found new joy in Beethoven,” he mused, “and the *Great Fugue* now seems to me—it was not always so—a perfect miracle...this absolutely contemporary piece of music will be contemporary forever.... I love it beyond any other.”<sup>6</sup> Stravinsky’s late music shares a remarkable number of characteristics with that of Beethoven, namely an intense spirituality, an idiosyncratic approach, a newfound lyricism, a nostalgia for music of the past, and a relative inaccessibility. “The quartets,” Stravinsky reflected, “are addressed not to the great unwashed, but to a select few, and the later sonatas speak to an intimate two or three, or perhaps only to the composer himself.”<sup>7</sup> Stravinsky and Beethoven are also alike in the troubled receptions of their late works: upon his death, the German master’s late music seemed destined for relative obscurity, in marked contrast to the enormous popularity of his early and middle period works.

As great bookends of the nineteenth century, the receptions of Beethoven and Stravinsky have been shaped by the ideals of Romanticism. Romantic musicians, most notably Wagner, brought about the critical and popular renaissance of Beethoven’s late music, lifting works once regarded as “symptoms of illness”<sup>8</sup> from oblivion and hailing them as archetypes for a new and grandiose conception of art. In contrast, Stravinsky battled Romantic prejudices among performers, listeners, critics, and scholars for his en-

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<sup>6</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 124.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Kerman, Alan Tyson, and Scott G. Burnham, “Beethoven, Ludwig van,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), III, 111.

tire career. In the 1950s and 1960s, nineteenth-century notions of proportion, expression, and authenticity continued to bias reviews. In his late works Stravinsky continued to thumb his nose at virtually every expressive hallmark of Romanticism. *The Flood* was the antithesis of a Wagnerian music drama. The Baroque-inspired, Medieval-tinged lament of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* shunned conventions of the death-haunted lieder of Brahms or Strauss. Miniatures like *Introitus* were reckoned mere bagatelles unworthy of serious consideration. When Stravinsky tackled epic subjects, as in *Requiem Canticles*, critics anticipated music of heroic proportions in line with Berlioz. Most importantly, Stravinsky's self-conscious turn to serialism violated a deep-seated sensibility among critics, namely the notion that authentic technique should spring naturally from deeply personal inspiration, not from choice and cerebration. Furthermore, many scholars maintain that Stravinsky was most authentic when exploiting his Russian heritage, specifically the late Romantic, nationalist tradition of Rimsky-Korsakov.

Stravinsky lived longer than any composer of comparable genius, outlasting Wagner by fifteen years, Bach by twenty years, and Beethoven by thirty years. This disparity calls into question the validity of pitting Stravinsky's last scores against the so-called "late" works of comparable masters. Beethoven began his ninth symphony while in his late forties, the same age that Stravinsky composed the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), widely acknowledged as another masterpiece in the genre of the choral symphony. Stravinsky wrote the *Sonata for Two Pianos* (1944) and *Symphony in Three Movements* (1946) while in his early sixties, the same age that Bach completed his late masterwork, *Das musikalische Opfer* (1747). *Parsifal* (1882) premièred when Wagner was in his late sixties, the same age that Stravinsky was at work on *The Rake's Progress*.

No composer of equal gifts has been graced with such longevity, and it is difficult to imagine another exploiting this opportunity more prolifically or with equal daring.

While another octogenarian, Richard Strauss, retreated in his last years, providing masterful recapitulations of the music of his youth, Stravinsky's inventive zeal never waned. As Craft observed:

The creation of great works of art by anyone of advanced age is rare in any medium. Stravinsky was seventy-four and eighty-four, respectively, when he wrote *Agon* and the *Requiem Canticles*, which is a more remarkable phenomenon, whatever else, than the composition, at twenty-four and thirty-four, of respectively, the Symphony in E-flat and *Renard*. . . . in the decade between 1956 and 1966, Stravinsky composed more music than he had in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

These scores offer an unparalleled portrait of an ageing genius and, as such, are uniquely precious. Only Verdi's innovative late works—*Otello*, *Falstaff*, and the *Quattro pezzi sacri*—can claim rightful company with Stravinsky's last achievements. That he produced a suspect work like *The Flood* should not cast a pall over all his late scores; Beethoven hacked the dubious *Wellington's Victory* during his last compositional phase.

Time and again, Stravinsky's works have survived critical epitaphs, withstanding assaults to take their place as modern classics. "I have grown quite a garden," the composer remarked wryly, "with the flowers that reviewers have thrown at the supposed graves of works of mine over the past fifty years."<sup>10</sup> A lone voice, Charles Wuorinen has prophesied that the Russian composer's serial works may yet prove his most significant legacy: "My view has always been, since even the earliest of the twelve-tone pieces

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<sup>9</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 486.

<sup>10</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 107.

came out that they were compositions of enormous significance. Far more so than, I think, has been generally recognized.”<sup>11</sup> Despite Wuorinen’s hopes, ignorance and prejudices among composers, performers, and listeners against serial music—no matter how tonally shaded or attractively constructed—will likely mean that these scores remain the indulgences of only the most devoted music lovers. The composer himself seemed to have expected no more. “The music was not for everybody,” he admitted, “just for connoisseurs... maybe you will not like it. But music is not always to like; music is also for something much more important than to like.”<sup>12</sup>

Savvy critics and scholars have been reluctant to brave final estimations of the late music. Even among devotees, heartfelt endorsements of the music have been noticeably lacking. While proponents have admitted cautious admiration for the composer’s final phase, their esteem has been qualified by reservations regarding his advanced age, demanding schedule of public appearances, and amateurish command of his serial idiom. “Taking into account the fact that he continued to appear in concerts all over the world until the age of eighty-five,” Druskin concluded, “Stravinsky’s old age may well be said to have been unimaginably rich and fruitful.”<sup>13</sup> Despite misgivings, Walsh has admitted that the best of the late music “is equal to all but the very greatest he composed before

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Wuorinen, recorded interview for “Program VIII: The Serial Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

<sup>12</sup> Igor Stravinsky, recorded interview for “Program X: The Final Years,” *Public Broadcasting Association Presents Igor Stravinsky: The Man and His Music, A Documentary Radio Program Series*, narrated by Jim Svejda (Berkeley: Educational Media Associates, 1977), (EMA 103–15 Sound Discs).

<sup>13</sup> Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: His Life, Works and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 163.

Craft appeared on the scene.”<sup>14</sup> A fundamental problem, Walsh observes, is that no single late work has emerged as a definitive masterpiece, a cornerstone upon which to build a broader appreciation, despite individual passages of unquestionable mastery.<sup>15</sup>

The *Requiem Canticles* could prove such a keystone work. Initially disparaged as evidence of dotage, it has come to be highly regarded. These pithy funereal prayers have proven both remarkably accessible and deeply rewarding, attracting curiosity among the uninitiated and devotion among connoisseurs. Outstanding interpretations by Craft and Oliver Knussen have remained in print, in marked contrast to recordings of other late works.<sup>16</sup> It also benefits from its position in a long line of much-loved Requiem settings, a historical legacy that Stravinsky exploited brilliantly to create an enormously powerful composition that sacrificed none of his characteristic reticence. Sadly, many critics have regarded the work as an exception that proves the overall inadequacy of the late style, not hearing the links that could lead listeners back to the exquisite elegiac rituals of *In memoriam Dylan Thomas*; *Canticum sacrum*; *Threni*; *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*; and *Introitus*.

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring, Russia and France, 1882-1934* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), xii.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: The Second Exile, France and America, 1934-1971* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 523.

<sup>16</sup> *Igor Stravinsky, Volume XII*, Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Ithaca College Concert Choir, Robert Craft, conductor (Sony Classical SMK 46 302) and *Stravinsky: The Flood U. A.*, New London Chamber Choir, London Sinfonietta, Oliver Knussen, conductor (Deutsche Grammophone 447 068-2 GH).

## APPENDIX A:

### STRAVINSKY'S ORIGINAL WORKS AFTER *THE RAKE'S PROGRESS*

#### *Cantata* (1952)

Medium – Soprano and Tenor Soloists, SSA Women's Chorus, Chamber Ensemble of Two Flutes, Two Oboes (One doubling English Horn) and Cello

Première – 11 November 1952, Los Angeles Symphony Society, Igor Stravinsky, Conductor

#### *Septet* (1953)

Medium – Clarinet, French Horn, Bassoon, Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano

Première – 23 January 1954, Dumbarton Oaks, Igor Stravinsky, Conductor

#### *Three Songs from William Shakespeare* (1954)

Medium – Mezzo-Soprano Soloist and Chamber Ensemble of Flute, Clarinet, and Viola

Première – 8 March 1954, Evenings on the Roof, Los Angeles, Robert Craft, Conductor

#### *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* (1954)

Medium – Tenor Soloist and Chamber Ensemble of String Quartet and Four Trombones

Première – 20 September 1954, Monday Evening Concerts, Los Angeles, Robert Craft, Conductor

#### *Greeting Prelude* (1956)

Medium – Symphony Orchestra

Première – 4 April 1955, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston, Charles Munch, Conductor

#### *Canticum sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci nominis* (1956)

Medium – Tenor and Baritone Soloists, Chorus, Orchestra, and Organ

Première – 13 September 1956, Saint Mark's Basilica, Venice, Igor Stravinsky, Conductor

#### *Agon* (1957)

Medium – Symphony Orchestra

Première – 17 June 1957, Los Angeles, Robert Craft, Conductor

*Threni: id est Lamentationes Jeremiae prophetae* (1958)

Medium – Soprano, Alto, Tenor (I & II), Bass, and Basso Profondo Soloists, Chorus, and Orchestra

Première – 23 September 1956, Sala della Scuola Grand di San Rocco, Venice, Igor Stravinsky, conductor

*Epitaphium (In memoriam Prince Max Egon von Fürstenburg)* (1959)

Medium – Flute, Clarinet, and Harp

Première – 17 October 1959, Donaueshingen Festival

*Double Canon (Raoul Dufy in Memoriam)* (1959)

Medium – String Quartet

Première – 20 December 1959, Town Hall, New York City

*Movements for Piano and Orchestra* (1960)

Medium – Piano Solo and Symphony Orchestra

Première – 10 January 1960, Town Hall, New York City, Igor Stravinsky, Conductor, Margrit Weber, Soloist

*A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* (1962)

Medium – Speaker, Alto and Tenor Soloists, Chorus, and Orchestra

Première – 23 February 1962, Basel, Switzerland, Paul Sacher, Conductor

*Anthem: “The Dove descending breaks the air...”* (1962)

Medium – SATB Chorus

Première – 19 February 1962, Monday Evening Concerts, Los Angeles, Robert Craft, Conductor

*The Flood* (1962)

Medium – Speakers, Tenor and Bass (I & II) Soloists, Chorus, and Orchestra

Première – 14 June 1962, CBS Television Network

*Elegy for J. F. K.* (1964)

Medium – Baritone Soloist & Clarinet Trio

Première – 6 April 1964, Monday Evening Concerts, Los Angeles, Robert Craft, Conductor



*Fanfare for a New Theatre* (1964)

Medium – Two Trumpets

Première – 19 April 1964, Lincoln Center, New York City

*Abraham and Isaac* (1964)

Medium – Baritone Soloist and Chamber Orchestra

Première – 23 August 1964, Jerusalem, Robert Craft, Conductor

*Variations, In Memoriam Aldous Huxley* (1965)

Medium – Symphony Orchestra

Première – 17 April 1965, Orchestra Hall, Chicago, Robert Craft, Conductor

*Introitus (T. S. Eliot in Memoriam)* (1965)

Medium – Male Chorus & Chamber Ensemble

Première – 17 April 1965, Orchestra Hall, Chicago, Robert Craft, Conductor

*Requiem Canticles* (1966)

Medium – Contralto & Bass Soloists, Chorus, and Orchestra

Première – 6 October 1966, McCarter Theatre, Princeton, New Jersey, Robert Craft, Conductor

*The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* (1966)

Medium – Soprano & Piano

Première – 31 October 1966, Monday Evening Concerts, Los Angeles, Peggy Bonini, Soprano and Ingold Dahl, Piano

APPENDIX B:

SELECT DISCOGRAPY OF STRAVINSKY'S LATE WORKS

*Cantata*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VIII, In New Directions*

Mary Ann Hart, mezzo-soprano; Thomas Bogdam, tenor  
The Gregg Smith Singers, The Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Music Masters 01612-67158-2

*Stravinsky: Sacred Choral Works*

Rosemary Hardy, soprano; Ian Bostridge, tenor  
Netherlands Chamber Choir, Schönberg Ensemble  
Reinbert De Leeuw, conductor  
Phillips 454 477-2

*Septet*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VIII, In New Directions*

The Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Music Masters Classics 01612-67158-2

*Three Songs from William Shakespeare*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VIII, In New Directions*

Catherine Ciesinski, mezzo-soprano  
The Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Music Masters Classics 01612-67158-2

*In memoriam Dylan Thomas*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VIII, In New Directions*

Jon Humphries, tenor  
The Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Robert Craft, Conductor  
Music Masters Classics 01612-67158-2

*Canticum sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci nominis*

*Stravinsky: Symphony of Psalms, Mass, Motets, Canticum sacrum*

John Mark Ainsley, tenor; Stephen Roberts, baritone  
Choir of Westminster Cathedral  
The City of London Sinfonia  
James O'Donnell, conductor  
Hyperion CDA66437

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VII*

Jon Humphries, tenor; David Evitts, baritone  
The Gregg Smith Singers  
The Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Music Masters Classics 01612-67152-2

*Agon*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume IV, American Stravinsky*

The Orchestra of St. Luke's  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Music Masters Classics 01612-67113-2

*Threni: id est Lamentationes Jeremiae prophetae*

*Stravinsky: Volume VI*

Julie Moffat, soprano; Jennifer Lane, mezzo-soprano  
Martyn Hill, first tenor; Joseph Cornwell, second tenor  
David Wilson-Johnson, first bass; Martin Robson, second bass  
The Simon Joly Chorale  
The Philharmonia  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Koch International Classics CD7514

*Movements*

*Stravinsky: Piano Works*

Michel Béroff, piano  
Orchestre de Paris  
Seiji Ozawa, conductor  
EMI Classics 7243 5 86073 2 1

*Epitaphium*

*Igor Stravinsky, Volume XII*

Columbia Symphony Orchestra  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Sony Classical SMK 46 302

*A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer*

*Stravinsky, Volume VII*

David Wilson-Johnson, Speaker; Jennifer Lane, mezzo-soprano  
The Gregg Smith Singers  
The Philharmonia  
Robert Craft, conductor  
Koch International Classics 3-7477-2 HI

*Anthem: "The Dove descending breaks the air..."*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VII*

The Gregg Smith Singers

Robert Craft, conductor

Music Masters Classics 01612-67152-2

*The Flood*

*Stravinsky: The Flood U. A.*

Peter Hall, tenor; David Wilson-Johnson, bass-baritone

Stephen Richardson, bass; Michael Berkeley, Bernard Jacobson,

Lucy Shelton, Peter Hall, Soloists of New London Chamber Choir

New London Chamber Choir

London Sinfonietta

Oliver Knussen, conductor

Deutsche Grammophon 447 068-2 GH

*Abraham and Isaac*

*Stravinsky the Composer: Volume VIII, In New Directions*

Stephen Varcoe, baritone

The Orchestra of St. Luke's

Robert Craft, conductor

Music Masters 01612-67158-2

*Stravinsky: The Flood U. A.*

David Wilson-Johnson, bass-baritone

London Sinfonietta

Oliver Knussen, conductor

Deutsche Grammophon 447 068-2 GH

*Igor Stravinsky, Volume XII*

Richard Frisch, baritone

Columbia Symphony Orchestra

Robert Craft, conductor

Sony Classical SMK 46 302

*Elegy for J. F. K.*

*The Essential Igor Stravinsky*

Cathy Berberian, Soprano

Paul E. Howland, Jack Kreiselman, and Charles Russo, Clarinets

Sony Classical Legacy J2K 89910

*Fanfare for a New Theatre*

*Stravinsky: Shadow Dances*

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Deutsche Grammophon 289 453 458-2 GH

*Variations (Aldous Huxley in Memoriam)*

*Igor Stravinsky, Volume XII*

Columbia Symphony Orchestra

Robert Craft

Sony Classical SMK 46 302

*Stravinsky: The Flood U. A.*

London Sinfonietta

Oliver Knussen, conductor

Deutsche Grammophon 447 068-2 GH

*Introitus*

*Stravinsky: Sacred Choral Works*

Netherlands Chamber Choir

Schönberg Ensemble

Reinbert De Leeuw, conductor

Phillips 454 477-2

*Requiem Canticles*

*Igor Stravinsky, Volume XII*

Linda Anderson, soprano; Elaine Bonazzi, alto

Charles Bressler, tenor; Donald Gramm, bass

Columbia Symphony Orchestra

Ithaca College Concert Choir

Robert Craft, conductor

Sony Classical SMK 46 302

*Stravinsky: The Flood U. A.*

Susan Bickley, contralto

David Wilson-Johnson, bass-baritone

New London Chamber Choir

London Sinfonietta

Oliver Knussen, conductor

Deutsche Grammophon 447 068-2 GH

*The Owl and the Pussy-cat*

*The Essential Igor Stravinsky*

Adrienne Albert, Soprano

Robert Craft, Piano

Sony Classical Legacy J2K 89910

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