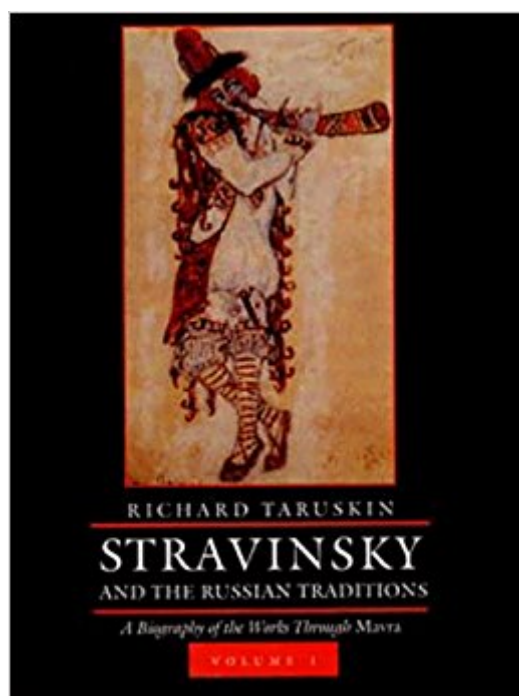


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Stravinsky And The Russian Traditions: A Biography Of The Works Through Mavra, Two-volume Set



Synopsis

This book undoes 50 years of mythmaking about Stravinsky's life in music. During his spectacular career, Igor Stravinsky underplayed his Russian past in favor of a European cosmopolitanism. Richard Taruskin has refused to take the composer at his word. In this long-awaited study, he defines Stravinsky's relationship to the musical and artistic traditions of his native land and gives us a dramatically new picture of one of the major figures in the history of music. Taruskin draws directly on newly accessible archives and on a wealth of Russian documents. In Volume One, he sets the historical scene: the St. Petersburg musical press, the arts journals, and the writings of anthropologists, folklorists, philosophers, and poets. Volume Two addresses the masterpieces of Stravinsky's early maturity; *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, and *Les Noces*. Taruskin investigates the composer's collaborations with Diaghilev to illuminate the relationship between folklore and modernity. He elucidates the Silver Age ideal of "neonationalism"; the professional appropriation of motifs and style characteristics from folk art; and how Stravinsky realized this ideal in his music. Taruskin demonstrates how Stravinsky achieved his modernist technique by combining what was most characteristically Russian in his musical training with stylistic elements abstracted from Russian folklore. The stylistic synthesis thus achieved formed Stravinsky as a composer for life, whatever the aesthetic allegiances he later professed. Written with Taruskin's characteristic mixture of in-depth research and stylistic verve, this book will be mandatory reading for all those seriously interested in the life and work of Stravinsky.

Book Information

Hardcover: 1800 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; First edition, first printing (full number line) edition (July 15, 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520070992

ISBN-13: 978-0520070998

Product Dimensions: 7 x 6.5 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,403,846 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #63 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Stravinsky #945 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Classical #7720 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music >

Customer Reviews

We are used to thinking of Stravinsky in terms of avant-garde Paris in the 1920s, the epitome of modernism. These two hefty volumes of unassailable scholarship and fascinating detail correct this blinkered vision, which to some extent is a product of Stravinsky's own self-marketing. Richard Taruskin demonstrates Stravinsky's place in the specific cultural traditions of his homeland, pulling together with impressive intellectual breadth the influences of Russian music, art, literature, folklore, religious liturgy, and more. He illustrates the composer's legacy from Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, Scriabin, and Tchaikovsky in the pre-Diaghilev period, and dazzles with his analysis of folk influence in "Petrushka" and on through the famously innovative, yet rooted "The Rite of Spring." Further volumes will be eagerly awaited by all lovers of Stravinsky's music.

Over the past 20 years, Taruskin (Musorgsky, LJ 1/93) has written some of the most provocative and revelatory articles on the music of Stravinsky, particularly from the early "Russian" period. It will come as a great joy, then, to scholars and amateurs alike to delve into this monumental work that, in two volumes, skillfully takes the reader into a fascinating world of Russian anthropology, folklore, and philosophy in search of the roots of Stravinsky's early styles. Drawing on his voluminous knowledge of Russian lore and on archival research materials only recently made available to Western scholars, Taruskin repeatedly and convincingly makes compelling connections between the culture—in the fullest sense—and the music. Volume 1 begins with an overview of Russian civilization at the time of the composer's birth and ends with a groundbreaking analysis of the Rite of Spring. In Volume 2, Taruskin approaches selected later works, including some in the so-called "neo-classical" period, with equal acumen and insight. For scholars who root their analyses in "context," this is a most heartening validation. Essential for all major music collections. —Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, Pa. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Taruskin's 2 volume set into Stravinsky's "Russian" period is still the MOST comprehensive investigation for those wanting a more discernible picture of the gestation of works from that period, including the Firebird, Petrushka, the Rite and Les Noces. For example Taruskin compares wedding laments used by Russian brides with those found in the opening of Les Noces. This link becomes significant when one is trying to resolve how much Stravinsky knew about his Russian heritage during the composition of these works. In his conversation books with Robert Craft, several

inconsistencies emerge as to the influence of Russian music on Stravinsky's own music. For an interesting read, check out Taruskin's article, "Stravinsky and the traditions: Why the memory hole?" in *Opus Magazine* 1987. Getting back to the books, of particular significance is a "thematic" catalog of folk materials in which Taruskin attempts to reconstruct the origins of Stravinsky's Russian masterpieces. I did not give the book 5 stars because I reserve that for the rarest of rarities which are reserved for books/movies/cds which provoke thought in the most unexpected of ways and are unlike anything else like the movie "Being John Malkovich". Another insightful and recent book on early Stravinsky (purely biographical) is Stephen Walsh's "Stravinsky : A Creative Spring : Russia and France, 1882-1934".

This is an extraordinary book which will re-define Stravinsky scholarship. It is by far the best book published on Stravinsky, with perhaps one exception (*The Apollonian Clockwork* by Andriessen and Schoenberger). Taruskin's scholarship is of the highest quality, his knowledge of Russian music awe-inspiring, and the revelations he uncovers simply by being a Russian-speaker investigating the sources first-hand make this book a watershed in the way we think about Stravinsky. This book only takes the story to 1923 - I can only hope Mr Taruskin is working on the next volume as I write.

"The Rite of Spring" is a work of a Russian composer on a Russian sujet. But that a serious musicologist tries to tell me that, due to a few vague allusions to traditional folk tunes, it is a pure product of the Russian musical tradition. Please! No doubt, it is work of genius, a great dark musical vision, but, conceding that in its spirit it is a "authentic" Russian composition, in its composing strategies it owes Debussy and Ravel much more than any Russian composer. Frankly, I don't understand why Taruskin tries so hard to hide this vital influence on Stravinsky in this book. Though Stravinsky emancipated from these influences in later years, the impact on his early ballet music was tremendous. And Stravinsky was the last one to deny it. Surely it is worth to discuss the influences in detail, since there are a lot of interferences. Debussy and Ravel themselves were strongly influenced by Russian composers like Mussorgsky and Borodin. But to blind this part out of the composer biography is just not possible if you want to give a comprehensive picture. The plenty musical examples that Taruskin offers documenting the sources of Stravinsky's compositions are too selective in this respect. It might though be admitted that the impressionistic influences are harder to describe since they refer less to thematic references but much more to matters of technique. There would have been a great opportunity in these extensive volumes to look at all this in detail. Instead of this Taruskin simplifies things or makes awkward derivations. The bitonal

Petruschka chord-combination c major/f-sharp major for example happens to be already accidentally in Wagners "Siegfried" and happens even literally in the cadenza-like part of Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" where Stravinsky most likely took his inspiration from. It's just strange and exerted to derive it from Rimsky's system of "octatonic" chord-combinations. Apropos "octatonic", even to claim this system, that Rimsky theoretically fixated for his teaching, as a Russian specific is strange enough, since it is well known that those harmonic influences came to Russian music through Berlioz, Liszt and especially Wagner. Despite this serious objections, Taruskin deserves a lot of praise for his great research. I never read such a brilliant report about the history of Russian music between Glinka and Stravinsky and the circle around Diaghilev with all its paradoxes. An enormously interesting book despite the fact that its main thesis, i.e. that Stravinsky is rooted mainly in the Russian tradition, stays on very shaky ground.

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