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# The Repatriation of Igor Stravinsky

I. F. STRAVINSKII: STAT'I I MATERIALY. Compiled by *L. S. D'iachkova*. Edited by *B. M. Iarustovsky*. Moscow: "Sovetskii kompozitor," 1973. 527 pp. 2.86 rubles.

In July 1970, when the composer had less than a year left to live, his niece Xenia Stravinsky (the daughter of his elder brother Iurii) traveled from Leningrad to Évian-les-Bains on an official mission. The aim of that mission was interpreted by the composer's intimates as: bring him home, "dead or alive." To quote from Robert Craft's *Chronicle of a Friendship*, "If it is the latter [i.e., alive], he will receive the world's best medical care, as well as a house, car, chauffeur, and every comfort and even luxury. If it is the former [i.e., a voluntary posthumous return], he may be assured of the highest state honors as well as a niche next to Pushkin or Tolstoy." It was clearly to be one of those symbol-laden repatriations which the Soviet government holds so dear, works so hard to achieve, and which it invariably represents to the world (as it had in such divergent cases as those of Alexander Kuprin, Sergei Prokofiev, and Marina Tsvetaeva) as the returning artist's total and unreserved endorsement of the entire Soviet system.

Stravinsky chose to remain in the West and to be buried in Venice. Nevertheless, the officially permitted repatriation of his music, memoirs, and critical writings, initiated at the time of his state visit to the USSR in 1962, has been gathering momentum since the time of his death. Articles and books by Soviet authors about him have been appearing every year or so; pictures of Stravinsky can now be seen in the phonograph record sections of the *Beriozka* hard-currency stores in Moscow and Leningrad, next to those of other great Russian composers; and in 1971 a carefully selected (and heavily censored) volume of excerpts from the first four volumes of the Stravinsky–Robert Craft discussions and reminiscences (Igor Stravinsky, *Dialogi*, Leningrad: "Muzyka," 1971) was brought out. Now Stravinsky has been given the ultimate official Soviet accolade, one of those *Stat'i i issledovaniia* or *Stat'i i materialy* volumes which are the musician's or painter's equivalent of a writer's having an issue of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* devoted to his life and work. An imperial-sounding edict by the minister of culture, Ekaterina Furtseva, with its capitalized PRIKAZYVAIU (I HEREBY COMMAND), printed on the reverse of the title page, makes any future hostility to Stravinsky in the Soviet press a potential *lèse-majesté* and sets the tone for the new official

approach to his person by referring to him as the "outstanding Russian composer."

And thus the musician reviled for decades as a traitor to his people, a capitalist lackey of Wall Street, and a reactionary mystic has now been returned to the fold. One has to marvel at the adaptability of the Soviet cultural establishment, when one considers the obstacles and inner contradictions it had to overcome in order to grant full recognition to Stravinsky. It was not simply the mere fact of his emigration. Glazunov and Rakhmaninov had also emigrated, yet their music had always remained a part of Soviet musical culture (the Glazunov equivalent of *Stat'i i materialy* was published in two volumes in 1959; at least four analogous collections devoted to Rakhmaninov have appeared between 1945 and 1957). But Stravinsky, unlike the conventional Glazunov and the musically conservative Rakhmaninov, was one of the creators and presiding genii of the musical sensibility of our century, the very embodiment of that modernist spirit which the aesthetics of socialist realism, with its total commitment to the nineteenth-century views of Chernyshevsky and Stasov, is duty-bound to abhor and to execrate. Yet the Soviet musicologists are now being COMMANDED by their government to study and to appreciate Stravinsky. It is hard not to be reminded of Stalin's similar order on the subject of Mayakovsky, issued in 1935. The result of Stalin's command was the appearance of a whole school of Mayakovsky criticism dedicated to proving that Mayakovsky, the founder and leader of the Russian Futurist movement, was all along an enemy of modernist art. Are we now in for studies of Stravinsky as an enemy of modern music?

For the moment, at least, the emphasis is not on modernism, but on patriotism. The first of four sections of *Stat'i i materialy* consists of eulogies and testimonials by prominent Soviet musicians. They devote most of the space allocated to them to assertions of Stravinsky's Russian authenticity—as meaningful a pursuit, one would think, as a search for military themes in *War and Peace* (Stravinsky's equally self-evident internationalist outlook, however, is hardly mentioned, lest anyone take him for a cosmopolitan). Dmitrii Shostakovich, who in the 1950s had called Stravinsky a traitor to his country on the pages of *Sovetskaia muzyka*, now admits that he had always loved and studied Stravinsky's music. "The spirit of Russia is inextinguishable in the heart of this genuine, truly major talent, brought forth by Russian soil and united to it by blood," writes Shostakovich, probably not realizing how closely he echoes the *Blut und Boden* phraseology of certain German critics who wrote in a similar vein about Beethoven during the National Socialist period. Aram Khachaturian admits he does not care for Stravinsky's later work and cautions the Soviet readers against taking seriously any of Stravinsky's criticism of "great Russian musicians" or his "anti-civic" statements, since these sacrileges

must actually have been committed by some unnamed "businessmen" who supposedly surrounded Stravinsky and kept speaking on his behalf. Just to be on the safe side, Khachaturian concludes by evoking Lenin and asserting his own fealty to Leninist principles in music. Tikhon Khrennikov sanctimoniously bemoans Stravinsky's long absence from his homeland which cheated him of the opportunity to compose patriotic epics, such as Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko* and *Alexander Nevsky*. Refreshingly free from the cant and hypocrisy that characterize the rest of the testimonial section are violinist David Oistrakh's candid admission that he forced himself to lose interest in Stravinsky's music when "certain attitudes" to it became mandatory "during a particular period"; and composer Rodion Shchedrin's (with whose recent ballet *Anna Karenina* Soviet music seems to take its first tentative step into the second half of the twentieth century) recollection of the explosive impact of Stravinsky on the Soviet music students of the late 1950s, when his previously forbidden music suddenly became available and performable.

The second section of the book offers the Soviet reader selected portions of Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music* (without so much as a mention of its fifth section, "The Avatars of Russian Music," a trenchant analysis of Russian aesthetics and Soviet musical policies) and some fragments from *Themes and Episodes* and *Retrospectives and Conclusions*, the last two of the Stravinsky–Craft literary collaborations. The translations from the English (*Poetics of Music* was translated, quite decently on the whole, from the French original) are occasionally inexact, but more often they are downright sloppy. In the brief commentary on *Orpheus*, an example from the Concerto for Strings is identified as coming from the Violin Concerto; the violist for whom the Elegy for Viola Solo was composed is identified as "violinist"; and the phrase "the tantara which almost spells 'Taps'" (i.e., the military bugle signal called *otboi* in Russian) is rendered as "the fanfares which almost replace 'light tapping'" (*postukivaniia*). One page later Stravinsky's description of the pitch series on which his *Variations* is based, "a succession of notes that came to my mind as a melody," is translated as "a succession of notes that arose in my consciousness as a ready model." Since the work of Soviet translators is usually highly competent, the wretched quality of the translations in this collection and of the Stravinsky texts in the 1971 *Dialogi*—where the title of the *Symphony in Three Movements* was rendered throughout as "Symphony in Three Motions" (*Simfoniia v trekh dvizheniiakh*, instead of *v trekh chastiakh*)—seems hard to account for.

In terms of censors' cuts (indicated by series of dots in brackets or at times not indicated at all), the texts in the present volume have been gone over with greater stringency than those in the 1971 *Dialogi*. A casual spot check reveals that among the passages from which Soviet readers had to be

protected are Stravinsky's mild praise for wealthy patrons of the arts in the West, his statement that many people preferred the music of Wagner to that of Verdi merely because they thought of Wagner as a revolutionary, and the information that Stravinsky's one-time son-in-law (Iurii Mandelshtam, who is, however, identified in the notes to Stravinsky's letters in a later section as an "émigré poet") was a contributor to the émigré journal *Sovremennyia zapiski*. In Stravinsky's letter to Diaghilev about the significance of Tchaikovsky's ballets, which is translated from the English text found in Eric Walter White's *Stravinsky* (University of California Press, 1966), the statement that the city of St. Petersburg was connected for Stravinsky with the recollection of Tsar Alexander III, whom the composer once saw in his childhood, is replaced by a few dots.

The third section of the collection is taken up with studies of Stravinsky's music by Soviet musicians and musicologists. It is, by and large, on the disappointing side. The conductor Gennadii Rozhdestvensky compares the orchestration of the original score of *Petrushka* with the composer's 1947 revision of it, without saying anything that is not obvious to anyone who has taken the trouble to look at the two scores. The composer Edison Denisov tabulates the percussion instruments found in various Stravinsky scores but does not seem to have anything to say about them. G. Alfeevskaia's essay on the *Symphony of Psalms* documents the unexpected similarities between the last movement of that work and Sergei Rakhmaninov's *Vespers* (*Vsenoshchnoe bdenie*, 1915), including Stravinsky's use of two melodies found in the Rakhmaninov work, which may, however, have been drawn by both of them from some common source in the Russian ecclesiastical musical tradition.

The two genuinely valuable contributions to Stravinsky scholarship that this section contains are the fragments from the journals of the choral conductor and authority on Russian folk music Alexander Kastalsky (1856–1926) and the essay "Paradoxality as a Feature of Stravinsky's Musical Logic" by the composer Alfred Shnitke. Kastalsky heartily disliked both *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces*, but his command of the Russian folk song idiom enabled him to perceive with clarity and insight the exact manner of Stravinsky's use of this folk idiom in these two works. Shnitke, writing in a jaunty, irreverent manner which is utterly untypical of Soviet criticism when dealing with an admired figure, but which is so much more suitable to discussing Stravinsky than the customary hushed tones and mechanical genuflections, very ably discerns and documents a hitherto unperceived principle in Stravinsky's musical thinking.

The real showpiece of the book is its fourth section, which contains sixty-two letters by Stravinsky from various Soviet archives. As the composer's close associate, Robert Craft, pointed out in his *New York Review of Books*

piece on *Stat'i i materialy*, these letters are documents of major biographical and cultural significance. Stravinsky's letters to his teacher Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov of 1907 testify to the fledgling composer's closeness to and respect for the older musician in a manner that one would not expect from Stravinsky's later recollections of that period. The same warmth and intimacy permeates the young Stravinsky's correspondence with Rimsky-Korsakov's widow and his two sons, who were for a time Stravinsky's closest friends. The letters to Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov contain marvelously detailed accounts of Stravinsky's search for the new musical language he discovered in *Petrushka* and in *The Rite of Spring*, which was called *The Great Sacrifice* (*Velikaia zhertva*) in the initial stages of composition. Following a visit to St. Petersburg in December 1910, Stravinsky announced that he had found the right ambience for the final scene of *Petrushka*: "The final act is shaping up in an interesting way: continuous rapid tempi, major keys that reek of some kind of Russian vittles [*sned'*]—cabbage soup, perhaps—of sweat, of high glistening boots, of concertinas. Intoxication! Gambling fever! What's Monte Carlo in comparison?" But Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov failed to respond to this winning enthusiasm. After the international success of *Petrushka*, the entire Rimsky-Korsakov clan turned against Stravinsky, as did the majority of prominent Russian music critics of the time, causing the young composer chagrin and pain with their barrage of "gustaia gazetnaia rugan'." Andrei actually preferred the music of his brother-in-law Maximilian Steinberg to that of Stravinsky, as can be seen from his monograph on Steinberg published in 1928.

Pending the publication of *Selected Letters of Igor Stravinsky* that has been announced by the "Sovetskii kompozitor" publishing house, the selection of letters in *Stat'i i materialy* is a major new source of information for any student of the composer's work or of Russian culture during the last decade before the Revolution.