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Review

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*Confronting Stravinsky:
Man, Musician, and Modernist*
Edited by Jann Pasler
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986
xx, 380 pp., illus., index

REVIEWER

Jerome Kohl

Confronting Stravinsky is an anthology of articles selected from papers presented in September 1982 at the International Stravinsky Symposium, held at UCSD and directed by Jann Pasler, who also edited this book. She conceived the Symposium

as a gathering that would be both international and interdisciplinary . . . in the hope of bringing attention to varying analytical and methodological perspectives and repairing possible biases of those who knew Stravinsky only in his American period. The theoretical analysis that has dominated Stravinsky scholarship in recent years was balanced with points of view derived from cultural history, aesthetics, performance practice, painting, and dance. . . . By creating a lively context for the interchange of ideas, we hoped to arrive at a new understanding of the composer and his work through the cross-fertilization of ideas and methodologies from different parts of the world and from many disciplines. (p. ix)

While the book does not include all of the papers from the Symposium (in her preface, Pasler mentions a few omitted items in passing—and one in some detail), it reflects this catholicity of intent. Indeed, some of the most compelling reading is to be found in the less conventional items included, amongst them Simon Karlinsky's essay concerning the influence of Russian preliterate theater on Stravinsky's early works, and Richard Taruskin's consideration of the impact of the late nineteenth-century Russian folk-art movement on the formation of Stravinsky's "Russian" style.

Because of its wide range of views, and the intellectual strength of many of the articles included, this book should be in the library of any serious student of Stravinsky's music. While fairness demands it be said that no conference can enforce attendance by representatives of all factions, it is nevertheless true that the dust-jacket blurb's enthusiastic characterization of the contents as "an indispensable overview of Stravinsky scholarship in the 1980s" is misleading to the extent that many important positions are not represented. This is especially the case with regard to the theoretical/analytical essays which form the bulk of the volume, but also applies to the deliberate exclusion of one item representing a major school of thought not widely favored in American circles. But before considering

what might have been, it would be well to set forth what this book *does* contain.

Confronting Stravinsky is a handsome volume—as we expect from the University of California Press—and unusual among such anthologies for its inclusion of eight beautifully produced color plates, four each illustrating editor Pasler's article "Music and Spectacle in *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*," and designer David Hockney's "Set Designing for Stravinsky." While there is an overlap of subject area with Alexander Schouvaloff and Victor Borovsky's recent picture book, *Stravinsky on Stage* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1982), there is duplication of only two of the four plates showing Valentine Hugo's pastel drawings of the 1913 premiere of *The Rite of Spring*—with intriguingly extreme color differences. The Hockney designs in the two books, on the other hand, include no duplications.

Confronting Stravinsky contains twenty-one papers, which are nominally divided into six sections, though in fact there are three large divisions, each subdivided into two parts. The first of these larger divisions comprises interdisciplinary studies, while the last is a miscellany including personal reminiscences (by Edwin Allen and Lawrence Morton), studies on Stravinsky's attitude to the pianola and the violin (by Rex Lawson and Boris Schwarz, respectively), an account of the bitter rivalry with Schoenberg (by Leonard Stein), and an essay on the "*Three Japanese Lyrics and Japonisme*" (by Takashi Funayama), with a concluding appendix consisting of an annotated selection by Robert Craft from "A Catalogue of Books and Music Inscribed to and/or Autographed and Annotated by Igor Stravinsky."

Between these outer sections lie nine articles grouped under two headings: "Theoretical Perspectives" (dealing with music from the Russian and Neoclassical phases) and "Compositional Practices in the Late Music." As Pasler states in her introduction, it is this "theoretical analysis that has dominated Stravinsky scholarship in recent years," and analyses dominate this book as well, taking up slightly more than half of the total number of the volume's pages.

* * *

Pride of place, at the beginning of this analytical section, is given to Allen Forte, who sets out ambitiously—perhaps *too* ambitiously—to explain the tonal syntax common to most of Stravinsky's "Russian period" works from *The Nightingale* (1908) to the Three Pieces for String Quartet (1914). As his title "Harmonic Syntax and Voice Leading in Stravinsky's Early Music" indicates, Forte argues that the forces that determine the successions of a relatively limited number of harmonic units (set-types), which are subsets of the octatonic/diatonic system, are to be discovered in the voice leading.

There are in this essay three principal departures from Forte's earlier writing on Stravinsky (most notably *The Harmonic Organization of The*

Rite of Spring [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978]): (1) the acceptance, as an article of faith, of the octatonic/diatonic hypothesis advanced by Arthur Berger and Pieter van den Toorn; (2) a tentative expansion of the notion of complementary set-types to a new formulation of “complement extension”; and (3) advancement of the thesis that voice-leading can account for the organization of sets within a work.

Forte has, of course, discussed the complement relation between sets in Stravinsky on previous occasions,¹ but here he is not restricting himself to pairs of actual sets. “Complement extension” is introduced without definition on p. 109, but it quickly becomes evident that what Forte means by the term is that a pitch-class set may be considered as present if its complement is present. For example, the presence of 5-35 (the anhemitonic pentatonic scale) implies its complement 7-35 (the diatonic heptad). Naturally, the musical context must be taken into account: it would not do to insist that classical Chinese music is essentially diatonic because of its pentatonic basis. This is problematic for Forte’s discussion because of the potential conflict with the assumption of a basic octatonic/diatonic superset as the background context. The complement relation requires an all-chromatic context—unless one wishes to invoke complementation within an octatonic (or diatonic, or “master diatonic octad”) framework where, for example, the complement of 5-32 would be (octatonic) 3-8 or (master-diatonic-octad) 3-11 (it does not occur in the diatonic heptad, and so has no complement in that context). This fundamental ambivalence concerning Stravinsky’s referential pitch framework explains Forte’s tentativeness in advancing this notion of complement extension (p. 109).

While Forte mentions voice leading frequently throughout the article, his discussion fails to adequately explain how a process of voice leading “close to the traditional meaning of that term” (p. 95) can be held to account for the set-*type* groupings he describes, and toward the end of the article (p. 119 and Example 7.17) he describes an octave-displaced, voice-rotated voice leading that is far from “traditional.” This parallels his tendency to absent-mindedly slip (here as elsewhere) from contexts appropriate to the pc set-types described by his taxonomy to conditions requiring the reader to understand the name to represent a particular pc set, or some other more narrow application. He even goes so far as to invoke registrally fixed *pitches*, which are necessary in order that “the traditional meaning” of voice leading might be applicable.

The reverse of this operation also occurs: calling upon voice-leading as a power to effect structures which only involve abstract pc set types. A particularly conspicuous instance is the explanation of Example 7.10 on p. 111, where we are asked to believe that “the voice leading of the passage forms the symmetric succession 4-17 / 4-28 / 4-26 / 4-28 / 4-17.” In the first place, “traditional” voice leading might well allow replacement of, say, a semitone by a whole tone, so that it becomes necessary to show indi-

vidually why each interval in the passage is necessary to the voice leading (if any interval is necessary only to provide a particular set class, then there is a chicken-and-egg problem with the theory); in the second place, the same symmetrical arrangement would still exist if any of the pitches were transposed upwards or downwards by octaves, and indeed would still exist if any of the constituent sets were to be pc transposed as a unit by any interval class whatever. Forte's hypothesis is perhaps not untenable, but requires a far fuller explanation than he offers here.

In this and in other things, the writing betrays haste in assembly and, perhaps, injudicious pruning after an earlier, much longer draft. Forte's more-than-usually telegraphic manner here suggests that the article is directed at an elite of initiates. How odd, then, that he is at such pains near the beginning to explain some of the most rudimentary aspects of his approach, even while neglecting some others. For example, the expression "master diatonic octad" is introduced, and its pitch-class makeup is listed in a table, but no explanation is given of why it is so called, nor how an eight-tone collection is to be considered diatonic (for the uninitiated, this octad constitutes the familiar diatonic heptad plus one pc which allows the collection to be interpreted as a major scale plus $b\hat{2}$, $\sharp\hat{4}$, or $b\hat{7}$, depending on the inversion and starting point chosen; one manifestation of this, of course, is the pc collection drawn from the medieval system of *musica recta*).

Odder still is the defensive tone of much of his introductory material, but odd to the point of embarrassment is his footnote 5, in which he defends his taxonomy (the least controversial aspect of his approach, surely!) by incorrectly asserting that "set names are preferable to prime form numerical notation because the name is general, applying to any pitch form of the set" (p. 96). It is of course true that the "name is general," but then so is numerical notation, unless zero is arbitrarily assigned to some particular pc. It is its identification of set types *to within inversion* that sets Forte's taxonomy apart from the usual use of numerical notation. Haste is the only explanation for this sort of slip (and others, such as the following: p. 115, the "triads" in Ex. 7.13 include six non-triads out of sixteen chords; p. 112, "At 135 [in *The Firebird*] the upper voice . . . introduces new sets . . ." where there are no new sets—not even transpositions of set-types!), and yet the book was four years in preparation after the conference for which the paper was originally prepared.

The examples, too, present some problems. For instance, Example 7.9, in which one eventually gathers that the tetrachord brackets over pairs of pcs are intended to encompass the parallel pairs in the adjoining rows as well; or Example 7.10, where the letter-name analysis includes an F \sharp which is conspicuously lacking in m. 101 of the score excerpt above it. Another confusion has to do with the text reference on p. 109 to Example 7.8: the reader will look in vain for leitmotivic tetrachords "on the upper

right portion of the letter-name graph.” (Perhaps the wording is retained from an earlier draft of the paper, and the diagram was changed: the correct reading would be “lower left portion of the diagram on the facing page.”)

* * *

Pieter van den Toorn’s “Octatonic Pitch Structure in Stravinsky,” which follows the Forte article, is a welcome contrast in its better-constructed argument, and its careful (though somewhat stiff) writing. As a matter of fact, it too addresses the issues of harmony and voice leading, and in a generally more satisfactory manner, though anyone hoping for a better demonstration than hitherto offered of an octatonic presence in Stravinsky’s music will be disappointed.

Despite his sweeping title, van den Toorn restricts himself to a discussion of *The Rite of Spring*, with brief closing remarks on *Symphony of Psalms*. The material on Part 1 of *The Rite* is drawn from van den Toorn’s first book, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), and the material on *The Rite* Part 2 was almost immediately republished (with myriad minor alterations to wording, but none of substance) as chapter 6 of his second book, *Stravinsky and The Rite of Spring: The Beginnings of a Musical Language* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

Van den Toorn’s construal of Stravinsky’s syntax differs from Forte’s in that while Forte posits successions of set types determined by voice leading, van den Toorn sees the fabric of *The Rite* in terms of nested sets—principally subsets of the octatonic system.

The relatively polished surface and smooth construction of van den Toorn’s development of thought is seductive. His examples in fact consist mostly of very short segments, and on close inspection his arguments seem more clever than profound. Whether these local constructions may be convincingly extended to larger arcs of the composition is yet to be demonstrated.

Like Forte, van den Toorn too readily infers the presence of an octatonic set on the basis of subsets, which could, after all, be produced from a different source set. Most obviously, the melodic minor scale contains a segment (ascending scale degrees $\hat{6}$ through $\hat{4}$) that accounts for six of the eight successive octatonic pitches (invocation of the sharpened fourth scale degree supplies the remainder), and there are a number of theorists who still find a diatonic/tonal genesis of many such smaller sets more convincing than the octatonic explanation (one among many recent examples of dissent is V. Kofi Agawu, “Stravinsky’s Mass and Stravinsky Analysis,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 11 (1989), 139–63). While these are not necessarily irreconcilable views, it is perhaps a failure of Pasler’s ecumenical intention that no papers included in this book represent such a “tonalist” perspective on

Stravinsky's earlier music. The impression left is that the octatonic basis of Stravinsky's earlier music is—now that Forte has joined van den Toorn—unchallenged.

* * *

Louis Cyr's contribution, titled "Writing *The Rite Right*," quite naturally—given the shared subject matter—follows van den Toorn's essay. It concerns itself mainly with the variant readings of different editions and manuscripts of *The Rite of Spring*, and rests content with pointing these out, occasionally making differentiations between practical adjustments and outright revisions. It is thus a traditional musicological sketch study rather than an analytical essay. The substance of Cyr's essay has been previously published (in French) as a portion of "*Le Sacre du printemps: Petite Histoire d'une grande partition*," in *Stravinsky: Études et témoignages*, edited by François Lesure (Paris: Éditions Jean-Claude Lattes, 1982), though non-Francophones will be grateful for the English presentation.

* * *

The most interesting and persuasively argued paper in the collection is Jonathan Kramer's "Discontinuity and Proportion in the Music of Stravinsky." Kramer shrewdly observes that harmonic stasis—a frequently remarked trait of Stravinsky's music—not only focuses the listener's attention on rhythm, but also "implies a relatively small number of structural levels. . . . Thus, sections of different lengths can function on the same hierarchical level . . . utterly unlike tonal compositions, in which shorter passages are usually subsidiary to longer sections" (pp. 174–75). From this beginning, Kramer proceeds to an analysis of durational proportions of the sections of several works: the Three Pieces for String Quartet, the first tableau of *Les Noces*, the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, the Sonata for Two Pianos, and *Agon*.

The analysis of *Agon* is the most impressive, particularly as it treats of the entire composition. Indeed, the other analyses seem almost a prelude to it. The account of the Sonata for Two Pianos is the weakest of these in its vague assertion of a governing proportion of "ratios slightly greater than 1:1," and would have been better omitted. The treatment given in his Table 10.1 of the first of the Three Pieces for String Quartet is also troublesome, but only because it is difficult to follow without a score—one glance at which makes everything perfectly clear. Why was this crucial illustration omitted?

On the whole, it is a most stimulating and ingenious discussion, but Kramer does make a number of assertions which demand amplification. Why, for example, should the ratio of 1.19:1 be regarded as "more sophisticated" than 3:2, and by what criterion is the golden mean a "simple ratio"

(let alone equal to 1.6!!—both statements on p. 178); and how, precisely, does generating “proportions from a ratio such as 1.1:1.0 . . . create a compromise between additive and multiplicative procedures” (p. 177)?

* * *

The first “theoretical” section of the book concludes with two contributions from European authors attempting “American-style” mechanical analyses; perhaps in deference to the venue of the conference for which they were written (ironically, given the organizer’s intentions), or perhaps as a shrewd ploy to assure acceptance in an academic environment hostile to a more representatively European approach. (I shall have more to say on this subject presently.)

Gilbert Amy’s “Aspects of the Religious Music of Igor Stravinsky” is riddled with errors and internal contradictions, especially between what is said in the text and what is shown in the illustrations, which are exceptionally prone to inaccuracy. For example, on p. 197 the text states that “in the *Requiem Canticles* . . . the sopranos have only one high C and the bass, only one low A,” whereas the accompanying Example 11.3 shows the range of the piece extending no higher than G on the top of the treble staff, and down to A \sharp in the bass! (Examination of the score reveals the example to be correct for the upper range, but both text and example are in error for the lower limit: the basses descend to a low F in m. 213.) On the same page: “In the *Symphony of Psalms*, the long coda never exceeds a total range of two and a half octaves (Example 11.1),” but the example shows a three-octave range. On page 200 “we compare works a decade apart in time—the *Symphony of Psalms*, the *Mass*, *Threni*, and the *Requiem Canticles*”—works written over a span of thirty-five years! (There may well be a translation problem here, but even if Amy meant to say “works composed at ten-year intervals” he is far off the mark, as the compositions mentioned date from 1930, 1944–48, 1957–58, and 1965–66.)

The article was originally written in French, and numerous awkward passages show the translation to be inept (p. 196: “Can one then induce that Stravinsky’s religious music is a synthesis . . .”). On the other hand, editorial inattention may be charged in this passage from page 204: “In referring to the *Mass*, we have *already noted* a return to medieval sonorities and practices” [my emphases]. There is in fact no such previous mention—at least not in *this* version of the article.

The examples also contain so many errors as to seriously cripple the article. The two excerpts in Example 11.9 and three of the four in Example 11.15, for instance, lack clefs—the former should both be treble (though the D \sharp in the second bar of the second extract is a misprint for D \flat), while the latter should have bass, bass, and treble (beginning of *Les Noces*, which is also deprived of its first note!), respectively. The segment from *Threni* in Example 11.15 (which *does* have clefs) is mislabeled: it is from m. 395

instead of 295. Example 11.13 not only fails to note which measures (21–22) of *Threni* are being illustrated, but also indicates the voice leading incorrectly: the alto should read A♭–B♭, and the tenor G–A.

While some of these shortcomings may be blamed on either the translator or the editor, the principal weakness of this article is its lack of focus: there is no real point being made. It amounts to little more than a tour guide to some favorite passages in Stravinsky's religious music. As Amy is a well-known composer, there may be some value in this with respect to his own compositions, but it casts little light on Stravinsky's music.

Elmer Schönberger and Louis Andriessen fare only slightly better in "The Utopian Unison," where the translation is once again of poor quality. For example, on p. 213: "*When* the perfect consonant [*sic*] actually is reached. . . ." But in substance, this article is no more than an impressionistic assertion that Stravinsky uses displaced unisons (or octaves) in some magical way, such that "wrong notes become so prevalent that they become the norm. It went so far that Stravinsky could make the octave sound like a dissonance." This statement makes a strange conclusion for this short article (7 1/2 pages, half of which is taken up by score extracts), which has only barely stated its premise. The reader's appetite has now been whetted for some demonstration—but none follows.

* * *

The second theoretical/analytical section of the book is devoted to "Compositional Practices in the Late Music," where there is less uncertainty and controversy, owing to Stravinsky's decreased reticence at this period to discuss his compositional procedures, and the analytically comforting presence of twelve-tone rows in much of the music.

The section begins with an essay by Glenn Watkins on "The Canon and Stravinsky's Late Style." Like Louis Cyr's article on *The Rite*, this is more concerned with description and taxonomy than with analysis, though Watkins goes beyond merely cataloguing occurrences of canon in the works from the Cantata (1951–52) to *A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer* (1960–61). He touches on Stravinsky's employment of canonic sections in larger formations, the orchestration, and the importance of canon as a symbol. He stops short, however, of examining pitch relationships amongst lines, except for a brief mention in the last part of the essay, where he discusses late reworkings of early compositions.

* * *

Milton Babbitt's contribution, "Order, Symmetry, and Centricity in Late Stravinsky," is, typically of this author, impeccably reasoned and elegantly composed. This essay is concerned almost exclusively with the *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* (1958), a work which Babbitt has touched on in earlier articles but now treats more exhaustively. Or, to be

more precise, he treats *the construction of the series and the verticals* of the work exhaustively. It is welcome at last to have his discussion of the intricacies of the verticals in print.

However, two unfortunate features mar this essay. The first is the more-than-usually convoluted language in the opening paragraph, the ceremoniousness of which may deter the less-dedicated reader from continuing. The second is a massive typographical error near the bottom of page 253, which badly garbles the text. Happily, these problems are both corrected in a revised form of the essay, which Babbitt presented a few weeks later at a second Stravinsky conference. This has been published as "Stravinsky's Verticals and Schoenberg's Diagonals: A Twist of Fate," in *Stravinsky Retrospectives*, edited by Ethan Haimo and Paul Johnson (Lincoln, Nebraska, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987). Much of the substance also appears, in considerably different form, in chapter 4 (pp. 107–117) of Milton Babbitt, *Words about Music*, edited by Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

* * *

By way of complement to Babbitt's "background analysis" of the *Movements*, Charles Wuorinen and Jeffrey Kresky's "On the Significance of Stravinsky's Last Works" deals with more concrete, surface manifestations of Stravinsky's serial techniques. The effect is more that of an affectionate survey by sympathetic composers than of well-organized analysis, and there is at least one lapse of fact which shakes my confidence in their familiarity with the late works. Stravinsky did not "*always* rotate hexachords by themselves, split off from their full-set contexts."² However, the observations made by these two composers seem at least to amount to fruitful suggestions for further inquiry into the music of Stravinsky's last period. The obvious parallel to Schönberger and Andriessen's similarly anecdotal approach raises the question of why the former fails where this latter succeeds. Perhaps the answer is that Stravinsky's methods are better understood in his later, serial music, while we are still only guessing at his procedures in the earlier phases. Schönberger and Andriessen's intuitions and suggestions therefore rest against an uncertain background, while in the more readily analyzed late music a more intuitive approach is not only unusual, but very welcome.

* * *

We may now consider more fully the merits of the book as a whole. While the jacket blurb suggests a unity of purpose between the Symposium and the book, saying of the essays that "in published form they offer the most ambitious and wide-ranging collection of essays on Stravinsky's art ever published—an indispensable overview of Stravinsky scholarship in the

1980s . . . ,” there is a discrepancy between the expressed intentions of the Symposium’s organizer and the contents of this book, edited by the same person.

I have already indicated some aspects of theory and analysis where this book falls short of being a truly comprehensive overview of Stravinsky scholarship. But an attempted bridge of perhaps the most glaring of the gulfs separating Stravinsky scholars in general *was* represented at the Symposium, and yet is absent from this book. I refer to a substantial article by the Belgian musicologist Célestin Deliège, the sole representative at the Symposium of the currently dominant European line of critical theory, one whose Hegelian/Marxist roots cause most American academics to dismiss peremptorily the entire school of thought, either because they do not believe in its *a priori* assumptions, or because they more generally do not believe that musicology/theory has any business mucking about with sociology and philosophy. (Needless to say, many Europeans find American musicology/theory deficient precisely because it tends to limit itself to the merely mechanical, ignoring the broader philosophical/social issues.)

The reasons for this omission cast an interesting light on the constraints placed on an editor’s control over the contents of a book. Pasler warmly describes Deliège’s paper in an extended reference on p. xii of her introduction, and the interested reader can consult the complete document under the title “Stravinsky: Ideology ↔ Language,” in *Perspectives of New Music* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1988), 82–106. While Pasler appropriately does not mention the circumstances in her preface, it was omitted from the book—over the protests both of the editor and of several of Deliège’s American colleagues who *are* included in the book—at the demand of the editorial board and readers of the University of California Press, who “did not feel the American public (?) could understand this European style of writing and approach to analysis” (Jann Pasler, letter dated 16 August 1985, and conversation with this reviewer on 3 September 1988). Doubtless the board and readers were sincere in their judgement, but this does seem an oddly insular attitude for a publisher that lists London as well as Berkeley and Los Angeles on the half-title page! Given the inclusion of some rather weak contributions from other European authors, it cannot be suggested that Deliège’s article was rejected on the basis of its writing, translation, or clarity of purpose.

It is a pity that the University of California Press, when offered this opportunity to initiate a dialogue with the mainstream of Stravinsky’s “other” (European) milieu, chose to slam shut the door.

Despite this regrettable failure of agreement between the goals of the editor/director and those of the publisher, *Confronting Stravinsky* remains a vitally important book. But the reader must be aware that the purview of this book is not as all-encompassing as the jacket blurb would have us believe.

NOTES

1. *Harmonic Organization*, but also *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 76–83; where, incidentally, the set 7-32 is characterized as “a fundamental structure in the composition” of *The Rite of Spring*, though in the article under discussion, this set does not figure in the table of select pc sets. Has Forte altered his opinion of the importance of this set, or does it just, by chance, happen not to occur in the examples chosen for this particular article?
2. Wuorinen and Kresky, p. 264 (my emphases). For a discussion of the verticals produced by full-series rotations in the Variations for Orchestra, see my article “Exposition in Stravinsky’s Orchestral Variations,” *Perspectives of New Music* 18 (Fall-Winter 1979/Spring-Summer 1980), 391–405; and Paul Schuyler Phillips’s admirable analysis in “The Enigma of *Variations*: A Study of Stravinsky’s Final Work for Orchestra,” *Music Analysis* 3 (1984), 69–89.

