

Review: Stravinsky: Insights and Oversights

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its quality declines, making the going heavy for the composer. Sullivan does the only possible thing: he has recourse to a quasi-Wagnerian synthesis in the hope that it will carry the 'bald and unconvincing narrative'. There is more musical reminiscence here than anywhere else in the work, but even that and the fine orchestration cannot infuse genuine life. The difference between music that is conceived orchestrally (as in Scene 3) and music to which orchestral colours have been applied (as here) is all too evident. This scene is the one into which the date of composition is most deeply imprinted; thus Elsie's character can be appreciated in purely Victorian terms – and those of us who admire Esther Summerson will probably admire 'O pure in heart' – but the appeal is not universal.

The level of musical quality is restored with Ursula's aria in Scene 5, accompanied by strings (Sullivan is saving the woodwind for the highly original opening of Scene 6 and the heavy brass for the Epilogue). The style is sublimated Mendelssohn; the fact that this is a contralto aria with strings inevitably brings 'Woe unto them that forsake Him' (*Elijah*) to mind, though Sullivan is a good deal more cheerful than his august predecessor. As for the Scene 6 duet which the critic of the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* found 'of disquieting triviality',⁴ it is worth noting that it was encored even by the Berlin audience. Modern audiences might well do the same; the public is always more willing to indulge in the sentimental than the critics, as Sullivan had proved to his satisfaction time and again (if anything is disturbing it is, rather, the xenophobia in the German review). Sullivan needed a movement of repose to contrast with the following choral Epilogue, a piece with as fair a share of genius in it as anything in his comic operas. He could scarcely have devised a more apposite conclusion; the brass writing is more idiomatic than usual (especially

for the trombones), and 'The deed divine' is probably his finest fugue. Because he was so eclectic a composer it is easy to fall into the trap of discounting his originality; this Epilogue and Prince Henry's seascape are probably the two movements of which it can be said with the clearest conscience that the composer could be Arthur Sullivan and no other.

Artists whose greatest genius lies in the field of comedy are always notoriously dissatisfied with their lot. They should take comfort from the paradox that the serious usually dates more quickly than the comic, no matter how topical the latter may appear to be. Yet we know more of Sullivan as man and artist because he wrote *The Golden Legend* than would otherwise have been the case, just as we know more of Rossini because he wrote *Guillaume Tell*. Sullivan's personality was extraordinarily complex, and if, having taken account of its apparent contradictions, we conclude that *The Yeomen of the Guard* was his most authentic achievement, we shall need to consider the significance of three works in relation to that opera if the depth of its humanity is to be plumbed: *Iolanthe*, *Princess Ida* and *The Golden Legend*. Ernest Newman, who to the end of his days could not fathom the real reason for Sullivan's success, once said that for a work of art to survive it needed two things: piercing personal vision and consummate style.⁵ *The Golden Legend* is not perfect, but it possesses each of those qualities in sufficient measure to justify its survival. Moreover, the moral point it makes is important: that in a world of greed and barbarity we cannot afford to ignore the virtues of disinterested renunciation and self-sacrifice. And if that is 'earnest', as Sullivan intended, then let us be glad on that account, and perform his serious masterpiece more often in the next hundred years than we have in the last.

⁴P. M. Young: *Sir Arthur Sullivan* (London, 1911), 147

⁵E. Newman: *Wagner as Man and Artist* (London, 2/1923), 360

Stravinsky: Insights and Oversights

Jann Pasler

Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence, ii and iii, ed. Robert Craft
Faber (London, 1984–5); 544pp.; 543pp.;
£35. ISBN 0571 132 529, 0571 133 738

Dearest Bubushkin: the Correspondence of Vera and Igor Stravinsky, 1921–54, with excerpts from Vera Stravinsky's diaries, 1922–71, edited by Robert Craft, translated by Lucia Davidova
Thames & Hudson (London, 1985);
239pp.; £25. ISBN 0 500 013683

How does a major composer live in the 20th century? For Igor Stravinsky's friend and amanuensis Robert Craft, the extent of public interest in such a question has never been an issue. Since the composer died in 1971, Craft has assumed there is an insatiable appetite for information about Stravinsky and his work. In the last four of five years, he has published two picture books, three volumes of correspondence and a chronicle of diary entries and letters from Vera Stravinsky to her husband – all information to which Craft had virtually exclusive access until

this spring when the archives, housed in their own building at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basle, were opened to the public. Although these books raise as many questions as they answer (and, it seems, purposely so), through them Craft has succeeded in provoking inquisitiveness about areas of a composer's life and music that, in the past, have been given short shrift.

What is most remarkable in Craft's recent publications on Stravinsky is the insight they offer into the composer's shrewd business skills. Almost half of vol.iii of his

Selected Correspondence consists of negotiations with his three publishers; a chapter of letters in vol.ii explains loans he made to relatives; and one appendix deals with a lawsuit in which he sued for non-payment of fees. Craft points out that, only days before the première of *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky was in court. Of the letters from Stravinsky himself in these collections, a vast number concern financial arrangements, legal rights to performances or royalties. Like Beethoven, who sold publication rights for his works to companies in several countries at once, Stravinsky was intent on living from what he made from his music and felt no qualms about accepting a commission from the Free Theatre in Moscow to finish *The Nightingale*, leading them to believe they had exclusive rights to its performances, and then selling the same rights to Dyagilev for performances in Paris and London. When he induced his patron Werner Reinhardt to pay for concerts that never took place and called them concessions, Craft calls him a 'master diplomat'; one can see that Stravinsky was also a bit of a trickster.

Stravinsky's correspondence also concerns his numerous collaborations. Together with Craft's appendix on the

Histoire libretto, the Ramuz – Stravinsky correspondence tells an elaborate story (100 pages) of how the two worked out the 'histoire' of 'soldat', as Stravinsky puts it, and reveals what musical ideas the writer contributed. Other letters clarify how Stravinsky worked with Gide on *Perséphone*, Dushkin on the violin – piano pieces, Cocteau and Balanchine on *Jeu de cartes*. One letter from the conductor Pierre Monteux on 5 March 1913 proposes a number of changes in the orchestration of *The Rite of Spring*. Of particular interest are Craft's chapters on Stravinsky's literary collaborations, wherein he traces Walter Nouvel's role in writing *Chroniques de ma vie*, points out numerous errors in the book, explains the contributions of Roland-Manuel and Pierre Souvtchinsky to the *Poétique musicale* and cites the 1500-word sketch with which the book began. These volumes likewise reveal many fascinating projects that Stravinsky turned down: a Dyagilev ballet based on a Byzantine Mass (1914); Picabia's 1923 scenario *Les yeux chauds* (a French version of Kandinsky's *Yellow Sound*); Abel Gance's film version of either *The Rite* or *The Firebird*: a 'cinematographic adaptation' of *Histoire*; a ballet, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, with Bakst,

Gide and Ida Rubenstein; a possible opera with Claudel; and, at Camus' suggestion, a ballet with René Char.

Reading these letters, organized by correspondent, one gets a clearer idea of how Stravinsky conducted his personal life as well. When not travelling, he spent his mornings composing, his afternoons writing letters or practising the piano and his evenings entertaining or going to the cinema with Vera. To accomplish the many errands called for by his busy schedule and frequent travels, he constantly asked his friends for help. Sympathetic critics such as Calvocoressi and Edwin Evans were expected to be propagandizers for his music. With some, such as Manuel de Falla and Charles-Albert Cingria in the 1920s and 1930s, Stravinsky was on close personal terms. Other relationships, as with Boulez,¹ were fraught with misunderstandings. Stravinsky's changing musical tastes also become evident through his correspondence: letters to Debussy and Ravel in the 1910s and 1920s suggest friendship and admiration for his French colleagues, whereas by 1938 (according to

¹ This chapter appeared previously in the June 1982 issue of this journal.

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Cingria) he had grown to 'detest' their music.

There are many insights in Craft's commentary in the footnotes and 16 appendices. In those concerning librettos, sketches, chronologies of composition and revisions, he provides the musical analysis that the letters lack, even though it may be only marginally related to issues raised in the correspondence. He also corrects inaccuracies, pointing out, for example that Stravinsky did not begin the *Symphony of Wind Instruments* in 1920, on the occasion of the memorial album of Debussy, but rather in 1918, on hearing of Debussy's death; he suggests Stravinsky's motivation for writing violin and piano music (they required shorter preparation time than orchestral concerts); and he takes issue, in his inimitable manner, with recent exhibitions and catalogues concerning the composer.

These books, however, are not without their puzzles, errors and questionable, if not misleading, omissions. It is never clear why a correspondent appears in one volume rather than another, what the sources of the letters are, and where unacknowledged cuts are made. In the case of the letters to Florent Schmitt, owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale, I was able to detect mistakes and incorrectly translated phrases. The date and place Craft gives for autograph letter no. 7 are 'Ustilug, November 2, 1911'; yet on the original, Stravinsky has clearly written, '2 II 1912, Clarens'. Given that, in the letter, the composer states 'I have almost completed Part One of the *Sacre*, including the instrumentation', this misdating results in a different chronology for *The Rite*. Moreover, the letter also lacks its first three sentences (not noted with ellipses) and Craft mistranslates 'pas visible d'ailleurs', referring to a picture of Stravinsky's nude body. Instead of meaning 'not to be seen elsewhere', it should read 'which, furthermore, is not visible', as the last sentence is: 'If you want to see it, I will send you another print'. The footnote to a letter thanking Monteux for his April 1914 performance of *The Rite* is also misleading, as the reference is not to the first complete performance of the ballet, but to its first complete concert performance. In addition to the paraphrased form in which a number of letters appear, such examples lead one to question the reliability of Craft's editing.

Considering that some chapters consist of only one or a small number of letters, the most baffling editorial decision is the



Stravinsky and his wife at Palm Springs, 1949

omission of chapters on several significant relationships in Stravinsky's life: Father Nikolai Podosenov, Stravinsky's confessor in the 1920s, whose letters Craft points to as 'the principal source for study of the composer's religious life'; Nicolas Roerich, Stravinsky's collaborator on *The Rite*; and Pierre Souvtchinsky, Stravinsky's lifelong friend and the one whom Stravinsky first asked in the late 1960s to edit his personal documents. Excerpts of their letters appear only in footnotes or in articles centering on others' correspondence. To learn of Stravinsky's relationship with Souvtchinsky, for example, one must consult the Boulez, Nabokov, and *Poétique musicale* chapters. Moreover, Craft asserts that Souvtchinsky served merely as an 'advisor' on Russian music and a 'translator' of Russian expressions for the *Poétique*, while the very letters he cites from Souvtchinsky demonstrate a much more significant role.

Mrs Stravinsky's diaries 1922–71, *Dearest Bubushkin*, have been even more ruthlessly edited.² Only in this case, Craft explains his rationale for omitting everything not directly related to the composer and reducing entries to a line or two, one every five or six days: 'a scholarly apparatus . . . would sink Vera's uncomplicated narrative'. The result is a chronicle that lists towns visited, guests

entertained, movies and performances attended, and occasionally books purchased. It is amusing to find the Stravinskys dining with such a wide array of guests, including John Cage on 24 February 1945 and Mrs Schoenberg on 2 November 1965; but to learn more of how Mrs Stravinsky lived her life, one must turn to the letters to her husband, interspersed within the diary chronologically. These not only document their extraordinary love affair and her dedication to his children, but also describe her life consisting of shopping, entertaining, clearing house, taking lessons of various sorts and making artificial flowers for profit. In the photographs that accompany this chronicle, many of them amusing snapshots (like one from 1968 showing Stravinsky in hippie beads to protest against the Vietnam war), one can watch the couple growing old together, Igor often the 'bubushkin' (i.e. in a pouty mood) and Vera always smiling.

For the scholar, unfortunately, these publications are not substitute for consultation of the original documents themselves, despite their immensely helpful footnotes and appendices. Yet of indisputable value are the topics for future research to which they point and the search they encourage for lost documents, including a diary which Stravinsky's secretary Sabline may have kept of their three-month American tour in 1925 and a 1910 *Petrushka* sketchbook Stravinsky sold in the late 1940s.

² Mrs Stravinsky's diaries, as presented by Craft, are not unlike those of her husband, published in Robert Craft's *A Stravinsky Scrapbook 1940–1971* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), pp.155–79