

Nadia Boulanger and the Stravinskys: A Selected Correspondence, edited and translated by Kimberly A. Francis, Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2018, 348 pp., \$90.00 (hardback), ISBN: 9781580465960; \$55.00 (eBook), ISBN: 9781787441897.
Companion website: <https://digex.lib.uoguelph.ca/exhibits/show/boulangerandstravinskys>

Reading the letters of others perhaps always feels voyeuristic. By perusing reflections that range from hasty missives, to dry business mundanities, to sincere updates on the writers' personal conditions, one sees others' lives through their own eyes, gaining a perspective rich in detail yet tantalizingly incomplete. Such a sense of illicit fascination is all the more strong when the correspondents are some of the towering figures of twentieth-century music and when the correspondence stretches across a period of some 40 years. This is the case with *Nadia Boulanger and the Stravinskys*, a deftly selected, edited and translated volume that brings to light several hundred letters between Nadia Boulanger and Igor Stravinsky and his family. Collected from eight archives – including the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Paul Sacher Stiftung and the New York Public Library – the majority of these letters are appearing in English translation for the first time. They will fascinate readers interested by the emotional and professional lives of these mid-twentieth-century figures.

Nadia Boulanger and the Stravinskys adds an important primary source to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to reassess the influential, and in many ways unique, role played by Boulanger in the history of twentieth-century classical music. As a teacher of dozens of students from around the world, and as the holder of influential connections within the Parisian music scene, Boulanger has been impossible to ignore for scholars of interwar internationalism and neoclassicism. Yet it is only in recent years that scholars have begun rigorously evaluating her work as a pedagogue, analyst and performer on its own terms.¹ The edited correspondence complements this work by showing how Stravinsky and Boulanger were drawn together time and time again around Stravinsky's music – whether in the early 1930s by the *Symphony of Psalms*, after World War II by the *Rake's Progress*, or later by the *Requiem Canticles*. At the same time, it helps to redirect the spotlight from Stravinsky – the man and artist – to a wider field of social and familial relationships in which he and Boulanger participated.

The translations are highly readable, yet they preserve the distinct voices and epistolary styles of their respective authors. In her editorial comments, Kimberly A. Francis often notes passages in the letters that are semantically elliptical – an acknowledgment that will remind readers that many of these letters were written in haste. Her footnotes provide useful details concerning figures mentioned in the correspondence who may be less-well known to readers, such as the performers Robert and Nell Tangeman (111), who sent Stravinsky articles for his enjoyment, or members of Boulanger's social world, like Marie-Blanche de Polignac (255), whose slow death elicited sympathy from Boulanger.

The volume has an accompanying website (hosted by the University of Guelph Library), which provides the original French-language texts of the letters as well as the

1 Two recent studies include Jeanice Brooks, *The Musical Work of Nadia Boulanger: Performing Past and Future between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Kimberly A. Francis, *Teaching Stravinsky: Nadia Boulanger and the Consecration of a Modernist Icon* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

English translations that are published in the book (the website does not include the introductory sections or footnotes). Each letter is given its own PDF and it is not possible to do a full-text search of the corpus. Instead, each letter is given several subject 'tags', along with metadata like addressee, year and location. These tags allow one to see all mentions of, say, the *Rake's Progress*, but they do not allow for researchers to search using their own criteria. As a result, the website will be of limited use to scholars wishing to track minutiae of the correspondents' word choice or style, since one would need to execute a search in each of the several hundred letters individually. Nonetheless, in addition to making the volume's invaluable primary sources available to the public, the website allows side-by-side comparison of the French and English texts and provides the archival provenance of each letter.

The first chapter of the volume contains early correspondence, beginning in 1929 and continuing through to Boulanger's premiere of Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* in May 1938. The correspondence began in earnest as Stravinsky searched for a music instructor for his son, Soulima. It continued throughout the decade on a number of topics, both personal and professional. Of special interest are Boulanger's meticulous comments concerning discrepancies between Stravinsky's recording of the *Symphony of Psalms* and the piano reduction prepared by Soulima, comments which ranged from Boulanger pointing out the omission of a dedication to discussions of suspect accidentals. Later in the 1930s, Boulanger's three tours of the US between 1937 and 1939 allowed her to connect with wealthy patrons, laying the groundwork for the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* to be commissioned by the Blisses. The correspondence documents the frantic, last-minute process of correcting proofs (dispatched on trans-Atlantic ocean liners) and of creating parts in times for the premiere, a pressure made more intense by the short timeline put forth by the Blisses. There are also reflections on the performance itself, as when Boulanger noted that 'the *Concerto* was played honestly, well, very well – and was *understood*, I believe' (46).

Chapter two covers the late 1930s until Boulanger's departure from German-occupied Paris in summer of 1940. During this time, Boulanger attempted to secure Stravinsky's American contacts, unsuccessfully searching for a commission for the *Symphony in C* but successfully facilitating his Norton Chair at Harvard University. Among the most moving letters in this chapter are those written by Boulanger following the death of Stravinsky's wife, Catherine, in 1939. In one letter that particularly strongly connects the musical with the personal, Boulanger reassures him:

May God give you His light [...] But may He also grant you the certainty that we *need* you, and that this certainty gives us the strength to complete your work despite everything. When we are all gone, this work will remain to grant unto those who are worthy a nourishment of spirit and heart without which everything would be intolerable. (53)

In Chapter three, we follow Stravinsky and Boulanger to the United States. This chapter features some of the most open and intriguing writing from both figures. Of special interest for scholars of trans-Atlantic exile culture during this time will be Boulanger's letter to Stravinsky from 17 March 1941:

But I didn't know how much I loved France, how I need her, and how, in her weakness, I feel she is great. How badly we have served her, we other French men and women whose flesh and spirit were crafted by her, her traditions, and her faith. [...] What have we done with this heritage that was our honor and demanded our responsibility? (75)

Such writing reveals how distance from France, as well as the cataclysm of World War II, seems to have underscored for Boulanger the importance of French national culture.

The early post-war letters covered in Chapter four convey a candid perspective on the restoration of European cultural life in the late 1940s. At this time, Boulanger observed how ‘everything is too fluid and complex. But the young people we talk to clearly fall into distinctive groups – spouting grand, vague, destructive theories’ (139). Among the most in-depth exchanges from this period concerns the premiere of the *Rake’s Progress* in Venice in 1951, with correspondence covering potential translations and performers. As Chapter five reveals, the two wrote fewer letters during the early 1950s and beyond. In part, this was because in 1953 Boulanger became Director of the Écoles d’art américaines at Fontainebleau; Stravinsky, meanwhile, began experimenting and eventually writing with dodecaphonic techniques, further distancing him from Boulanger’s aesthetic outlooks. The letters of this period are, in many cases, more business-like or distanced. This trend continues into the final chapter, where Stravinsky’s rejections of Boulanger’s offers for potential commissions or other engagements become at times grating. In response to a 1966 request from the French Minister of Culture concerning a memorial tribute to Aldous Huxley, for example, Stravinsky replied curtly: ‘*Variations* dedicated to the memory of Aldous Huxley has nothing to do with his work,’ before adding: ‘I am no longer going to give concerts in Paris after the public’s and the press’s affront at the premiere of my *Threni*, conducted by myself in one of Boulez’s concerts. This decision is final’ (295).

Throughout the correspondence Boulanger appears a more engaged correspondent than does Stravinsky; her letters are longer, more forthright, and often contain more interesting observations. The volume thus raises questions about whether Stravinsky was indeed among Boulanger’s most engaged or consequential correspondents, and in turn whether her more interesting epistolary relationships may lie elsewhere, with figures who are less well-known today or who are outside the musicological canon. We thus run up against one of the main challenges posed by the Boulanger archive: it is a massive, well-preserved collection left by a musician who had vast musical contacts that she maintained in large part through letters. Indeed, across her life she had around 2400 correspondents, to many of whom she wrote for decades; her correspondence in the Bibliothèque nationale de France is arranged into 68 volumes, each containing up to 400 items.² And these numbers do not include the letters that she sent, now scattered across the globe. It is thus likely that many new insights remain to be gained from this material. As scholars continue to examine this archive, Francis’ editorial work will set the standard for rigor and insight, while providing a model for how others might convey an archival richness while also decentering the traditional protagonists of music histories. In uncovering the plural dialogues among Boulanger, Stravinsky and his family, *Nadia Boulanger and the Stravinskys* highlights the fuzzy boundaries between personal and professional that drove one of the most consequential musical milieus of the mid-twentieth century.

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2 For an overview of the Boulanger archive, see Jeanice Brooks, ‘The Fonds Boulanger at the Bibliothèque Nationale’, *Notes* 51, no. 4 (1995), 1227–37.