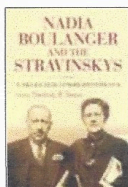


# Book Reviews



**Nadia Boulanger and the Stravinskys: A Selected Correspondence**  
 Edited by Kimberly A. Francis  
 University of Rochester  
 Press/Boydell, HB,

327 pp, £75  
 ISBN-13: 978-1-58046-596-0, 2018

Stravinsky met Nadia Boulanger in 1929 when she taught his son Soulima. At this stage Stravinsky was one of the greatest living composers and Boulanger was an influential teacher based in Paris. Their friendship lasted until Stravinsky's death in 1971. Francis makes clear that, although Boulanger apparently had affairs, her intense relationship with Stravinsky was platonic. However, their private lives were shared in moving detail as these letters reveal. Boulanger marked anniversaries of the tragic death of her younger sister, Lili, and of her mother. On Stravinsky's side she shared, in moving letters, his triple bereavement in 1939 of his mother, his wife and his daughter, and she also corresponded with other members of the family.

Boulanger idolised Stravinsky: 'God knows how much I love you, and I feel myself close to you. I cannot for a single moment forget my reverence, my gratitude...' His works from the Octet through to *The Rake's Progress* formed the core of her teaching, which is explored in Francis' book, *Teaching Stravinsky: Nadia Boulanger and the Consecration of a Modernist Icon* (2015). Along with Bach and Monteverdi, Stravinsky's music was the bible for her domineering pedagogy with composers such as Copland, Carter, Lennox Berkeley and countless others of several generations and nationalities. She eagerly anticipated all Stravinsky's new works, generously corrected and proof-read scores and analysed them with her students; she supported Stravinsky with her American contacts on her pre-war visits and her residence in the US during the war. She had an amazing career as a female conductor for that period, including Stravinsky works such as the *Symphony of Psalms* which she conducted four times in seven days. After the war, when the bright young things such as Boulez in Paris were attacking Stravinsky's outdated

aesthetic, she passionately argued in favour of neo-classicism, convincing Stravinsky – then living in the US – that he was on the right track. Her devotion was reciprocated and when Boulanger left him in the US in 1945 to return to Paris he wrote: 'All I do is think of you and of your absence which I believe will be unbearable to me'. It is even possible to argue that without her unflinching and consistently dedicated support Stravinsky might not have had the courage to create a grand opera in his neo-classical idiom – *The Rake's Progress* in 1950. That was a climactic turning point; in spite of his enormous prestige, Stravinsky realised that the musical world was moving ahead without him; he met Robert Craft who introduced him to Webern and he began, cautiously at first, to move into the late serial works.

This became a problem for Boulanger who had never liked the mechanics of serial techniques. The two of them handled the crisis as best they could, as the letters show, but the situation taxed Boulanger's belief that the great man could do no wrong. In 1950 she said: 'There is a heavy dodecaphonic influence but it will not hold its position for long'. Seventy years later she might feel justified but she would be disappointed that the public's apathy towards serial music includes much of late Stravinsky.

This book, by a Boulanger pupil, is a fascinating exposure of a uniquely influential partnership prompting reconsideration of many issues. It is admirably provided with footnotes so the reader knows who is being referred to in the letters; there's a bibliography and there are a few photographs; the only deterrent is the price.

Peter Dickinson



**So What Does a Conductor Do? – A Life of Music**  
 Nicholas Braithwaite  
 Published by the author  
 Softback: 296 pp £25  
 ISBN-10: 064697145X

Available from Amazon

Nicholas Braithwaite is the conductor son of Warwick Braithwaite, a much-

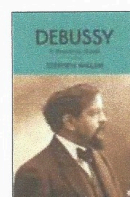
admired conductor better-known in the years immediately following World War II, and – like his father – has been able to establish a successful career, in Australia, England, and throughout Europe, perhaps better-known for performances of opera, most notably at English National Opera, the Stora Theater Opera Gothenberg and with Glyndebourne Touring Opera, his operatic repertoire taking him to opera houses across the globe.

Braithwaite's many recordings have tended to concentrate upon the repertoire of British composers, including Bennett, Berkeley, Bridge, Holst, Rawsthorne, and Stanford, principally on the Lyrita label. But Braithwaite's experience and repertoire are far wider than such examples would indicate.

Nicholas Braithwaite was born in London in 1939, and now offers this fascinating and very well-written cornucopia of experiences which deserves wide appeal and circulation. His lightness of touch as a gifted writer is admirable, his honesty and humour are excellent foils by which the lessons from his vast experience as a conductor are conveyed in a manner which soon becomes engrossing.

I found this excellently-produced book to be a delight: professional musicians (not only conductors!) as well as general music-lovers will enjoy this addition to musical autobiography in no small measure, and – thanks to Amazon's world-wide distribution – it can be in your hands within 72 hours of ordering. It is well-worth your time and money – a great read, both informative and at times highly amusing.

Robert Matthew-Walker



**Debussy: A Painter in Sound**  
 Stephen Walsh  
 Faber & Faber, HB,  
 358 pp. £20  
 ISBN 13: 978-0-571-33016-4, 2018

After Walsh's magisterial studies of Stravinsky and Musorgsky, expectations were running high for his take on Debussy. His subtitle shows that he aligns the composer alongside developments in the other arts, especially visual. His verdict is that Debussy should 'seriously be