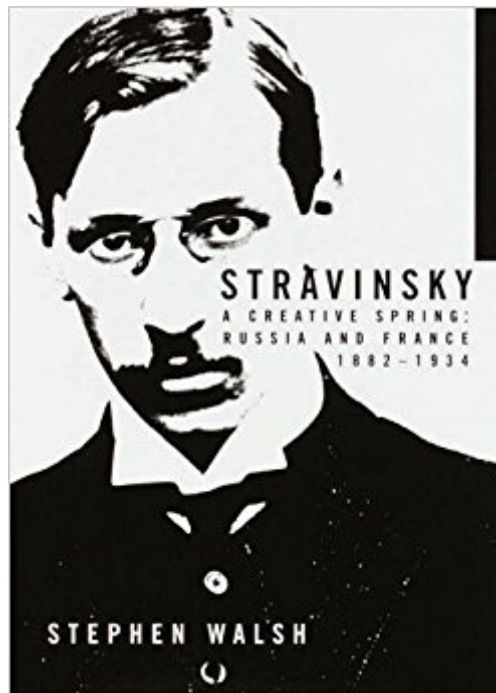




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Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia And France, 1882-1934



Synopsis

Widely regarded the greatest composer of the twentieth century, Igor Stravinsky was central to the development of modernism in art. Deeply influential and wonderfully productive, he is remembered for dozens of masterworks, from *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring* to *The Rake's Progress*, but no dependable biography of him exists. Previous studies have relied too heavily on his own unreliable memoirs and conversations, and until now no biographer has possessed both the musical knowledge to evaluate his art and the linguistic proficiency needed to explore the documentary background of his life--a life whose span extended from tsarist Russia to Switzerland, France, and ultimately the United States. In this revealing volume, the first of two, Stephen Walsh follows Stravinsky from his birth in 1882 to 1934. He traces the composer's early Russian years in new and fascinating detail, laying bare the complicated relationships within his family and showing how he first displayed his extraordinary talents within the provincial musical circle around his teacher, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov. Stravinsky's brilliantly creative involvement with the Ballets Russes is illuminated by a sharp sense of the internal artistic politics that animated the group. Portraying Stravinsky's circumstances as an émigré in France trying to make his living as a conductor and pianist as well as a composer while beset by emotional and financial demands, Walsh reveals the true roots of his notorious obsession with money during the 1920s and describes with sympathy the nature of his long affair with Vera Sudeykina. While always respecting Stravinsky's own insistence that life and art be kept distinct, Stravinsky makes clear precisely how the development of his music was connected to his life and to the intellectual environment in which he found himself. But at the same time it demonstrates the composer's remarkably pragmatic psychology, which led him to consider the welfare of his art to be of paramount importance, before which everything else had to give way. Hence, for example, his questionable attitude toward Hitler and Mussolini, and his reputation as a touchy, unpredictable man as famous for his enmities as for his friendships. Stephen Walsh, long established as an expert on Stravinsky's music, has drawn upon a vast array of material, much of it unpublished or unavailable in English, to bring the man himself, in all his color and genius, to glowing life. Written with elegance and energy, comprehensive, balanced, and original, Stravinsky is essential reading for anyone interested in the adventure of art in our time. Praise from the British press for Stephen Walsh's *The Music of Stravinsky* "One of the finest general studies of the composer."--Wilfrid Mellers, composer, *Times Literary Supplement* "The beautiful prose of *The Music of Stravinsky* is itself a fund of arresting images. For those who already love Stravinsky's music, Walsh's essays on each work will bring a smile of recognition and joy at new kernels of insight. For those unfamiliar with many of the works he discusses, Walsh's

commentaries are likely to whet appetites for performances of the works."--John Shepherd, Notes
This book sent me scurrying back to the scores and made me want to recommend it to other people. Above all, it is a good read."--Anthony Pople, Music and Letters

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Customer Reviews

Already noted for a book on his subject's art (The Music of Stravinsky), Stephen Walsh is equally illuminating about Igor Stravinsky's turbulent life. This first installment of a projected two-volume work covers the years 1882 to 1934, during which time Walsh shows the composer creating many of his famous works, most notably The Rite of Spring, whose riotous 1913 premiere announced the arrival of a boldly modern classical music. He follows Stravinsky from his native Russia to Switzerland and France, as well as a 10-week tour of America in 1925. Delving into Russian-language documents seldom consulted by Western scholars, Walsh corrects many factual errors and, more importantly, makes evident the importance of Stravinsky's Russian roots and musical training, which the composer himself often downplayed in later years in order to "cultivate the image of the 'synthetic' international master." He's similarly judicious in evaluating Stravinsky's stormy 20-year association with Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and his seldom-adept juggling of a long-suffering wife and a more sophisticated mistress. Candid about his distaste for some of Stravinsky's behavior and character traits, Walsh never seems nasty: "It is the richest personalities," he reminds us, "who engage us most fully." --Wendy Smith

Walsh, a British musicologist who has written extensively on Stravinsky and his works, has produced the first of a massive two-part biography of the century's greatest composer. The first part takes the reader in a comprehensive chronology from Stravinsky's birth to the end of his Paris years. In the process, Walsh carefully and exhaustively lays bare Stravinsky's genealogy and convincingly details his complex relationships with family, friends, and fellow composers. Drawing extensively on hitherto unexamined primary sources as well as on such indispensable secondary sources as Robert Craft's writings and Richard Taruskin's recent groundbreaking tome, *Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition*, Walsh performs this feat with admirable clarity and discretion. While there are no musical examples, nor any semblance of analysis, there is nonetheless a great deal of illuminating commentary on each work written during this time period. This is an important source for Stravinsky scholars and an enjoyable read for the casual reader. Highly recommended for all collections.

Larry A. Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I can't imagine what some of these reviewers were expecting; after reading their negative comments, I hesitated to buy this biography. But I'm glad that I ignored them and bought the book, since I find Mr. Walsh's writing to be very compelling, illuminating and extremely insightful. Walsh is a master of organizing his voluminous material, producing an immensely readable narrative, which flows logically while continually yielding fascinating, detailed information about the life of the 20th-Century's greatest, most celebrated composer. HOW DID STRAVINSKY GET THAT WAY??? How was he able to make the quantum leap from a fairly routine, academic imitator of Rimsky K and Glazunov (his 1905 "Symphony in E-Flat") to the explosive, astounding, earth-shattering creator of *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*--- all within a 5 or 6 year period? Stephen Walsh leads us through this incredible story in an engrossing, enjoyable and informative manner; for me, there's never a dull moment. In addition, the depth of Mr Walsh's technical expertise allows him to eloquently summarize the effect of Stravinsky's art in terms of its musical, historical and cultural influence. In addition, Walsh is continually on the lookout for inaccuracies which have accrued throughout the years---whether due to Stravinsky's, Robert Craft's, or any number of other chroniclers faulty memories or personal agendas. He really sets the record straight in many instances, backing up his findings with carefully documented evidence (letters, concert programs, timelines, etc). My one and only complaint: since Mr. Walsh's astonishing ability to craft a NARRATIVE is so impressive, I would have expected far more frequent mention of DATES-- especially the current YEAR in which the events occur; it would have greatly assisted a guy like me who likes to keep things in sequential

order by framing the facts by DATE as they occur. A simple listing of the year at the top of each right-hand page would have easily solved this. There are times when I have to scour through 8-10 pages to recall what YEAR we are currently in while reading---something that is very important, say, in the WWI/Russian Revolution years. But it's a small gripe. This is one of the truly great biographical achievements in music. Volume 2 is on order. Highest recommendation. LR

Very pleased: thank you

A profound vision of Igor Stravinsky's life.

Being a former concert pianist in training, I am extremely interested in 20th Century music. Stravinsky is one of my favorite composers. I looked forward to reading this biography; however, it was a little dry. It is extremely detailed, which should please any music historian, but my complaint is that it did not adequately address the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* in Paris. The Paris crowd rioted and Stravinsky walked the streets in gloom afterward (which I learned in college - not from this book). I have always thought that was an interesting event and would have liked more detail from the author, who appeared to think it was insignificant, while addressing every tiny detail of Stravinsky's personal life, squabbles over money, minor compositions, etc. I give it a C+.

good memory. Very sharp and strong product. It was my first kind of cutting product for food and I am very impressed. I've had it for a few months now and its sharpness is still the best of all the knives I have. as described . i love it so much, very fast, receive it next day.

I love Stravinsky's music but this biography has so much minutely detailed information about Stravinsky's works that it was very difficult for the author to maintain the narrative's flow. Somebody warned me of this but the same was said about Richard Buckle's biography of Diaghilev (which I think is one of the greatest biographies ever written) so I went ahead and started reading this book anyway. I quit about half way through. Like a dictionary, this book may be good to consult if you want a particular piece of information about Stravinsky but reading it from cover to cover is a hard slog.

Stravinsky was a fine composer who contributed to the development of modernism in art, but little about his personal life reveals his background. This biographical sketch evaluates both his music

and his art, examining his contributions with a critical eye to revealing how his past influenced his creations and eventually his world. An excellent, in-depth critical profile evolves.

Stephen Walsh has done a job of research that boggles the mind. Revelations on every page about an elusive composer who projected so many personas and opinions he seemed almost a chameleon. Can't wait for Volume two.

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