

Mary S. Woodside and Neal Johnson, ed. and trans. 2008. *The Russian Life of R.-Aloys Mooser, Music Critic to the Tsars: Memoirs and Selected Writings*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen. 320 pp. ISBN 978-0-7734-5215-2

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Watkins brings it all together in the final section: “Gesualdo and the Challenge to History.” Here we see that it is not the direct influence of Gesualdo on Schoenberg and Stravinsky that makes him an important figure, but rather the sympathetic natures of these three seemingly iconoclastic figures that illuminate his importance for later generations. Each of them is often seen as a revolutionary who destroyed all that came before him in order to forge something new, a break from the past that pointed towards a future no longer tethered to the strictures of tradition. Watkins posits instead a group of visionary composers who recognized the historical crisis involved in refuting the past, and the necessity of finding a balance between the revolutionary and the traditional that helps to affirm the identity of each by maintaining the tension and antagonism between them. In their late works, Gesualdo, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky all realized the importance of this delicate balance and thus sought a synthesis between their respective innovations and traditions: modality and proto-tonality for Gesualdo; serialism, atonality, and tonality for Schoenberg and Stravinsky. For Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Gesualdo was not only an influential visionary who explored chromaticism, but was, in fact, an earlier version of themselves.

Watkins’s account of Gesualdo as a subject struggling with his creative nature and artistic legacy resonates closely with Susan McClary’s recent work on subjectivity in the Renaissance, and as such complements it nicely. *The Gesualdo Hex* is a remarkable book that every scholar, Gesualdo specialist or not, ought to read. It should be said, however, that this is not the kind of book every scholar should try to write. Watkins’s reputation as the pre-eminent Gesualdo scholar, and his considerable list of academic publications, alleviates him from the necessity of jumping through hoops or showing his work before solving the equation. Instead, Watkins writes with a novelist’s feeling for narrative about a group of musicians who struggled against their own natures and that of the world around them before producing the sort of late works that would protect their artistic legacies. Most scholars need a lifetime of work before they can accomplish the creation of such a book as this, and very few can hope to do so in such an exemplary and admirable manner.

GRAHAM FREEMAN

Mary S. Woodside and Neal Johnson, ed. and trans. 2008. *The Russian Life of R.-Aloys Mooser, Music Critic to the Tsars: Memoirs and Selected Writings*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen. 320 pp. ISBN 978-0-7734-5215-2.

As music critic for the *Journal de St Pétersbourg*, the Geneva-born R.-Aloys Mooser (1876–1969) attended the city’s major performances and formed close personal ties with its important musical figures. He describes these events, interactions, and personalities in his writings for the *Journal* and in his memoirs, a selection of which are published here for the first time in English (translated from the French by Neal Johnson). Mooser writes with the fine

ear of a trained musician and keen eye of a cultural outsider, revealing the underlying tensions and struggles that animated the musical world. Sprinkled with amusing anecdotes and wicked rumours circulating at the time, his memoirs are delightful to read and provide a captivating view of musical life in St. Petersburg at the turn of the century.

Through careful organization and meticulous editing, Mary S. Woodside presents Mooser's memoirs in a thoroughly accessible form. She and Johnson favour clarity over fidelity to Mooser's style, which was characterized by "frequent use of long complicated sentences which require one or even two re-readings to comprehend, and which often produce one-sentence paragraphs." Their translation is fluid and easy to read. As Woodside explains in the preface, this new volume is intended "to complement" the existing French edition (1994), which merely transcribes the memoirs. And whereas the introduction to the French edition focused on Mooser's Swiss years, Woodside concerns herself with his Russian period. She crafts seven chapters from thirty topics Mooser takes up, being careful to distinguish her headings from Mooser's own. Each chapter begins with relevant background information on the people Mooser discusses, as well as enough historical context to render the material understandable to the uninitiated. Woodside also supplements Mooser's text with detailed footnotes; thus, she makes even the more esoteric passages accessible to a broad audience. Some of the information in these introductory notes (like an explanation of the "Balakirev Circle") is common knowledge to anyone familiar with Russian culture, but in other instances, the conductors and soloists Mooser encounters are not widely known today. Sometimes, however, Woodside overcompensates, providing explanations that simply echo Mooser's own (she provides an account of how Pavel Tretiakov founded the Tretiakov Gallery, for example, even though Mooser explains this in detail).

Mooser's memoirs begin in chapter 1 with an account of his family background, early years in Geneva, the collapse of his family's finances (which forced him to move to St. Petersburg), and his initial period of settling in to the city. An anecdote from his time as a church organist helps set the tone: after an ignorant general complained about a Bach postlude, Mooser proudly recounts fooling him into believing that a segment of Glazunov's new ballet *Raymonda* was fitting religious music. Mooser seemed to relish poking fun at ill-informed or musically insensitive officials; such pranks pop up throughout the memoirs and reveal the writer's good sense of humour. Even when dealing with serious subjects, Mooser uses a light touch and devotes almost equal attention to human interest stories as to musical events.

Chapter 2, "Artists," presents a parade of notable musicians whom Mooser heard perform and with whom he became personally acquainted during his years in St. Petersburg. Among them are violinist Henri Marteau, pianists Edouard Risler, Paula Szalit (child prodigy), Antoine de Kontski, and Ignacy Paderewski, conductor Arturo Toscanini, and actress Jenny Naryshkin. Mooser pays particular attention to the conductor Hans Richter (1843–1916), who brought many of Wagner's operas to Russia.

In chapter 3, “Theaters, Troupes, Artists,” we witness Mooser’s frustration with the unusually close ties between the tsar and the arts in Imperial Russia. According to Mooser (and most critics would have agreed), Russian opera was held back by the conservatism of the tsar, who effectively controlled the repertoire and was loath to introduce new or unfamiliar operas. This chapter provides an important glimpse into the politics and favouritism that controlled the repertoire and casting at the Mariinsky Theatre. Although not all of the stories Mooser tells can be confirmed and some appear to be purely rumour, they paint a picture of the atmosphere that surrounded the theatre.

Expanding upon similar themes, chapter 4, “Concerts, Ensembles, Patrons,” explores other institutions and individuals who promoted the arts in Russia. Mooser gives his views on the Imperial Russian Musical Society, the Quartet of the Imperial Russian Music Society, Aleksandr Dmitrievich Sheremetev (creator of a reasonably priced, broadly accessible public concert series), the Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (creator of an important quartet), Pavel Mikhailovich Tretiakov (founder of the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow), Mitrofan Petrovich Beliaev (publisher of Russian composers and funder of a concert series), and Savva Ivanovich Mamontov (founder of the Moscow Private Russian Opera, 1885).

The eminent pianist Aleksandr Ilich Siloti (1863–1945) receives his own chapter, “The Siloti Concerts.” Sharing Mooser’s frustration with the conservatism in the repertoire of government-sponsored organizations, Siloti created a concert series in 1903 aimed at exposing the public to unfamiliar works (Bach’s *Brandenburg Concertos* had never been performed in St. Petersburg!). Mooser also valued Siloti’s liberal views and his role as a spokesman against the government in 1905 when Rimsky-Korsakov was removed from the conservatory for supporting the students’ strike. This is one of the few places where Mooser deals at all with the political situation. He closes the chapter with a discussion of Henri Casadesus’s Société des Instruments Anciens, which performed hoax/imposter early music attributed to little-known composers.

Chapter 6, “Composers,” is likely to receive attention from the broadest audience, as it deals with some of the most famous figures in Russian music. An intimate friend of Balakirev, Mooser provides a rare window into his mentor’s personal life and habits. He comes down hard on Rimsky-Korsakov, condemning the rigidity and lifelessness of his music, the editing and rewriting he did of others’ works (especially to Musorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*), and the sterility he fostered in his students. While admiring Glazunov as “a fine example of the perfect gentleman,” Mooser believes that Rimsky was responsible for the conservative and formulaic nature of his protégé’s work. In what is already the most cited portion of Mooser’s memoirs, he discusses the rumours he heard from Riccardo Drigo and Glazunov of Tchaikovsky’s purported suicide (Mooser arrived in Petersburg three years after the event). Although Mooser seems to suggest that he believed these rumours, he ultimately leaves the question open, and his memoirs have been used by critics to argue both sides (today many scholars accept that the suicide rumours are false).

Chapter 7, “Postlude,” is a brief selection of reminiscences from a trip Mooser made to Munich after the First World War.

The book closes with two appendixes: a genealogy of the Romanovs and a selection of reviews and articles that Mooser wrote for the *Journal de St Pétersbourg*. By beginning with two reviews by Mooser’s predecessor, Woodside provides a context in which to appreciate the shift Mooser brought with his outspoken support of the New Russian School of composers and his dislike of Anton Rubenstein and Tchaikovsky. The reviews illustrate both Mooser’s critical style and the consistency of his views across private and professional writings. Woodside’s selections provide a good balance of Mooser’s reflections on broad topics (e.g., the right of a composer or performer to make alterations to an earlier composer’s work) as well as reviews of specific performances.

This edition of Mooser’s memoirs is a valuable source for musicologists and cultural historians interested in the musical climate of St. Petersburg at the turn of the century. From the centre of St. Petersburg’s musical world Mooser provided important first-hand accounts of the people and events of his time. However, as his writings make abundantly clear, he was not an impartial observer but rather a very opinionated participant. In the first chapter he accuses Rubenstein’s works of “oozing facile pathos and treacly sentimentality” and writes joyfully of how a series of concerts offered him the opportunity, “always eagerly seized upon, to take sides unequivocally on behalf of the contemporary Russian works.” Mooser was a great admirer of Wagner but had no patience for Rachmaninoff. He supported Debussy, but lamented that Elgar was “frighteningly productive and disastrously impersonal.”

ANNA A. BERMAN

John Deathridge. 2008. *Wagner: Beyond Good and Evil*. Berkeley: University of California Press. xiii, 302 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-25453-4.

On the back cover of John Deathridge’s *Wagner: Beyond Good and Evil*, Roger Parker acclaims the book for being that rarity, a “genuinely new” contribution to Wagner scholarship. Parker’s claim is a bold one, given the voluminous literature on the subject, and one that possibly does a disservice to Deathridge’s work, for Parker’s appraisal somewhat misattributes where the importance of this book lies: rather than presenting a radical break from conventional thought on Wagner, as a “genuinely new” book might be expected to do, the book is vital because it collects (albeit in significantly revised form) over fifteen years’ worth of research and insights of a renowned Wagnerian scholar. Moreover, taken as a whole, the book attempts to come to terms with why Wagner has been so crucial to history (musical, cultural, and political alike) as well as endeavouring to determine why he continues to be a vital part of our cultural fabric and what he continues to say to us well into the twenty-first century.