

Nietzsche's Orphans. Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire. By Rebecca Mitchell. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. xiii, 336 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Photographs. \$95.00, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.43

Rebecca Mitchell's study has two main themes: the central role that, she claims, was accorded to music in the twilight years of tsarist Russia, and the search for a Russian Orpheus who would save society from the ills of modernity besetting Russia. Her "Nietzsche's orphans" were a disparate group of troubled souls: writers, artists, musicians (three of them renowned composers), journalists and music critics, all influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy and the special place of music in it. They were "orphaned," however, by their inability to accept all of his teachings, notably his amorality, and by their resistance against the continuing hegemony of German philosophy and music over Russian culture. Mitchell sees them as a distinct "aesthetic community," with a shared language "replete with terminology such as 'Dionysian,' 'Apollonian,' 'symbol,' 'leitmotif,' 'religious art,' *sobornost*,' 'unity,' 'mysticism,' 'life-creation,' 'Orphic' and 'messianic'" (10).

Within this community there was little agreement on the form that Russia's musical (and therefore existential) salvation should take and the search for a Russian Orpheus in Mitchell's account resembles less a group endeavor than a beauty contest conducted by competing acolytes to prove the merits of their respective heroes and often to denigrate their rivals. This is clearly revealed in her discussion of the three principal candidates: Aleksandr Skriabin, Nikolai Medtner, and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Only Skriabin, however, was fully involved in the creation of his own mythology; both Medtner and Rachmaninoff had mythology woven around them, Medtner principally by his elder brother, Emilii, and Rachmaninoff by his adoring audiences and by the young writer Marietta Shaginian. Nonetheless, Mitchell believes that there was indeed a "sense of common cause" which was a "defining characteristic of Nietzsche's orphans" (14).

The book is straightforwardly organized, opening with an introduction to the personalities and issues discussed. Next, she examines the "musical metaphysics" derived from Arthur Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but developed by a wide range of writers to reflect the special nature of Russian society and history and music's task to heal the conflicts and divisions crippling Russia. Mitchell then focuses on the three candidates for the role of Orpheus, though Nikolai Medtner shares a chapter with his overweening brother and the chapter on Rachmaninoff is justly subtitled "The Unwilling Orpheus." Here I think Mitchell has taken his self-professed pessimism, for which the "orphans constantly assailed him," too uncritically. In providing a few short illustrations of each composer's works, she necessarily emphasizes a particular facet of their musical imagination; in the case of Rachmaninoff, *The Isle of the Dead* and his use of the Dies Irae motif. For all his public persona as a pessimist, Rachmaninoff was also the composer of some of the most exhilarating music for orchestra and solo piano ever written. When Leonid Sabaneev heard only the "tragic helplessness of man" (156), he evidently had not listened to the second symphony, composed two years before *The Isle*. Like many composers at all times (though certainly not Skriabin), Rachmaninoff seems to have revealed himself only in his music, refusing to engage in the discussions of music and metaphysics indulged by his contemporaries and admirers.

Mitchell makes some pertinent comments on gender in this metaphysical world, noting that the clichés of female passivity and male creativity were rampantly displayed. In some cases, misogyny and antisemitism (à la Otto Weininger) were closely interrelated, as is revealed in her discussion of Emilii Medtner (121, 128–29). She also

notes that women were scarce in the print media, though enthusiastic participants in the performance and promotion of new music and in the informal discussion of it.

She ends with a chapter on the impact of war and revolution on the “orphans” and a moving epilogue, noting their fate after 1917. Many emigrated, while others made a successful accommodation with the Soviet regime. Others perished in the Gulag.

I have some doubts about her claim that music performed a crucial role in the spiritual life of late tsarist Russia, essential for the future of the Russian nation. Her study shows that while this was true of the metaphysical circles themselves, for the wider educated public music remained predominantly an entertainment, as elsewhere in western culture. Similarly, her focus on the introverted world of the musical metaphysicians leaves the reader with the misleading impression that except for Richard Wagner and his contested influence, the Russian musical world was largely insulated from the music of western Europe and North America.

The book is extensively documented, with an immense range of published and archival materials quoted, and some elegantly presented music illustrations. After all the dense prose, it must have been a relief to return to the music itself, with no need for commentary.

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The House of the Dead: Siberian Exile under the Tsars. By Daniel Beer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. xxii, 464 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Plates. Maps. \$35.00, hard bound.
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Daniel Beer begins this exceptionally well-written and sweeping history of Siberian exile by recounting the exile of the bell of Uglich in 1591. In punishment for the townspeople's revolt, Boris Godunov had his forces lash the bell, rip out its tongue, and then sentence it to exile alongside the town's human rebels to Siberia. They would join the over one million people who would be sentenced to Siberian exile under the tsars. Beer argues that the tsarist government tried to use deportation to Siberia to get rid of undesirables and to fill a new land with convicts. In this way, the systems of Russian exile and colonization were intertwined. Beer makes an important contribution to the field by showing that the tsarist state used the vast space of its empire to exert power, but space also overstretched the state and undermined its control over its exile system.

Beer takes the reader along on the exile's journey from sentencing to the long and torturous road to exile, a journey that could last as long as five years, and finally to the place of exile itself. Beer narrows in on personalities—from lone escapees to noted figures like Fedor Dostoevskii, whose semi-autobiographical novel of his own time in exile gives this book its name. He also highlights the diversity of convicts' experiences. Most exiles limped their way across Russia on foot to their exile and served their sentences in mines or prisons, finally to be released as new settlers of Siberia. Other, wealthier and better-connected convicts, however, traveled by carriage and lived in rented houses. Beer dwells on the notable political exiles—the Decembrists, the exiles from the two Polish rebellions, and the literary and revolutionary figures—and brings them to life. While they were sentenced to the civil death of exile, their tales of heroic resistance in Siberia (some true, others not) spread across Russia and beyond. In weaving his tale, Beer occasionally, and understandably, gets wrapped