

The late choral works of Igor Stravinsky: a reception history

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Abstract

Despite his preeminence in twentieth-century music, the late works of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) remain in relative obscurity: seldom performed, inadequately recorded, poorly understood, and frequently disparaged. The troubled reception of these works stands in remarkable contradiction to the composer's ever-increasing renown; few contemporary composers can rival Stravinsky in terms of popular acclaim, concert performances, recordings, or continuing influence. Stravinsky's late pieces were the subject of enormous controversy in the 1950s and 1960s. Written using the fractious twelve-tone method of Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), these scores represent perhaps the most astonishing change of style ever undertaken by a composer of comparable stature. This thesis will survey the reception of

Stravinsky's major late vocal works in England and America, including In memoriam Dylan Thomas (1954), Canticum sacrum (1956), Threni (1958), A Sermon, a Narrative, and a Prayer (1961), The Flood (1962), Introitus (1965), and Requiem Canticles (1966). The reception of each piece will be traced chronologically, beginning with responses to premiere performances and progressing to contemporary scholarship.

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