

Nicolas Nabokov (1903-1978): An Overview of His Writings

Born in Lyubcha in today's Belarus, Nicolas Dmitrievich Nabokov, a cousin of the writer Vladimir Nabokov, studied composition in Yalta with Vladimir Rebikov (1866-1920) and subsequently, after the family's exile, at the Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart with Joseph Haas (1879-1960) and with Paul Juon (1872-1940) at the Berlin Conservatoire, where he also consorted with Ferruccio Busoni. It was in Berlin that he started out as a music critic, writing for the Russian-language liberal daily *Rul'*, founded by his uncle Vladimir (father of the writer). These youthful efforts have not been catalogued.

In Paris, where he lived from 1924 to 1933 and had his first works performed (including the ballet *Ode* with the Ballets russes in 1928 and a Symphony No. 1 in 1929-30), Nabokov contributed to the Russian émigré press with articles for the periodicals *Blagonamerennyi*, founded by his future father-in-law Ioann Shakhovskoy; *Volia Rossii* (writing on Diaghilev); and *Chisla* (with, notably, an article on Prokofiev in 1930). He also wrote in German (with a chronicle of French musical life for *Melos* in 1927) and in French; his article "La vie et l'œuvre de Serge de Diaghilev" (1929) in *La Musique* provoked a temporary falling-out with Igor Stravinsky, who was displeased to read that Diaghilev had played an important role in the genesis of *Petrushka* and *Les Noces*.

Exiled again after 1933, this time in the United States of America, where he was naturalised in 1939, Nabokov, encouraged by the relationships that he cultivated in Washington with young diplomats and experts on the Soviet Union, took up the pen again publishing about twenty-five articles between 1941 and 1941, mostly in liberal opinion magazines such as *The New Republic* (an article on music in the USSR, 1941), *The Atlantic* (from 1942 to 1951, notably on Prokofiev, Vaslav Nijinsky, Diaghilev, and Serge Koussevitsky), *Harper's* (on Shostakovich, 1943), *Partisan Review* (on Stravinsky, 1944 - this article led to a thaw in their relationship), and *Politics* (on the musical purges in the Soviet Union, 1948). Some of these, as well as the chapter "Christmas with Stravinsky" from *Igor Stravinsky: A Merle Armitage Book*, edited by Edwin Corle (1949), were republished in 1951 in Nabokov's memoir *Old Friends and New Music*, released in two slightly different editions in Boston and London, respectively. (A catalogue of all these articles can be found in the bibliography of Vincent Giroud, *Nicolas Nabokov: A Life in Freedom and Music*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Back in Paris in 1951 after his nomination as general secretary of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), Nabokov continued to publish regularly in the general press: in *Preuves*, one of the CCF's organs (a review of *The Rake's Progress* in 1952, souvenirs of Count Harry Kessler in 1962 which also appeared in German in

Die Monat the same year); in *Encounter*, another CCF periodical (on Soviet music after the death of Stalin, 1953); and in *The Listener*, *Counterpoint*, and *Le Figaro littéraire*. He also contributed twice to *La Revue musicale*, to *High Fidelity* (in 1957, for Stravinsky's seventy-fifth birthday), and to the *Revue internationale de musique*, which in the autumn of 1951 published "La musique en Union soviétique", a translation of an article that had appeared in *Musical America* and was reproduced in *Preuves*, and in which Nabokov described the attacks suffered by composers (Prokofiev and Shostakovich, notably) in the USSR since 1948. The editor of the *Revue internationale*, Jacques Chailley, having summoned the Association des musiciens progressistes, Nabokov's contribution was presented as the first instalment of a "Tribune libre" accompanied by a shamefully Stalinist response by Jean Prodromidès. Ten years later, in the autumn of 1961, Nabokov published in the same periodical a new article on the state of music in the Soviet Union, without provoking much reaction this time.

Appointed a cultural advisor to the mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt, who was trying to revive cultural life in the city after the construction of the wall, Nabokov in 1964 published a monograph in German on Stravinsky, entitled simply *Igor Strawinsky*, with which the composer declared himself to be most satisfied. Again relocating to the USA after his resignation for the CCF, following the revelation of its (partial) funding by foundations serving as fronts for the American government via the CIA (this arrangement had not been revealed to him), Nabokov edited with Anna Kallin the series *Twentieth-Century Composers*, of which four volumes were published by the Weidenfeld & Nicolson in the United Kingdom and by Holt, Rinehart & Winston in the USA between 1971 and 1971, written respectively by Virgil Thomson (*American Music since 1910*), Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt (*Germany and Central Europe*), Humphrey Searle and Robert Layton (*Britain, Scandinavia and the Netherlands*), and Fred Goldbeck (*France, Italy and Spain*); the advertised fifth volume, to be written by Nabokov himself with Nicolas Slonimsky, remained unfinished. But Nabokov devoted himself above all to the writing of his autobiography, *Bagázh*, published in the United States and Germany in 1975 and in France the next year (under the title *Cosmopolite*). Among his last publications are a study of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, published posthumously in 1978 in *Slavica Hierosolomitana*, as well as reminiscences of W. H. Auden, included in the volume *W. H. Auden: A Tribute*, edited by Stephen Spender (London: Macmillan, 1975) and of Boris Blacher, written in 1975 for a concert-homage by the Cleveland Orchestra and later reprinted in the volume *Boris Blacher*, edited by Heribert Heinrich and Thomas Eickhoff (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2003). At the time of his sudden death following a minor operation, Nabokov was working on a new memoir and an oral history project that was to have drawn on a series of interviews with personalities that he had met in the course of his long life.

Nabokov's writings therefore amount to three monographs and about sixty articles that have been identified, some of which appeared in multiple languages, and to which must be added a number of unpublished ones held mainly in two archives: the Nicolas Nabokov Papers at the Harry Ransom Center (University of Texas at Austin) and the Nicolas Nabokov Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale University).

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