
by

Mark Stephen Carroll
B Mus (Hons.)

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ABSTRACT

This study places the radicalisation of art music in early post-War France in its broader socio-cultural and political context. It achieves this by pursuing two general and intersecting lines of inquiry. The first details the stances towards musical conservatism and innovation adopted by cultural strategists representing Western and Soviet ideological interests at the onset of the Cold War. The study considers the implications of the performance at *L'Oeuvre du XXe siècle*, an international arts festival staged in Paris in 1952, of two opposing musical types: neo-classicism (represented by Stravinsky’s *Symphony in C*), and serialism (Boulez’s *Structures 1a*). Organised by Nicolas Nabokov, the festival was one of the Congress for Cultural Freedom’s attempts to question the validity of Soviet socialist realism. The second line of inquiry, which draws upon the commentaries of Adorno and Sartre, recognises that the Cold War generated a heightened political awareness amongst French musicians at the very time when the social relevance of avant-garde music had become the focus of widespread debate.

Five specific topics are addressed: the differences and similarities between socialist realism and Western cultural policy, as articulated by the Congress for Cultural Freedom during *L’Oeuvre du XXe siècle*; the historical antecedents of the French socialist realist Progressiste movement in France, and the impact of its Zhdanovian dictates upon Serge Nigg’s artistic development; the location of *L’Oeuvre du XXe siècle*, and the styles presented at it, within the ideological and cultural ferment of early post-War France; the attempt by René Leibowitz to situate Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw* within the Sartrean existentialist idea of committed art, and Sartre’s response to Leibowitz’s findings; and the potential of works such as *Structures 1a* to challenge the Cold War ideological status quo.
Among the conclusions drawn is that whereas neo-classicism signified the maintenance of a post-War order in which French interests were rendered subordinate, serialism formed part of a revolutionary discourse which sought to question that order; and that the challenges to convention and musical comprehension presented by *Structures 1a* are highly significant given that the work was composed at a time and in a place where the Cold War antagonists had demanded conformity and transparency in artistic expression in order to ensure fidelity to their ideological values.