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ABSTRACT

Igor Stravinsky’s collaborations with contemporaries including Picasso, Nijinsky, and Cocteau are well documented. Less familiar, however, are the anachronistic “collaborations” suggested in one short movement Stravinsky wrote in 1918, and involving the Germans Luther and Bach, the Swiss Ramuz, the Russian Stravinsky, and the American Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

“Grand Choral,” the penultimate movement of Stravinsky’s l’histoire du Soldat—written in 1918—provides a key to unlocking the mysteries of construction, ideology, and by extension, performance of the work. “Grand Choral” parodies J.S. Bach’s Cantata 80 (1715) which, in its turn, is based on Martin Luther’s 1529 hymn, “Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott.” C.F. Ramuz, Stravinsky’s original collaborator on l’histoire du Soldat, based his libretto on a Russian folktale, but in 1993, Vonnegut wrote a new text to accompany Stravinsky’s music, a text inspired by the true story of Private Eddie Slovik, the last American soldier executed for desertion. In essence, Vonnegut collaborates with Stravinsky in a posthumous sense, as Stravinsky does with Bach and Bach with Luther. Vonnegut and Stravinsky each write themselves into an existing work, giving it contemporary meaning and a new poignancy.

The principal aim of my paper is to document the process by which I studied and conducted l’histoire du Soldat with one libretto by Ramuz and another by Vonnegut. In the paper, I will first examine the historical context in which each of the “collaborators” contributed to l’histoire du Soldat. I will also present an analysis of “Grand Choral” with regard to the source material by Luther and Bach. Finally, I will document the process and findings of my study, rehearsal, and performance of each of the two versions of l’histoire du Soldat which I conducted on March 31, 2009 in Quance Theatre, on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan with a full cast of musicians, dancers and actors.
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