



Modernist Mysteries: Persephone

Tamara Levitz

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Modernist Mysteries: Perséphone is a landmark study that will move the field of musicology in important new directions. The book presents a microhistorical analysis of the premiere of the melodrama *Perséphone* at the Paris Opera on April 30th, 1934, engaging with the collaborative, transnational nature of the production. Author Tamara Levitz demonstrates how these collaborators-- Igor Stravinsky, André Gide, Jacques Copeau, and Ida Rubinstein, among others--used the myth of Persephone to perform and articulate their most deeply held beliefs about four topics significant to modernism: religion, sexuality, death, and historical memory in art. In investigating the aesthetic and political consequences of the artists' diverging perspectives, and the fall-out of their titanic clash on the theater stage, Levitz dismantles myths about neoclassicism as a musical style. The result is a revisionary account of modernism in music in the 1930s.

As a result of its focus on the collaborative performance, this book differs from traditional accounts of musical modernism and neoclassicism in several ways. First and foremost, it centers on the performance of modernism, highlighting the theatrical, performative, and sensual. Levitz places Christianity in the center of the discussion, and questions the national distinctions common in modernist research by involving a transnational team of collaborators. She further breaks new ground in shifting the focus from "history" to "memory" by emphasizing the commemorative nature of neoclassic listening rituals over the historicist stylization of its scores, and contends that modernists captured on stage and in philosophical argument their simultaneous need and inability to mourn the past. The book as a whole counters the common criticism that neoclassicism was a "reactionary" musical style by suggesting a more pluralistic, ambivalent, and sometimes even progressive politics, and reconnects musical neoclassicism with a queer classicist tradition extending from Winckelmann through Walter Pater to Gide. *Modernist Mysteries* concludes that 1930s modernists understood neoclassicism not as formalist compositional approaches but rather as a vitalist art haunted by ghosts of the past and promissory visions of the future.

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