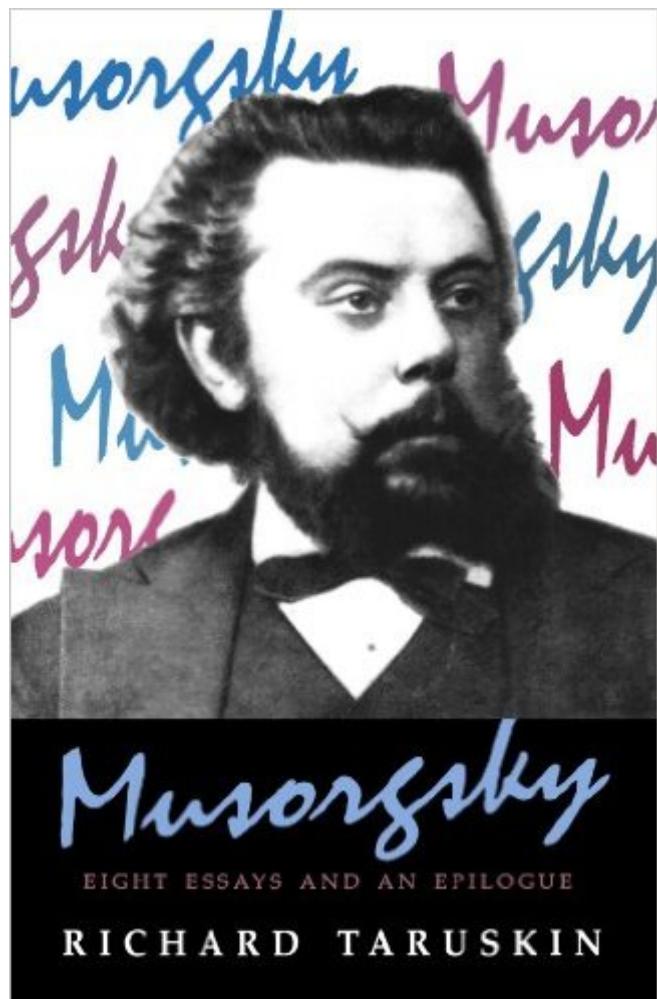


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Musorgsky



Synopsis

"It is [a] fully illuminated story that Richard Taruskin, in the path-breaking essays collected here, unfolds around Modest Musorgsky, Russia's greatest national composer.... [Taruskin's] tour de force comes with a frontal attack on all the Soviet-bred truisms that for a century have refashioned Musorgsky from what the evidence suggests he was--an aristocrat with an early clinical interest in true-to-life musical portraiture and a later penchant for drinking partners who were both folklore buffs and political reactionaries democrat."--From the forewordIncorporating both new and now-classic essays, this book for the first time sets the vocal works of Modest Musorgsky in a fully detailed cultural, political, and historical context. From this perspective Richard Taruskin revises fundamentally the composer's historical and artistic image, in particular debunking the century-old dogmas of Vladimir Stasov, Musorgsky's first biographer. Here the author offers the most complete explanation of the revision of the opera *Boris Godunov*, compares it to contemporaneous operas by Chaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, advances a revisionary characterization of *Khovanshchina* as an aristocratic tragedy informed by a pessimistic view of history, discusses Musorgsky's use of folklore, and, focusing on *Sorochintsi Fair*, brings to a climax his refutation of Musorgsky as a protorevolutionary populist. The epilogue is a survey of revisionary productions of Musorgsky's works at home during the Gorbachev era.

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Customer Reviews

Before I'll make some critical notions on this book I have to confess how much I enjoyed reading

this book. This book, like the other books by Taruskin is academic literature at its best. Not only profound, detailed and knowledgeable but also driven by curiosity and passionate interest in his subject. And I wouldn't even consider my objections against many of his assumptions as something to be put against this book. I prefer being confronted with some controversial theories to boring middle of the road literature. Already the title of the introduction "Who Speaks for Musorgsky?" made me a little resentful and is somehow symptomatic for the case Musorgsky. Why is it that everybody feels invited to either speak for him or school him like a dependent boy? Balakirev, Cui and Rimsky did, and even his friends and supporters Stasov and Kutuzov loved to do it. Taruskin decided that Kutuzov speaks more for Musorgsky than Stasov since this fits better to his revisionist thesis. The truth is that they all first speak for themselves. Stasov projects his revolutionary ideas on him like Kutuzov his reactionary aristocratic ideals. Cui wants to demonstrate his intellectual and Rinsky his technical superiority. And of course the soviet propaganda used him for their purposes well. I would say that even the Musorgsky of the letters is not always speaking for Musorgsky since his hypersensitive and conflict avoiding character often made him write rather what his addressee wanted to hear than what he really thought. The only thing that speaks truthfully for Musorgsky is his music.

America's leading historian of Russian music, Richard Taruskin, collected ten essays about 19th-century composer Modest Musorgsky (1839-1881) in this 1993 publication. This volume will be of interest to specialist readers, not general ones. Points of interest are: 1) Taruskin extensively discusses and documents Musorgsky's radical period in the 1860s, marked by populism, an attempt to integrate theater and popular speech rhythms in musical drama through the unfinished opera "The Marriage" and the long 15-minute song "The Puppet Show." 2) How Musorgsky developed and moved away from the anti-melodic dramatics of this early period when he was a member of the "kuchka", the "mighty handful". Taruskin shows the growing melodic interest of the vocal writing in the composer's major achievement, "Boris Godunov" and the almost-as-good "Khovanschina". This is explored in a number of ways, including debunking the traditional musicological view of how the initial rejection of "Boris Gudonov" by the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg forced Musorgsky into revising the opera. Taruskin instead shows the revision of "Boris" was in progress before the rejection, impelled by the composer's changing dramatic and musical views rather than imposed by the Imperial Theater. 3) Ploughing through years of accumulated leftist and Soviet claims as to Musorgsky's putative leftist populism, Taruskin goes straight to source documents to show that Musorgsky, born of an

aristocratic family which lost its wealth in the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, was in fact a conservative supporter of the Tsar & the aristocracy, was quite anti-semitic even by the standards of his time, and in fact, though a drunk, exhibited the bred behavior of the aristocracy throughout his life.

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