ment was simply entertainment for the consumers and business for the producers. A comparative perspective might have allowed McReynolds to evaluate more effectively the strength of this commercial culture and its particularly Russian character.

In conclusion the author suggests that Russians who participated in this world of leisure developed "a new sense of self that allowed for personality shifts according to the circumstances" (p. 293). This sounds very much like T. S. Eliot's "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." In an epilogue the author briefly describes the changes in some of these cultural institutions during the Soviet era. Although she finds some continuity, she stresses the superior opportunities for self-expression in the more open and freewheeling pre-revolutionary commercial culture, which she characterizes as a key aspect of "modernization." Thus she writes: "The extent to which this foreclosure [of commercial leisure activity] contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union has yet to be fully explored" (p. 299).

In sum this is a book that opens up a subject and raises more questions than it answers. And for that we should be grateful. The book is very nicely produced and contains many illustrations that give readers a flavor of the commercial culture.

Jeffrey Brooks


In this intriguing study, Simon Morrison addresses the question of how Russian Symbolist writers' concerns with transforming and transcending life through art, and particularly through music, functioned when put to the practical test in four specific operatic works conceived in various versions by Russian composers between 1890 and 1930. Discussing Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia*, Scriabin's *Preparatory Act*, and Prokof'ev's *Fiery Angel*, all either inspirational to or inspired by Russian Symbolist thought, Morrison argues that these works not only demonstrate the ability of music to "invoke the otherworldly," but also point to "the insurmountable barrier between the representation of the miraculous and its enactment" (p. 1).

Morrison introduces the subject with a brief discussion of Symbolist aesthetics and the musical symbol. He then turns to Aleksandr Blok's 1913 drama *The Rose and the Cross*, which provides an illuminating preliminary example of the difficulties inherent in assigning otherworldly import to music. Blok's metaphorical and autobiographical work turns on a troubadour's evocative song, a variant of which was composed by Mikhail Gnesin, but, as Morrison notes, "given the philosophical freight [Blok] had assigned to it, any setting of the song would prove anticlimactic and deficient" (p. 25). Blok rejected Gnesin's offering, which he found too traditional in its intentional association of specific musical motifs with semantic cues and its dismissal of the innovations in harmony and meter that the Symbolists prized.

In chapters 1 and 2, devoted respectively to Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia*,
Morrison describes the two operas as successfully – but paradoxically – Symbolist. The first, after all, was composed in 1890, before the Symbolist movement had gotten underway; and the second, while created between 1900 and 1904 during the movement’s heyday, was nonetheless the product of a rationalist composer decidedly opposed to Symbolist theory. Discussing the popularity Tchaikovsky’s opera enjoyed among World of Art painters and Symbolist poets, Morrison stresses the work’s “proto-Symbolist content” (p. 55), noting its play’ between rational and irrational forces as well as its sporadically ambiguous combination of time periods. He characterizes Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, meanwhile, as “an opera of faith by a skeptic” (p. 117), the result not only of the composer’s collaboration with the Symbolist enthusiast Vladimir Bel’sky, his librettist, but also of Rimsky-Korsakov’s fascination with pantheism and syncrétism. Commenting on the positive response on the part of Russian Symbolists to Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, Morrison concludes, “A Symbolist opera cannot be designed; it can only arise by default out of its reception” (p. 171).

Chapter 3 is dedicated to Scriabin’s Preparatory Act, a transliteration and translation of which Morrison helpfully appends to the volume as an appendix. Scriabin was thoroughly immersed in Symbolist thought, particularly that of Viacheslav Ivanov, and sought intentionally to create a Symbolist musical work (though his composition dates predominantly to 1913–14, by which point Symbolism as a movement had run its course). And yet here, too, questions regarding intentionality arise: Morrison explains that Scriabin was so determined to work transformative miracles through his text that his project was doomed to failure from the start. Indeed, Scriabin completed only a draft of his libretto and fifty-five pages of musical sketches before dying in 1915 with the work unfinished. Scriabin’s Symbolist writer friends had viewed his project, including the libretto’s at times questionable poetry, with a combination of misgivings (“Scriabin is unstable!,” a concerned Ivanov wrote [p. 193]) and respect. In true Symbolist fashion, they interpreted his death – from blood-poisoning because of a boil – as a sacrifice and surrender to art. Morrison, writing that through his project Scriabin had “transcended artistry” (p. 231), appears in ways to echo their approbation.

The book’s final chapter deals with Prokof’ev’s Fiery Angel, based on Valerii Briusov’s 1907-1908 novel of that name. Created in the 1920s during the composer’s years in emigration, the opera’s links to Symbolism consist of its source matter and its implicit commentary on Symbolist “life-creation.” Briusov’s novel may be read on many levels, including that of a roman à clef treating the famous Symbolist love triangle of Briusov, his fellow writer Andrei Belyi, and Nina Petrovskaiia, whom both men pursued; as Morrison relates, the affair also became fodder for several of their poems. Although Prokof’ev, who had not been raised on Symbolist texts and lore, learned about the novel’s autobiographical content only several years after discovering the book in 1919 in New York, he ended up creating an opera that took Briusov’s sometime mockery of Symbolist mystical aesthetics one step further and thus, Morrison writes, “heretically eradicates states of transcendence” (p. 17). Despite Prokof’ev’s high hopes for the opera, it met with repeated rejections and was staged for the first time only in 1955, two years after the composer’s death.