

## **David Dubal: The Art of the Piano: its performers, literature and recordings (third edition).**

Pompton Plains, NJ and Cambridge, UK: Amadeus Press, 2004. Softback, with bonus CD. ISBN 1-57467-088-3. US \$34.95. xxii + 693 pp.

In 1989 Summit Books published the first edition of David Dubal's *The Art of the Piano*. Dubal, a New York radio personality who also teaches a piano literature class at The Juilliard School, assembled a two-part reference book dealing alphabetically with noted pianists of the 19th and 20th centuries as well as a thorough examination, arranged alphabetically by composer, of the piano repertoire. The latter section also contained Dubal's listings of recommended recordings, usually multiple versions of each work, chosen for their contrasting qualities.

Six years later a second, expanded edition appeared under the imprint of Harcourt, Brace and Co. Now Amadeus Press has brought us a third edition, more than 200 pages larger than its predecessor, with still further coverage of pianists and repertoire. An additional feature is a bonus CD (playing time: 78: 25) containing 31 recordings by as many pianists, produced by Allan Evans of Arbiter Records. (More about this CD later.)

To his credit, Dubal evinces a genuine enthusiasm for the piano and its practitioners, and he also displays firm knowledge of most of the literature, which he has obviously explored in depth for many years. His treatment of pianists, while making no pretence of formal scholarship, is a combination of biographical facts with pithy critical comment. He is fond of quoting other writers (ranging from famous composers to James Huneker, Romain Rolland and Charles Rosen), and he sprinkles these quotations liberally throughout the book. His own evaluations, of course, are not free of personal biases and traces of hero worship. Nor does he refrain from harsh criticism in a limited number of cases: many will applaud the way he excoriates Lang Lang, for example. In general, Dubal focuses on each player's individual qualities (where first-hand evidence is available), or on whatever historical background may provide clues to those qualities. The scope of his treatment varies widely, from a few sentences to several pages depending on each pianist's fame, significance, or Dubal's own perspectives.

So much for the book's positive elements. What might have been a much-needed reliable survey of the field has been thoroughly sabotaged by the most careless, inept job of book production I have ever encountered. The volume is strewn with literally hundreds of misspellings, typographical errors, and factual errors. Few performers emerge unscathed by this sloppiness. For example, at various points in the text we encounter "Jorge Rolet," "Emil Saver," "Howard Shelby" (as well as "Shelly"), "Leschetizsky," "Casadesis," "Giles," "Gravrilov," "Samuel Fienberg," "Cyziffra," "Moisewitch," "Eshenback," "Rachmanimoff," "Dallapiccolo," Claudio "Aabbado" (as well as "Abrado"), Carlo Maria "Giuliani," "Relich" (twice, for Pogorelich), Sergio "Fiorento," Louis "Lorte," "Bohuslav Martin," "Urusula Oppens," "Yalta Menuhin," "Gounoud," and Rudolf "Firku\_n\_y". We also learn about "rhapsodies," Liszt's "Funeralilles" and such Baroque dances as the "allimand" and "Boure." Record labels fare equally badly: "Hungaraton," "Marsten," "Meloyda," "Bianca" (for Bianco e Nero), "Simox," "Nu Ova Era," "Cembalo d'Amour," "Stradivarious" and "Arbitor" (numerous times). My favorite, however, is on page 591, where a CD on the "OUCH Arbitor" label is listed!

Incorrect information swarms throughout the volume. There is room here for only a few typical examples. Carried over from both earlier editions is an assertion that Emil Sauer recorded Chopin's B Minor Sonata; he did not. There is no recording of Busoni's Toccata by Egon Petri. Lowell Liebermann's Gargoyles consist of four, not three, pieces. Glenn Gould's last recital was not in Chicago in March 1964 but in Los Angeles the following month; moreover, Gould recorded 22, not 18, Beethoven Sonatas. Van Cliburn won the Leventritt prize in 1954, not 1955. Wanda Landowska was born in 1879, not 1877. Adam Harasiewicz did not record Chopin's complete piano works. Kathleen Dale, not Kathleen Long, is the author of the book *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*. Shostakovich did not dedicate his Preludes and Fugues to Tatiana Nikolayeva, nor did he record all 24 of them. Dubal makes the absurd statement that Rachmaninoff recorded 49 (sic) attempts at his *Midsummer Night's Dream Scherzo* transcription. Vincent Persichetti composed 12, not 11, piano sonatas. The Dukas piano sonata is not "an hour long" (p.294) no matter who plays it; but on p.487 its duration has become "upward of 45 minutes", which is still wide of the mark. Yolanda Mero did not make "many recordings," she left only one Victor 78. Sir Donald Tovey's Piano Concerto is not "totally neglected"; Steven Osborne's recording of it has been available since 1998. Louis Kentner did not play all the Beethoven Sonatas at his 1956 U.S. debut; the cycle was presented four years later. Enesco's second sonata, not his first, is unpublished (and was actually never written down). There is no Richter recording of Prokofiev's Sonata No.3 (he never played the work), nor one of Rubinstein playing Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No.3.

Dubal's coverage of the piano repertoire is flawed by a number of oddities and omissions. Since his focus is entirely on solo works and concertos, anyone seeking details of four-hand or duo-piano music, or chamber works with piano, will receive no help here. Nor does Dubal give reasons for his exclusion of this music. Since the last edition he has added durations for the each of the Beethoven Sonatas, but we are not told whose durations, why they are important, or why these are the only works thus treated. He also now provides descriptions of each of Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues; yet he does not specifically list or describe the French Suites, English Suites or Partitas, nor any of Haydn's 50+ sonatas. None of Clara Schumann's or Fanny Mendelssohn's piano works is mentioned. Fauré's five Impromptus are not described. Only one of Mozart's variation sets is listed. And Dubal's treatment of Reger's and Dvořák's large piano outputs is cursory, to say the least. As before, he adds a curious "addendum" to the repertoire section, focusing on the more obscure composers and works considered unworthy of inclusion in the main body (but completely lacking details of recordings, precisely where such details are needed). Conspicuously absent are certain baroque keyboard composers, such as Couperin and Rameau, who Dubal incorrectly perceives as "seldom played or recorded" by pianists. Meanwhile, the information Dubal does provide for recordings of piano repertoire is badly in need of updating and correction, quite apart from the many debatable inclusions and omissions. Incorrect record labels, ambiguous CD or LP availability of many of the chosen performances, and similar problems and inconsistencies persist throughout.

Apart from the foregoing problems, anyone familiar with the full extent of recorded pianists over the past century will immediately seize upon a number of Dubal's indefensible omissions. I would include on my list the following: Victor Schiøler, Joseph Villa, Werner Haas, Seta Tanyel, Gilbert Kalish, Germaine Thyssens-Valentin, Steven Osborne, Konstantin Scherbakov, Geoffrey Tozer, Piers Lane, and Elizabeth Leonskaya.

A particularly unappealing aspect of the book, which the publishers deemed worthy of expansion from the earlier editions, is the presence of 53 of Dubal's own sketches of various pianists and composers. These amateurish drawings border on the hideous and are obviously copied from existing portraits or publicity photos, any of which would have been infinitely preferable.

As for the book's bonus CD, it has its attractions as a sampler of material issued by Arbiter Records (with five items not previously released), but if there is any broader *raison d'être*, we are not informed of it. All 31 pianists represented fall into the "historic" category. Among them are Michal Hambourg, Iren Marik, and Severin Eisenberger. Not included are such notables as Josef Hofmann, Josef Lhévinne, Simon Barere, Edwin Fischer, Ignace Jan Paderewski, and Guiomar Novaes. The transfers are of the relatively unfiltered variety, characteristic of Arbiter productions.

All things considered, *The Art of the Piano* is a potentially useful volume that is so fatally flawed by its lack of proofreading and fact-checking that it cannot be taken seriously. The author acknowledges some dozen people who assisted in the book's preparation, but the shoddy final product does no credit to any of them. Obviously Amadeus Press, a once reputable publisher, failed to provide its author with the competent editorial assistance he clearly needed to accomplish his worthy intentions.

- Donald Manildi

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