

Maurice Hinson: The Pianist's Dictionary

(Indiana University Press, 2004. 221 pp. ISBN 0-253-344050-0)

For more than 30 years the industrious Maurice Hinson, professor of music at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has produced a steady stream of reference books dealing with all aspects of the classical piano literature. All have appeared under the imprint of Indiana University Press. Some, notably his 1972 *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, have undergone one or more revisions or expansions. Hinson's latest contribution is an attempt to compile a dictionary of names, terms and titles pertaining to the entire field of pianism, embracing composers, compositions, performers, teachers, publishers and piano makers. "This is information I have worked on while teaching piano for almost 60 years," Hinson states in his Preface. (Disclosure: my name is included, once, in a list of former pupils of Hinson's colleague Margaret Saunders Ott.)

However laudable Hinson's aims may be, the published results quickly eliminate this volume from serious consideration. Its 220 pages, lacking illustrations and with only six small musical examples (and at a rather exorbitant hardcover price of \$39.95), contain a nearly unbelievable profusion of factual errors, misspellings, and misleading statements - more, in fact, than I have ever encountered in a reference book. For example, a Sonata, according to Hinson, contains "two to five contrasting movements" (despite his references elsewhere to some of the numerous one-movement piano sonatas). The defining characteristic of "Zortzico," unmentioned by Hinson, is quintuple meter. Curiously, a definition is provided for "natural," but none for sharp, flat, or accidental. Any reader seeking the meaning of "atonality" will be told, incorrectly, that it is "an organizing harmonic system." Habanera (sic) and Seguidilla are defined, in both cases, with unspecific references to "the aria from Bizet's Carmen."

When we turn to the names of pianists, the errors begin to proliferate. Ania Dorfmann becomes "Dorfman," and her teacher Isidor Philipp's first name is misspelled "Isidore." Philipp is said to have written "books on the instrument" (not so), but no mention is made of his famous, nearly countless technical exercises. Vladimir Horowitz's year of birth (1903) is erroneously given as 1904, while Emil Sauer was really born in 1862, not 1863, and Artur Schnabel was born in 1882, not 1881. The year of death for Frederic Lamond is 1948, not 1945. Wanda Landowska was born in 1879, not 1877. A reference to "Christian Ortiz" (p.182) should be to Cristina Ortiz. On p.202, Zadel "Sokolovsky" should be Skolovsky. The one-armed pianist Paul Wittgenstein was the brother, not the "cousin," of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. In four separate references, Hinson perpetuates the frequent misspelling of Leon Fleisher's last name as "Fleischer." The contemporary composer Lowell Liebermann has become "Liebeman." The teacher of Daniel Pollack was Ethel Leginska, not "Leginsky," and Hinson's entry for the latter (spelled correctly!) should have mentioned that her name was originally Liggins. Ossip Gabrilowitsch's first name is given here as "Osspi." The wife of pianist Eugene List was Carroll Glenn, not "Glen." Rudolf Serkin (born 1903) is described as a "Czech pianist," but Czechoslovakia did not exist then; Serkin was born in a German-speaking region of Bohemia.

The choices of front-rank pianists given brief (two or three-sentence) biographical sketches seem arbitrary at best. Many famous performers are represented, but a few of the significant names

excluded are Simon Barere, Gina Bachauer, Abram Chasins, Francis Planté, Marc-André Hamelin, Harriet Cohen, Tams Vásáry, Emanuel Ax, Sergio Fiorentino, Moura Lympany, Jörg Demus, Georges Cziffra, Karl Ulrich Schnabel, Julius Katchen, Robert Levin, Samuel Feinberg, Vladimir Sofronitsky, Maria Yudina, Géza Anda and Stephen Hough. Occasionally personal value judgments intrude to a questionable extent for a supposedly objective reference book. One example is Hinson's claim that Ruth Laredo's playing "is a joy to hear." Another is a description of Louis Kentner's recordings as "delightful." Although we are duly informed that Johann Sebastian Bach was "one of the greatest composers," such diverse creative figures as William Bolcom, Nicolai Kapustin, Billy Mayerl, Nicolas Medtner, and Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji have been denied individual entries despite their large, increasingly familiar, piano outputs. Hinson does acknowledge Robert Casadesus as a performer, but not as the composer of some noteworthy sonatas, etudes and preludes.

Hinson gives a good deal of attention to specific titles of piano works and to musical terminology in general, being especially diligent to include (and translate) French performance directions as found in Debussy, Satie and others. Again, however, the selection process is hit-or-miss. Satie's piquant admonition, "Comme un rossignol qui aurait mal aux dents" is not here, for instance, while would-be Beethoven interpreters will be irritated by the absence of "Vivacissimamente" (from Sonata, Op.81a) or "Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung" (in Sonata, Op.109). Hinson does, however, manage to include "Gefühlsduselei" without stating where it is to be found. There is an entry under "Dante Sonata," but Liszt did not title his work thus; *Après une lecture de Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* is the proper designation, which Hinson should have specified. Strangely, Hinson manages to include nearly every one of the fanciful, inauthentic Victorian titles that were once assigned to Mendelssohn's 48 Songs Without Words, but he fails to make clear that these did not originate with the composer. In the entry under "Fantasy," two of the greatest masterworks of the genre - by Chopin and by Schumann - are not mentioned, but Schubert's contribution is given in the incorrect key of C minor rather than C major. An equally egregious omission is the name of Ravel under "Ondine."

Purely factual errors swarm throughout the dictionary, but there is space here to document only a few. Leo Ornstein composed eight, not four, piano sonatas. Max Reger never wrote "50-page fugues" as Hinson absurdly claims, yet Reger is credited with two nonexistent piano sonatas. Schumann's *Waldszenen* consists of nine, not eight, pieces. Schumann's *Papillons* ends with a clock striking six, not 12. Chopin wrote 16, not 10, *Polonaises* for solo piano. Under "Funeral March Sonata" Hinson believes that the march is the second, rather than the third, movement of Beethoven's Op.26. Anyone seeking accurate information under "Goldberg Variations" may be puzzled to read that Bach included 32, not 30, variations in this work. Enrique Granados wrote 12, not 10, *Spanish Dances*. Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* was inspired by pencil sketches and watercolors, not by "paintings." Ruth Laredo did not record the complete works of Scriabin. Benno Moiseiwitsch is called "an expert on classical repertoire" yet he avoided Haydn and Mozart and played only seven or eight works of Beethoven. Charles Rosen's repertoire begins with Bach and Scarlatti, not with Beethoven. Grieg composed 66, not 73, *Lyric Pieces*. Tatiana Nikolaeva (sic) premiered Shostakovich's *Preludes and Fugues*, not his "Preludes" which are different works entirely. Michael Habermann has performed and recorded only a small portion, not "most of," Sorabji's music.

Rounding out this rather depressing picture is an abundance of inelegant, ungrammatical and sophomoric phraseology. For Ravel's Pavane, the complete entry reads "this piano piece requires a steady tempo (not too slow) and is not easy to project on the piano." Dohnanyi's ten Winterreigen "are dedicated to a specific friend, make references to personal experiences, and are full of keyboard improvisation." "Many composers have composed Mazurkas" (p.111). The "Grandes etudes de Paganini" are dated 1851, then are described as "a set of six brilliant Paganini studies published in 1840 that Liszt transcribed for the piano." Hinson's text under "Octaves" Etude states: "This nickname is appropriate because of all the octaves in the piece." And pianist Lee Luvisi "has a special place in his heart for Mozart and Schubert, which always shows when he performs these two great composers."

Appended after letter "Z" is a short, two-page, unannotated bibliography that lists assorted reference works, all but three in English. We are not told whether these served as Hinson's source material or whether he is recommending them for further study.

Even if this dictionary were a paragon of completeness and accuracy, it would still be vulnerable to criticism on basic conceptual grounds. Too many pianists operate within a restricted, insular environment providing little if any exposure to other repertoires or to a wide spectrum of performance philosophies. Consequently, too few pianists seek the kind of broad cultural background or the variety of musical experiences that would inform and enhance their level of performance. Therefore, a dictionary that limits itself entirely to pianistic matters will do little to stimulate its users toward exploration of those broader areas. By contrast, the more general reference works, starting with Harvard, Baker's, and Grove, at least have the potential to generate some degree of curiosity among their users while still supplying accurate information on most of the questions that pianists confront.

The inevitable verdict here is that of a well-intentioned yet hastily, carelessly prepared book lacking any signs of fact-checking, proofreading or proper editorial assistance. It can only be called a major embarrassment to all involved. (To a somewhat lesser extent, similar problems prevail in Hinson's earlier publications.) Indiana University Press ought to recognize that issuing such reference works does a gross disservice to their reputation, to the author's reputation, and to all users of this volume. There is evidence that perhaps IUP simply doesn't care; two letters of concern sent to IUP's Director in September and October 2004, documenting specific flaws in Hinson's Dictionary, have gone unacknowledged. Under the circumstances, IUP would be best advised to quietly remove this unfortunate undertaking from the marketplace.

- Donald Manildi

(This review was originally published in Music Library Association Notes, Vol.62:1 [2005])