

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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# BOOK REVIEW

*Steinway & Sons*

Richard K. Lieberman  
Yale University Press,  
1995. 374 pp.

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## STEINWAY & SONS

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A REVIEW OF A book about the piano firm Steinway & Sons may seem a little out of place in a journal called *Harpsichord and Fortepiano*. After all, aren't they — the creators of that invincible beast which has swept aside all its predecessors, sacrificing all those fortepiano idiosyncrasies in the desire for greater volume, greater uniformity of tone and greater evenness in playing response — 'the enemy'? The confraternity of fortepianists might even go so far as to say that the survival of the modern grand has been the musical equivalent of an ecological disaster, filling the environment with misunderstandings of the music of Bach, Scarlatti, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. Yet we need to understand 'the enemy' if we wish to continue to erode the mentality which maintains that some Darwinian process has now finally come to an end: perfection has been reached, there is no use turning back to examine the corpses of the species made extinct on the journey, and there is no point in trying to recreate a 'biodiversity' of musical instruments.

Professor Lieberman's book gives some clues to the reasons behind the dominance of the modern grand piano, and more particularly to Steinway's leading role in this field. What is it that makes people want to own a Steinway? Prestige, snobbery, marketing are some of the answers. Why do concert pianists want to play them? The firm has always been responsive to the requirements of artists —

particularly the virtuosi — and has promoted its own artist-list and subsidised concert-tours through which the pianos, like presidential candidates, gain the validation of certain well-known superstar performers. Not least, of course, is the fact that the Steinway piano represents a very high standard of industrial design; and, as with all such complex structures, its failure to update and modernise the production process may yet lead to its downfall. A very good final chapter of the book charts Steinway's battle against Yamaha's seemingly unstoppable erosion of its own home (American) market. Today some Steinway pianos are manufactured by Kawai in Japan.

Lieberman's book is not specifically aimed at the musician. Piano buffs will be disappointed that the book contains little technical information, although this is amply compensated for by the wealth of biographical and sociological detail which is found in its place. For example, the author paints a fascinating picture of the Steinway family and their relationship with their employees. As director of the LaGuardia and Wagner archives in New York, where the Steinway archives are deposited, Lieberman has used his source material very well. The book occasionally faults on the dry side, but that is preferable to the opposite, since the lives of the Steinway family seem perilously close to those depicted in American soap operas without the need for authorial exaggeration! We are given lots of close-ups of simmering personalities, such as Ernestine, the Steinway widow

who married her coachman. Scandal naturally ensued and the poor woman was deprived of the custody of her children. We then meet the wife of William Steinway (1835–1896), Regina, who demanded that servants fetch champagne and ice-cream for her nights of debauchery; unfortunately for her, William kept a diary of their marital sexual activity and was therefore able to ascertain that her son was not his! To cap it all he discovered that, on a trip to Germany, Regina and her niece both became involved with the same man — to whom the niece subsequently became engaged, only to find out that he was already married with children. Yet another member of the family was prevented from becoming President of the company because he married a 'streetwalker'. Fred Steinway's fiancé, Julia, would only accept his proposal of marriage on the condition that he lost weight. Steinway women were not allowed to assume authority in the firm, and it seems they reasonably found an outlet for their energies elsewhere.

The story of the business follows a pattern typical in America at the time. From a family of charcoal-burners in Germany, Heinrich Steinweg builds his first piano in Seesen in 1835; in 1839 he is exhibiting pianos at a local trade fair in Brunswick. Heinrich's son Charles lands in New York in 1849, joined by his parents and siblings in the following year. Steinway & Sons was established in 1853 at about the same time as Bechstein and Blüthner were being established. These first instruments, all of them square pianos, were entirely handmade by the family. Five years later a factory was established, the 'first in New York to mechanise on such a grand scale'.

The grandchildren of the founder, brothers Henry and Theodor, lived 4000 miles apart in America and Germany respectively, and their surviving letters to one another are a goldmine for the present-day historian. Henry's letters detail the changes the firm was making to the instrument at the time. The full cast-iron plate, which permitted the greater tension required for a complete seven-octave compass, less frequent tuning and thicker, heavier strings — all of this producing a more powerful sound — had first been used by Babcock in 1825. Henry modified the design to create a 'downward projecting flange' with agraffes (metal studs) screwed into it, which helped to dissipate the thin sound made by the iron plate. In 1859 Henry was the first maker to overstring a grand piano, bringing the bridge closer to the centre of the soundboard to produce a stronger tone. The action was also made more responsive. Thus the 'Steinway system' was already in use by 1859 and later modifications were relatively minor. These included the 'duplex scale', a new way of stringing the piano developed by Theodor Steinway which utilised part of the string between the bridge and the hitch-pin to vibrate sympathetically with the main part of the string. Uprights, although rare in America in the 1860s, became a regular Steinway model. In 1893, instead of American rosewood, they started using ebonised cherry-wood for their European pianos because of the damper atmosphere they had to cope with. A new fast-drying lacquer was employed which led to an increase in productivity. A 'Steinway Accelerated Action' was introduced. Ivory was abandoned for practical (not ethical) reasons. Not all the modifications, however, were problem-free. The use of Teflon bushings proved disastrous, becoming sluggish in winter and audibly knocking in summer; felt was reintroduced, albeit 'Teflon-impregnated'.

Lieberman's book recalls the good times and the bad times for the piano industry. A record number of 6294 pianos were made at the factory in Queens in 1926, but there always seemed to be some threat to the piano industry lurking on the horizon — economic recession, war, or labour rights. The rise of the radio and phonograph was countered by stylish Art Deco Minipianos, although at first the company resisted the trend, feeling it was below their dignity. Then in 1935 a new threat arrived, and one not so easily countered: the Hammond Organ.

During the Second World War the Hamburg factory supplied Nazi Germany with wooden aeroplane decoys, bunk beds and rifle stock, whilst the New York factory turned out gliders and later the drab olive government-issue Steinway for use on the battlefield, as well as coffins. The FBI investigated pro-German sympathy at Steinway & Sons but found no evidence to back up the allegations, although competitors made capital out of the anti-German hysteria then current among the public. The firm in Germany did no better, as there the Steinways were regarded as Jews, and for Hitler Bechstein remained the preferred piano company. Hamburg Steinway were ordered to make wooden swastikas.

A major part of the firm's efforts was given over to marketing the instrument. Steinway began to seek artists' endorsements in response to the employment of the virtuoso Thalberg by their main American rivals, Chickering, and in 1872 sponsored what was to be Rubinstein's only American tour — there should have been others, but although Rubinstein made good money from it he found the task so 'tedious' that he began to 'despise [himself] and [his] art.' By the end of the century Steinway was inextricably linked with the musical establishment in New York. Favourable critics

were rewarded with gifts of Steinway pianos. On one occasion the rivalry between the piano firms of Steinway and Weber, both of whom sought endorsement from a visiting opera troupe, flared into a pitched battle between the firms in which each insisted that their own pianos, and not those of their rivals, were to be placed in the artists' rooms. When, in the 1890s, Paderewski was brought over from Europe for an 80-concert tour, he complained about the heavy action of the piano and in 1892 it was adjusted to suit him; unfortunately, at a concert in Rochester, he did not realise that the piano had been returned to the factory and restored to its original stiffness and he irreversibly injured his arm and the fourth finger of his right hand. When he returned to Europe he played an Erard. Later on Horowitz was provided with a piano and tuner in return for his loyalty to Steinway; in the 1960s Rubinstein and Duke Ellington similarly became Steinway supporters. Altruism was never really at the centre of Steinway's dealings with music: even the entrance to the Steinway Hall was designed in such a way that concert audiences had to pass through the showrooms and view the pianos in their 'stage sets'.

Industrial relations never seem to have been the Steinways' strongpoint. The unionisation of piano-makers in New York was a gradual process, being limited at first to 250 of a potential 1200 members because the proceedings were carried out in German. In response to this, Steinway and another 22 piano manufacturers in New York formed their own association. The battle-lines were thus drawn out before the first of many strikes occurred in 1864. Yet the Steinways aimed at being benevolent patriarchal figures, setting up a village for workers in Queens. In 1893 a Steinway Railway Co. was started, and eventually a tunnel was built to link Manhattan and Queens.




There was also the Steinway North Beach Amusement Park (now the site of LaGuardia airport), which was where most New Yorkers saw electric light for the first time, provided by a Steinway power plant. In time, however, workers did not want to rely solely on the generosity of their employers but demanded to share in the sometimes substantial profits of the firm. The details of labour relations are particularly well told in the book. In 1939 the first Union contract was signed, but the Union leaders never pushed the Steinway family too hard. The result was a general apathy amongst the workforce with about half of them taking on second jobs.

The inability to adapt was both Steinway's strength — the quality of the instruments was maintained even when it did not make economic sense to do so — and Steinway's downfall, resulting in a loss of market share. In the 1950s Steinway ignored an opportunity to supply Yamaha (founded in Japan in 1887) with pianos for the top range of the Japanese market. The Japanese were forced to make their own quality pianos and by 1968, 44% of pianos sold in the United States were imported, most of them Yamahas. In 1972 Yamaha was manufacturing more pianos a week than Steinway made in a year. The time was soon ripe for a takeover and the story of the firm of Steinway and Sons thus, to all intents and purposes, came to an end.

The piano market is still under threat: on one side from electronic pianos, keyboards, synthesisers and computers, and on the other from the historical performance movement. By placing the development of the modern concert grand so clearly into its social, economic and historical context, this book makes it very clear that Steinway pianos are a product of the late 19th century. What their future will be in the next century is uncertain, but all those with an interest in that future would do well to read this illuminating volume.

P.H.



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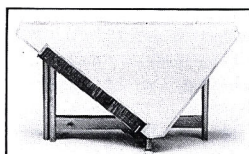
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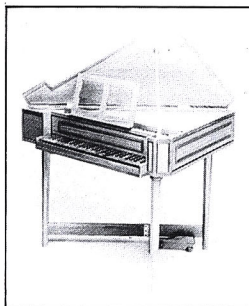
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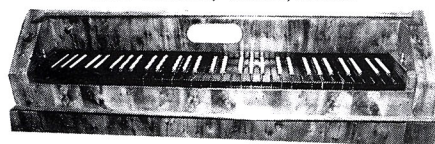
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# DISC REVIEWS

## J.S. Bach: Das Wohltemperierte Clavier

Davitt Moroney  
Harmonia Mundi 1901 258.88, 4 CDs,  
272 minutes.

One weekend in early January 1995, Davitt Moroney performed both books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* at the Wigmore Hall. Those recitals proved to be both illuminating and memorable, showing us how Dr. Moroney's interpretations had matured in the seven years since his recording of these works.

With the re-issue of that set, one can relish his earlier thoughts on these pieces, as well as selecting particular favourites, or revisiting those Preludes and Fugues that have remained a mystery.

As we already knew from his highly regarded readings of *The Art of Fugue*, the French Suites and the Goldberg Variations, Davitt Moroney is one of the most respected, sensitive and scholarly of harpsichordists. His journey through the '48', therefore, makes for often compelling listening. Indeed, for many listeners, Moroney's version will rightly stand beside those of Leonhardt and Gilbert.

Moroney's approach is clear-sighted, generally unfussy and free from excess and irritating rhythmic eccentricities. There is much magisterial beauty, occasional levity and, in the main, clarity of articulation. *Tempi* tend to be on the cautious side of moderate and when playing repeats, he strictly excludes the possibility of adding any further ornaments.

I might have wished for a slightly more sparkling and Italianate *Praeludium* in F (Book 1) or, indeed, a more extrovert reading of the 'Presto' bars that conclude the second *Praeludium* (c minor, Book 1), but such small quibbles are more than offset by the majestic, yet free playing of the c<sub>4</sub> minor Fugue and the almost Beethovenian fugue subject of the nineteenth in A (both Book 1). In Book 2, fugue nos. 14, 17 and 20 were especially impressive.

There is such an astonishing richness

and fecundity of invention in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, that I feel it unwise to listen to too many Preludes and Fugues at a single sitting. Each CD contains twelve Preludes and Fugues and I would suggest that six are ample, thus providing both absorption as well as contrast in any one session.

Davitt Moroney's excellent accompanying essay deals with such matters as the work's reception, the '48's place in the history of keyboard music, tuning and systems of temperament, etcetera. We are not, however, given any information with regard to the harpsichord itself, except for its maker and year of completion, 'John Phillips 1980'.

This 4-CD set exudes great authority but, perhaps even more essential, Moroney gives us the very real feeling that he has lived with (and fully entered into the spirit of) this extraordinary compendium of counterpoint, style, *affekt* and musical rhetoric for many years.

Both didactic and edifying in its purpose, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* does not yield up its riches and secrets lightly. Perhaps even for the most diligent listener and performer, this music may turn out to be the most enjoyable, surprising and humbling fruit of many years study. Meanwhile, we have the artistry and example of Davitt Moroney to guide us on our way.

RICHARD LEIGH HARRIS

## The Bach Family

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach:  
Harpsichord Concertos  
Richard Egarr, harpsichord  
London Baroque/Charles Medlam  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 901588

Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach:  
Trio Sonatas  
London Baroque/Charles Medlam  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 901587

J.S. Bach, W.F. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, J.C. Bach: Concertos & Duets  
Christopher Hogwood and  
Christophe Rousset  
L'Oiseau-Lyre 440 649-2

Two recent discs by London Baroque

from Harmonia Mundi explore the chamber music of two of J.S. Bach's sons — with much of the music featuring a central rôle for the keyboard part.

The disc of harpsichord *concertos* by W.F. Bach is full of delights. Wilhelm Friedemann (1710–84), Bach's eldest son, left about half-a-dozen examples of this genre, of which London Baroque has recorded three — the Concerto in F (F.44), the Concerto in a (F.45) and the Concerto in D (F.41). The musical style stands uneasily between the old world of the Baroque and the newly emerging one of Classicism. It emanates, therefore, a sense of uncertainty, a quality which it shares with Friedemann's personal life; however it is this very uneasiness, this insecurity, which makes much of his music so beguiling. You can imagine that Friedemann speaks to our own generation, with its increasingly schizoid cultural life, perhaps more directly than he has spoken to any generation since his own. You sense this immediately on the disc with the opening ritornello of the first piece recorded, the Concerto in F. Here is a true *mélange* of motifs — some that would not be out of place in the works of Mozart or Haydn (the arching phrase of the first violin), and others that are not so much reminiscent of the Baroque as manifestations of its still vital presence (the repeated note pattern, the unison closing phrase). Cheek-by-jowl like this, the flavour of each style brings out the piquancy of the others. How our own 'post-modernists' could learn from this: the juxtaposition of disjunct styles does not necessarily replace narration by ironic commentary.

Although a child of his time, Friedemann's music also reflects the fact that he was his father's eldest and favourite son, for whom the *Clavier-Büchlein* was started and Book I of 'The 48' written. A brilliant scholar, Friedemann was never able to match his father's steady devotion to the Lutheran Church; he spent much of his time in Halle, where his friendship with leading free-thinkers (and frequent absences to apply for other jobs) did not, unsurprisingly, endear him to his employers, who turned down his request for a pay rise. When a lucky break came his way — in the form of an offer of the

post of Kapellmeister at Darmstadt — he seems to have let it slip through his fingers unnecessarily; and when he finally left his job in Halle it was to act as a freelance musician, mainly as a teacher and virtuoso organist. Towards the end of his life, in Berlin, he continued to act out his dysfunctional lifestyle, betraying friends and sinking into poverty. One wonders whether the effort to measure up to his father was just too much for him and he chose 'preordained failure' as the more attractive option.

Whatever the true relationship between his life and works, Friedemann's music is well worth exploring. The London Baroque performances are as expressive and confident as we can expect from this group, demonstrating a true chamber-music rapport. In fact one would like to hear London Baroque tackle Haydn and Mozart quartets from their own baroque performance style — looking forward, rather than back, as is so often the case with 'period' quartets. The harpsichord is integrated into the string ensemble and the frequent forays of the ritornello into the solo episodes are particularly effective and a tribute to the recording. The structure of the concerto is rather conventional, but it is the details of the music that give delight. The disc booklet contains a short introductory essay but, unfortunately, no information about the instruments used.

To supplement these concertos we can recommend a recent disc of music for two keyboard instruments by the Bach family performed by **Hogwood and Rousset**. W.F. Bach's *Concerto a duoi Cembali Concertati* is performed on two clavichords. Again, the musical writing is of high quality, although I am not convinced that this concerto was written with clavichords in mind or that it is best served by them. The argument for their employment here goes like this: the presence of dynamic markings in much of Friedemann's solo keyboard music indicates that it was intended for the clavichord; when Griepenkerl first published Friedemann's Polonaises in 1819 he stated that they were originally intended for the clavichord; finally, a description of 1786 relates how Johann Hüssler and Forkel rehearsed on two clavichords, "a couple of

duets by Müthel and Friedemann Bach". Against this, however, is the fact that this concerto stands without dynamic markings, and that although Hüssler and Forkel no doubt rehearsed Friedemann's works on the clavichord — and may even have performed them on these instruments in concert — it is not really proof of the medium for which they were conceived (even if it may give a licence for the use of these instruments on this disc). Nevertheless, it is a most enjoyable performance; but do heed Hogwood's advice to resist turning up the volume of your CD player on these clavichord tracks.

Bach's other sons who are featured on this disc are C.P.E. Bach and J.C. Bach. The pieces by C.P.E. Bach (1714–88) are also played on the J.A. Hass clavichords, which sound more successful here than in the Friedemann concerto. All the C.P.E. Bach pieces exist in other arrangements and are typical of the kind of charming trifle with which he saturated the market. These are then followed by a J.C. Bach (1735–82) duet in G, op.15, performed on two square pianos: one made by Johannes Pohlmann, and the other by Johannes Zumpe with his partner Gabriel Buntebart. This whole sonata is an absolute delight: the graceful music, the crystal-like sounds of the instruments, the sensitive performances of Hogwood and Rousset. In his informative essay in the accompanying booklet, Hogwood explains how the playing of these square pianos should be approached from the point of departure of the clavichord rather than the later piano. These performances convince one of the rightness of this statement.

The disc begins with J.S. Bach's Concerto in C for two harpsichords (BWV 1061a) and Contrapunctus 13 from The Art of Fugue. The concerto seems to have been originally conceived for two harpsichords and the string parts added later (with strings it is catalogued as BWV 1061). The keyboard parts are self-sufficient and the string parts awkward in the final fugal movement, while the slow movement is for two solo keyboards in any case. The Contrapunctus 13, marked 'Fuga a 2 Clav.', is given in two versions, rectus and inversus. In fact the whole disc — which,

Hogwood plaintively informs us, covers the complete oeuvre of two-keyboard music by J.S., W.F., J.C. and C.P.E. Bach — contains readings that are both authoritative and thought-provoking, as you would expect from these performers. The double-manual harpsichords used for the J.S. Bach tracks are from the collection at the Musée de la Musique in Paris: a Ruckers 1646, remodelled by Taskin in 1780, and a Hemsch from 1761. The L'Oiseau-Lyre booklet, unlike that from Harmonia Mundi, tells us not only about the instruments but also names the keyboard technicians and tuners. Quite right too. I also like the illustrations of composers and performers which makes Harmonia Mundi rather parsimonious in comparison.

**Johann Christoph Friedrich** (1732–95) is the least known of Bach's composer sons. The second of the London Baroque discs contains five of his trio sonatas: HW VII/5 and 6 are for violin, viola and piano; HW VII/2 and 3 are for two violins and continuo (here a harpsichord is used); and HW X/2 is for cello with obligato keyboard (here a piano). J.C.F. Bach spent his career at the Bückeburg court, although a trip to England to visit his brother J.C. Bach proved to be significant, spurring him on to buy a new piano and to become a devotee of Mozart. The string line-up on this recording is slightly altered from that on the Friedemann disc, with Irmgard Schaller replacing Ingrid Seifert on first violin and Richard Gwilt moving from violin to viola. The keyboard player is Richard Egarr on both discs, and the director cellist Charles Medlam. Egarr uses a Ruckers harpsichord and a Stein piano, both in the Cobbe Foundation. Both sound very well. The performances provide an excellent advocacy of J.C.F. Bach's music, which is mainly in the *galant* style, with an occasional nod to the *expressive* idiom.

Not only do all these discs provide us with recordings of an exciting repertoire, but they do so with careful consideration of the circumstances in which the music was composed. They make a powerful trio of discs with which to trace both the stubbornness of the older Bach's style and, at the same



time, the development of a new musical language. The eagle-eyed will also note the connection with Mendelssohn (his great-aunt, Sara Levy, made a copy of the Friedemann concerto in F) and Brahms (who published Friedemann's *concerto a duoi Cembali* in 1864): thus, with the Bach family legacy, into the 19th century.

## Antonio Salieri Joseph Anton Steffan

Antonio Salieri: Concerto for fortepiano in C; Concerto for fortepiano in B<sup>b</sup>  
Joseph Anton Steffan: Concerto for fortepiano in B<sup>b</sup>  
Andreas Staier, fortepiano  
Concerto Köln  
Das Alte Werk, Teldec 4509-94569-2, 74 minutes

From Teldec comes a fascinating disc of piano concertos by two of Mozart's contemporaries, Salieri and the less well-known Steffan. In the last decade or two the early music movement has begun to tackle repertoires at some remove from its established core of the medieval, renaissance and baroque styles, and in so doing has lost one of its defining features, a willingness to explore little-known or 'marginal' composers on the same terms as the 'great names'. Look through recording catalogues and you will find a wealth of pre-1750 byways in the process of exploration. To give one example which has some bearing on the present disc, recent releases in the field of the late baroque concerto have centred not just on the works of Vivaldi, Bach and Handel, but have also included those of Stanley, Locatelli, Sammartini, Heinichen, Leclair. Where in the catalogues are the corresponding recordings of Mozart's contemporaries? Or, for that matter, Beethoven's, Schumann's, Liszt's? Norrington wants to know what Smetana and Bruckner sound like on period instruments; there is nothing wrong with this, but it does seem that the pioneering spirit has been somewhat watered down in favour of an easier option. It is rather as if your favourite restaurant guide suddenly abandoned the slummy café-bars and eccentric trattorie down

by the docks and only recommended the established places already boasting Michelin stars. The early music movement used to disprove what 'new' American musicologists would gleefully refer to as 'the hegemony of the canon', but the recent haste to get ever more of the 'great classics' out on period instrument recordings disappointingly gives their claim some backing. Surely Mozart is not the only composer to write piano concertos in the 1780s which are worth listening to? The reply might be that his are the best, but that is surely not the point, based as it is on a simplistic view that the arts are some kind of competition in which only the first place deserves attention. Whatever the cause of the current lack of willingness to explore neglected post-Baroque repertoires (and the answer probably has 'money' somewhere in it) it is nevertheless disappointing, and the disc under review is therefore all the more welcome.

Two concertos by Salieri dating from 1773 (the same year in which Mozart's K. 175 was written) are included on the disc. Two years earlier the composer's 'Armida' had been staged, a musical work described as an 'opera di stile magico-eroico-amorosa toccante il tragico' — do these concertos also span this gamut of styles? Not really; most of the ideas found here are none too original, and, what is more to the point, Salieri does rather conventional things with them. Occasionally there are attractive passages such as the scoring of the middle movement of the C-major concerto, in which successive piano statements are answered in turn by alternations of pizzicato lower and upper strings, followed by the piano extending the theme accompanied by the plucked strings. Generally speaking, on the present evidence, here are concertos more pleasant than profound. Indeed the sleeve notes quote this rather disarming passage from Gerber: "He [Salieri] modestly remarks on this subject that they [the concertos] are of less significance inasmuch as he lacks practice in this genre." The cadenzas are supplied by Staier himself and are often the most interesting passages to which to listen. The reading of these two concertos in the

performance by Staier and Concerto Köln is not without problems. Salieri's music is approached as if it were proto-Romantic, resulting in an interpretation which the music cannot really bear. It comes across, for example, in the aggressive orchestral-versus-solo writing of the first movement of the C-major concerto, which is almost made to sound like Schumann at times. In the last movement of the same concerto there is a minor key section which is played with a near-demonic darkness that misreads the spirit of the music. Staier's own long and musically intricate cadenzas are not really merited by Salieri's music. *Rallentandos* abound throughout. It is as if soloist and orchestra believe that Salieri's music will only stand up to critical listening if it can be shown to be a precursor to the full-blooded Romantic concerto. A result of this misunderstanding is that much of the Haydnesque and *opera buffa* nature of Salieri's music is lost. In the final analysis Salieri was a conservative composer, and, despite his long career in Vienna, an Italian.

It would have been better to view these concertos as the foray of an opera composer into the heart of the central European symphonic tradition. It is true that Salieri taught Beethoven, Schubert, Czerny, Hummel, Liszt and Moscheles — but then he lived until 1825 and these pieces were written more than half a century earlier, while he was still in his twenties. The more important question that needs answering is: why does 18th-century classicism need to be seen as a prefiguring of Romanticism in order to be considered worthy of attention? One thinks, for instance, of the BBC's recent adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*: Concerto Köln's recording of these two Salieri pieces casts Andreas Staier in the musically equivalent rôle of Colin Firth's Darcy, both pianist and actor wading through lakes bare-chested, much to the bafflement of the souls of the composer and authoress.

Like Salieri, Steffan (1726-1797) settled in Vienna while he was young, although he was born in Bohemia (hence the other spelling of his name, 'Stepán'). A favourite harpsichord pupil of Wagenseil, he became Klaviermeister to Maria Carolina and Maria Antonia in 1766.



The disc under review includes his piano concerto in B<sub>1</sub>, dating from the 1780s, and it is a work that can hold its own with the best of Mozart's essays. It consequently receives a more appropriate interpretation here than the works by Salieri.

The first movement best shows Steffan's incorporation of *fantasia* elements into the concerto structure. The Allegro is prefaced by an Adagio in a minor key where, after a few bars for the orchestra, the piano is introduced. This whole section — less of a prelude, more of a self-contained piece — counterpoints piano and orchestra with great skill. The piano dominates the succeeding Allegro, which acts as something of a foil to the tension prepared by the Adagio. This movement is in a mature classical style employing a much more complex and subtle structure than that used by Salieri, together with a much wider variety of piano textures. A dance spirit is pervasive throughout this movement and consequently lends it a distinctive language, neither sub-Mozart nor quasi-Haydn. In this work the cadenzas are by the composer himself and seem better proportioned than those in the Salieri.

The slow movement (Andante con moto) shows clearly the difference between the Steffan and the Salieri works; for instance, whilst in the latter the piano figuration rambles around somewhat, in the former it is always to the point. The final movement also shows Steffan's complete mastery of this style of music. This concerto is a major discovery on disc and for this reason alone is highly recommended. It is therefore disappointing to report that, putting aside my reservations

about the general approach to the Salieri concertos, other aspects of the performances are not entirely satisfactory.

Firstly, much praise is due to the soloist, Andreas Staier, who performs beautifully throughout. His playing is full of ravishing details: in particular, his variety of articulation and rhythmic stress is delightful. Secondly, Staier uses a gorgeous-sounding replica of a Walter fortepiano by Monika May. The maker must be congratulated as the powerful, rich tone of the fortepiano seems worthy of the contemporary descriptions of Walter's instruments which are, of course, a natural choice for this Viennese concerto repertoire. Indeed it is ironic that the good qualities of this instrument may have caused some of the more uncomfortable aspects of the recording.

My main reservation about the disc concerns the orchestral playing. One would expect a conductor-less orchestra like Concerto Köln to have developed genuine qualities of ensemble playing; I fear, however, that the sheer exuberance of Staier's interpretation, coupled with the power of his instrument, drive the orchestra to employ an unnecessarily aggressive string-tone in an attempt to compete with him. This, coupled with a bass-heavy recording balance, makes one almost quite nostalgic for the warm-hearted (if less 'authentic') performances of The Academy of St. Martins-in-the-Field or I Musici! Steffans music survives this often gimmicky interpretation, and it is unfair to make a final judgement about the Salieri concertos until they are given a performance that meets the composer on his own terms.

P.H.

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# MUSIC REVIEWS

Schubert. *Fantasia in C* ('Wanderer Fantasia'). D 760-op. 15. Bärenreiter. BA 5640.

Schubert. *Sonata in c*. D 958. Bärenreiter. BA 5632.

Clara Schumann. *Romantic Piano Music*. Bärenreiter. BA 6550.

Clara Schumann. *Romantic Piano Music Volume 2*. Bärenreiter. BA 6556.

Johannes Brahms. *Rákóczi-Marsch*. Bärenreiter. BA 6557.

A clutch of new editions of Romantic piano music, some well-known and some appearing for the first time, is now available from Bärenreiter.

To start with Schubert's *Fantasia in C* D760 is like starting a trek from the summit of a mountain rather than its foot. It is a work to which all succeeding large-scale Romantic instrumental music aspires, but so seldom reaches (although Schumann's *Phantasia in C* and Liszt's *b minor piano sonata* come pretty close). The editors have presented us with a clean edition taken from the Urtext of the New Schubert Edition (1984), but the results as presented here are not unproblematic. The edition is based on the autograph manuscript and the first printed edition which, we are told, was engraved on the basis of that manuscript and subsequently revised by Schubert. However that is all we are told, for there is no critical apparatus accompanying the edition; we cannot see where or why the editor has chosen readings from one source or another. Given the history of the work's publication I think a facsimile of the first edition, with a full list of variants in other early sources, would have been preferable — a version of the work which we know would have been performed in the 19th century, rather than a futile search for an ur-text which is merely a symptom of our own 20th century musical insecurity. One is no doubt meant to consult the relevant volumes of the Neuen Schubert-Ausgabe, but that does not mitigate the fact that the offprint under review is incomplete as it

stands. In addition, although editorial interventions are marked, they are sometimes difficult to differentiate from the main text — the use of lighter or smaller type may be an unfussy solution but it is also an unsatisfactory one, especially given the large number of bars fitted onto each page, which barely gives the pianist room to add fingerings. I doubt that Bärenreiter thought much about pianists at all: this edition has all the hallmarks of being designed for theoretical consumption (music students and lecturers in musical analysis will no doubt find it handy), unconcerned as it is with the question of what Schubert and his contemporaries actually played and how they played it.

An important feature of this work is the way in which it is marked out from the rest of Schubert's oeuvre by its virtuosity. Is it too much to expect that we should be given some guidelines for performance? We are surely no longer so naïve as to think that, given accurate notes, the interpretation will naturally follow. Even for performances on modern instruments it would be useful to know what type of piano Schubert probably had in mind, what its characteristics were, how tempo, dynamics and so on were approached, and how and when the pedal was used. Of course all these answers, like those to the textual questions above, can be found elsewhere, but I think we should expect more from publishers than just a clean text; there should be some statement about the messy business of performance, even if the answers can only be provisional. The heavily edited editions of Schubert's works from the 19th and early 20th centuries provided their own answers to these questions of performance, and while we may dispute their conclusions we have no right to ignore the questions they address. It is a kind of arrogance, when so much work has obviously gone into establishing a good text, to believe that these matters are of no interest to the educated amateur. It is being assumed that students and professionals will have access

to the complete edition, as well as time to consult it.

The edition of the first of Schubert's three late piano sonatas, *D958*, is also limited by its lack of critical commentary. Nevertheless, the editor has supplied some interesting sketches of parts of the sonata which are described as 'playable' although one 16-bar sketch is excluded without explanation. It is also unclear why only the 'playable' sketches have been included; there is not enough information here for us to reconstruct the development of Schubert's ideas, and none of the sketches could be performed in recital as they stand. Despite this, the fragments are most welcome and can help to inform our performance of the sonata. In this anniversary year we will no doubt have many opportunities to hear how pianists on period and modern instruments tackle the questions of performance which these texts silently ask but do not attempt to answer.

Two volumes of music by Clara Schumann are also beset by editorial problems. Here, all information is completely lacking. We have two volumes of 'selected' piano works without being told the criteria for their selection. No background information is given for any pieces included, not even basic information such as date or source. Tempo interventions, which appear in italics and are presumably editorial, pepper the score; surely it would have been much better for the editor to confine himself to some prefatory comments about the nature of tempo fluctuation/rubato in Romantic piano music rather than be as prescriptive as he is here. While one may doubt that all the phrasing is original there is no way of being certain of this. Then there is the curiosity that a few odd pieces in vol. I appear with fingerings, such as Fuga I; why this piece and not Fuga II? In the Romanza op.21 no.3 we are bombarded with fingerings in three typofaces: italic, non-italic and italic with an asterisk underneath or beside it. Those with an asterisk clearly represent Clara's own fingerings, and the italics are presumably those of the editor, but the non-italic un-asterisked fingerings are anyone's guess. At times this piece takes on the



appearance of one of Boulez's more metrically complex piano scores, especially as the italics slant between the notes to which they refer!

Close examination reveals that Bärenreiter have taken over an older edition of Clara Schumann's music. In the circumstances it would surely not have been remiss to tidy up and explain editorial policy and to have provided source information and a context for the pieces. In addition, they might have corrected one or two small errors in the music such as a missing triplet sign in one left-hand part (Vol.I p.24, system 4 b.3) and a missing bass clef in another (Vol.II p.17, system 1 b.1 beat 2).

The music is a pleasure to play — falling naturally under the hand, as you would expect from a composer who was also a great pianist. I would not go so far as the blurb on the back of the edition, which proclaims that Clara Schumann is "one of the most important composers of her time", but certainly she had a flair for Romantic harmony and melody even if she was forced to accept the limitations of salon-friendly ternary-

form pieces — the best, such as no.2 of the *Trois Romances* op.11 (Vol.II), manage to break free from these confines with genuine imagination.

I find the pieces that eschew this song-form more interesting, such as the 3 Preludes and Fugues op.16 (Vol.I), which manage to avoid sterile academicism, and the Variations op.20 (Vol.I) on a theme by Robert Schumann. I do not understand why the Romance op.3 has been included in Vol.II: it is obviously a juvenile work, a set of variations marred from the start by its unsuccessful theme and a tendency to be over-ambitious. Such a work should be kept for either a collected edition or a dissertation about Clara Schumann's compositional or pianistic development. However, despite this, both volumes present us with much good music by an unjustly neglected composer and are therefore highly recommended. There is some replication of pieces which appear in the 1986 Henle edition of selected works by Clara Schumann, which is much better edited and more consistent in the

quality of the choice of works, but the Bärenreiter edition is still worth having for the gaps it fills.

Finally, a new lollipop by Brahms, his arrangement of the *Rákóczi-Marsch*. As the editor, Michael Töpel, notes in his preface, this was one of the most popular marches of the time, arrangements by Liszt and Berlioz being among the most famous. It is not surprising that Brahms, an inveterate arranger of music for piano, should have applied himself to such a well-known piece, although he is known to have refused to provide a set of variations on it for his publisher, replying that "Frau Schumann has the march in my setting for single piano." It is this setting, from the Clara Schumann estate, that is now published with a full critical commentary. The arrangement is typical Brahms: good fun for thrashing around the keyboard, often at a very loud volume, and not so good for remaining on speaking terms with those who live in the flat below!

P.H.

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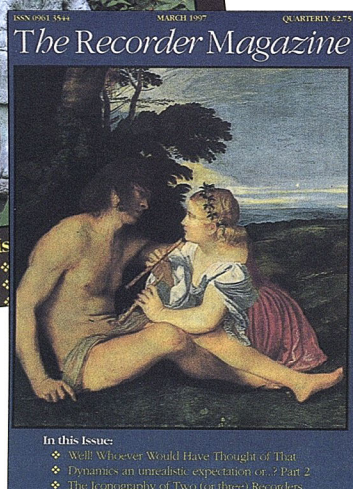
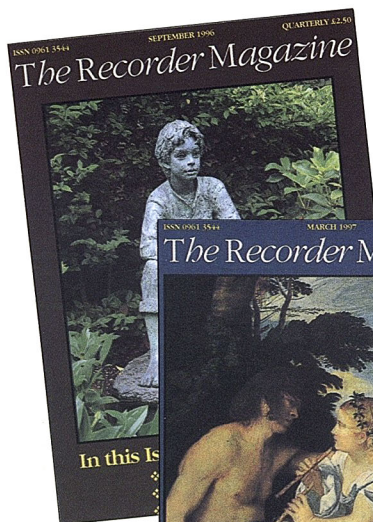
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