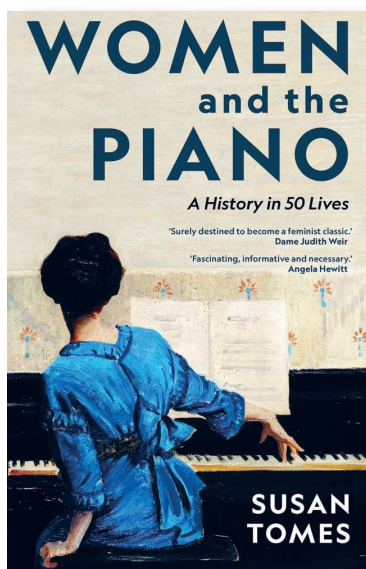


are musical works. Given the extensive resonance of this publication, such an ordering would be extremely helpful.

The second edition of Brown's study is excellent in many respects, and considerably expanded and updated compared to the original in terms of substance, language and design. I have not the slightest doubt that the new edition of this book in its revised form will contribute not so much to enhancing its canonic status (of which Brown surely has no need, given his achievements to date), as to the further development of the flourishing movement of historically informed performance. We hope that, thanks to this distinguished scholar's successors, that movement will flourish just as well in the domain of Romantic interpretation. We eagerly await a Polish translation.



ANETA MARKUSZEWSKA review

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Women and the Piano. A History in 50 Lives
Susan Tomes

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Although interest in the musical activities of women in past epochs continues to grow, after reading Susan Tomes's book, we are left with the embarrassing reflection that we had to wait so long for a work devoted entirely to women pianists. For the last three centuries, they have remained in the shadow of men, although the piano was a crucial element in their life experience, regardless of whether they thought of it in a professional or an amateur context.

Tomes's work begins with three short opening chapters. In the first ('Introduction'), the author refers to her recollections as a piano pupil who knew the names and achievements of great pianists like Cortot, Schnabel, Horowitz

and Rubinstein, but could not really name any well-known female pianists, with the possible exception of Clara Schumann. But even she, as Tomes mentions, appeared mainly in relation to her husband or to other composers in her circle, often outstanding pianists themselves. In the common narrative, the world of the piano, its history, belonged solely to men. I believe that Tomes's personal experience, which inspired her to write this book, is quite universal. Musicians and piano music devotees still have difficulty naming wonderful female pianists from the past, and yet, as the author emphasises, there have been many of them. Tomes, drawing on her pianistic experience, decided to dust them down and give them a voice – and she succeeded in her task quite superbly.

In the second chapter ('From harpsichord to piano'), Tomes reminds us that keyboard instruments belonged, from their very inception, to the world of women. Some of them, like Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre in France and Elisabetta Gambarini in Great Britain, were not only virtuosos of the harpsichord, but also composers, who published their works. Around the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Bartolomeo Cristofori in Florence hit on the idea of making a new instrument (*gravicembalo col piano e forte*), which allowed the player to control the speed with which the hammers struck the strings, and consequently the dynamics and timbre of the sound, a new era began, in which a significant role fell to women. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the piano was almost an obligatory part of the woman's world, as is indicated by the content of the next chapter in Tomes's book, 'From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century: Women and the rise of the piano'. Here, the author addresses several important questions. As an instrument that initially belonged in the home, with time becoming increasingly big and heavy, the piano, which

most often stood in the drawing room, kept women in the non-public sphere, becoming their 'perfect partner' (p. 13). Playing the piano made leisure time more interesting, provided entertainment for guests and, interestingly, created one of the few moments when people actually listened to women. One indisputable asset of a keyboard instrument was the fact that one could acquire basic playing skills within a short space of time, with no risk of producing wrong notes, which might bother other members of the household. At the instrument, a woman looked beautiful, if she sat straight, kept her elbows in and did not make any violent movements with her hands or her fingers – when she was passive, not creating the impression that she was making any effort. The presence of a piano also underscored the prestige of a home (at least during the times when an instrument was still expensive and not every family could afford one). Making music on the piano, besides drawing, dancing, sewing, and so on, soon became an essential skill, which was expected of a future housewife. Meanwhile, when a woman had no chance of marrying and had to work to make her own way in life, learning to play the piano was one of the biggest opportunities for her to make a living. In this context, therefore, one essential question arises. How did it happen that an instrument widely associated with women and unsuitable for – in Tomes's words – a 'manly man' (p. 9) (such a conviction was widespread into the early nineteenth century) would soon be appropriated by men for the next two centuries? The author gives a short, but concrete answer. It turns out that a contributory factor was the emergence and intense development of public concert life, the phenomenon of the piano recital, and by the same stroke – professional performance. As Tomes writes: 'Men made sure to let women know that the professional sphere was no place for ladies' (p. 10). In these circumstances, women with

ambitions of becoming professional pianists had to display incredible determination, the ability to overcome stereotypes imposed on their sex, not infrequently the difficult reconciling of the life of a professional pianist with domestic life and the roles of wife, mother and carer, so as not to be suspected of betraying their womanly nature. Despite these efforts, they often admitted defeat and abandoned – for some time or for good – their dreams of a musical career.

The 50 titular lives are divided into three parts. The first two present pianists in chronological order: ‘The dawn of the piano era’ and ‘Women in the age of the concert pianist’. The third part takes account of artists from outside the world of classical music (though often with a traditional musical training) – ‘Jazz and light-music pianists’.

The first group contains seven pianists: Anne-Louise Boyvin d’Hardancourt Brillon de Jouy, Maria Theresa von Paradis, Josepha von Auernhammer, Marianna Martines, Therese Jansen Bartolozzi, Sara Levy and Hélène de Montgeroult. The lives and achievements of these artists have already been researched in detail, as to a large extent they were also composers or inspired the work of great masters. Tomes offers interesting biographical profiles. Madam Brillon ran a renowned salon, played the harpsichord and was one of the first women pianists in Paris, inspiring Luigi Boccherini to write a cycle of sonatas for violin and piano, Op. 5; she also composed. The piano virtuoso Theresia von Paradis, who created a playing system for blind pianists like herself, inspired none other than Mozart. The skills of Josepha von Auernhammer fascinated Joseph Haydn, just like Theresa Jansen Bartolozzi, whose talent was spotted first by her teacher, Clementi, then by Dussek. Both of the greatest Viennese Classics helped develop the talent of Marianna Martinez: Haydn in an early period, teaching her to play the

harpsichord and to compose, and Mozart later, performing piano duets with Martinez in her salon. Sara Levy became renowned as a marvellous harpsichordist and pianist associated with the Sing-Akademie in Berlin, and also as a salon artist and collector of manuscripts belonging to the Bach family. Hélène de Montgeroult was distinguished by her talent for composing, improvisational skills and virtuosity, as well as her stormy life.

One may wonder, of course, why other figures are not included here, such as the Roman pianist Rosa Coccia, or Elizabeth Weichsel, active in London; but Tomes’s selection shows that in the eighteenth century it was German-language centres (with particular emphasis on Vienna) and Paris that were most favourable to the development of a woman pianist’s professional or semi-professional career, though in most cases, except for Paradis and, sporadically, Bartolozzi, their work was confined to performances in salons, most often run by the pianists themselves.

The second group is the most numerous, comprising 37 pianists better known to piano playing devotees, who lived during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many of them were also composers. Thus we have portraits of Maria Szymanowska, Louise Farrenc, Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, Clara Schumann, Teresa Carreño, Cécile Chaminade, Amy Beach, Marguerite Long, Wanda Landowska, Nadia Boulanger, Clara Haskil, Maria Yudina, Alicia de Larrocha and Yvonne Loriod. Appearing alongside them are other figures perhaps not as famous, but extremely interesting, like Arabella Goddard, the first female performer in Great Britain of Beethoven’s late sonatas, regarded as a symbol of eminently masculine repertoire, and the American Amy Fay, who, like many talented girls, studied with Liszt and wrote memoirs of her struggles and her fascination with studying in Europe, and also described recitals given by the eminent

Hungarian. The gifted and beautiful Sophie Menter was perceived by Liszt as ‘my only legitimate piano daughter’ (p. 88). It is worth remembering child prodigy Adele aus der Ohe as someone who performed the compositions of Bach without tailoring them to the fashions of the time, and also popularised the work of contemporary female composers, including Greta von Zieritz and Amy Beach. Winnaretta Singer, besides her pianistic abilities, had a gift for attracting personalities from the world of music and art, including Marcel Proust, Jean Cocteau and Colette; she sponsored Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*, and also gave financial support to various artists, including the young Clara Haskil. This part of the book ends with a portrait of Chinese pianist Zhu Xiao-Mei, a victim of Mao Tse-tung’s cultural revolution, who, thanks to her strength of character and bravery, returned to the piano years later and today is one of the most interesting female interpreters of Bach. Yet irrespective of the time in which it befell them to live, the pianists discussed in this book emanate a strength of character, determination and a desire to be acknowledged. Many female artists suffered because they could not reconcile a musical career with being a devoted mother and wife; for that reason, they had a sense of guilt (not shared by their male colleagues), and sometimes gave up on their dreams or on family life. Yet they were always devoted to their art, were great lovers of music, believed in their work and fought for equal opportunities in their field – including equal fees. And the struggles in these stories are numerous: struggles that demanded strength, sometimes affected the pianist’s health or finances, but gave a purpose to their life. After reading this book, we have huge respect for these magnificent women, who showed that the fight for oneself, for one’s identity and truth, is worth the effort.

The third part of Tomes’s study comprises six portraits of incredibly creative

representatives of a lighter muse – mainly jazz: Lovie Austin, Raie da Caosta, Mary Lou Williams, Winifred Atwell, Hazel Scott and Nina Simone. On one hand, most of them were classically trained, but for reasons of race and/or social inequality, they lacked the conditions in which to develop their career. On the other hand, interested in making a name for themselves in entertainment, they had to wrestle with the difficult conditions of playing in jazz clubs, often at night, surrounded by men, and not infrequently becoming victims of violence on their part. Despite this, they managed to create remarkably inspiring music, a perfect example of which is the output of Hazel Scott.

The book ends with reflections on the position of the piano in the musical world of today and the role of piano competitions, which began to emerge in the early twentieth century and which, for all their flaws, seem to act as a springboard to a global career, including for women. There are also reflections on the situation of female pianists today. Things are much better, of course, but women still receive lower fees for concerts, and fewer women teach piano or take part in competitions – and win them. Women are invariably burdened with greater emotional responsibility for themselves and their families, forced to make greater sacrifices. It is difficult to say whether this situation will ever change or is immanent to the fortunes of women.

To close, although this book focusses on 50 women pianists, it is worth stressing that there are many more such artists; yet we do not always have enough information to paint their portrait, and not all of them have had comparable success or influence on pianistic culture as Tomes’s heroines. Hence this publication is necessarily the effect of painful choices and subjective decisions. It is also worth pointing out that we should not seek here information typical of encyclopaedic entries; that can be

found in other works, devoted for instance to female composers. This book also offers no detailed analysis of music composed by or for female pianists. The author, offering a synthetic look at the material, had a different idea, which I consider to be quite excellent: with regard to each and every protagonist, in the very first paragraph, she tells us what marks her out from others. As a consequence, on finishing this book, the reader can set in order the newly acquired knowledge and compare familiar artists to those newly discovered, as well as simply remembering them better. It is only in subsequent paragraphs that Tomes cites essential biographic facts, information about the artistic achievements of the virtuosos portrayed, their views on art, and also, if known, their place in the creative process and the history of music. Besides its unquestionable value for scholarship, I am deeply convinced that this book will encourage readers to pursue their own further research, to listen to new compositions and, in the case of female pianists who had the chance to record their interpretations, to discover them anew. That is what seems to me to be the author's greatest achievement. Finally, the assets of Tomes's book include both the ample, but not overwhelmingly long, bibliography, which encourages one to read more detailed work, and also the author's straightforward and communicative style.