



HARP

Book Reviews

by Saul Davis

Beethoven and the Construction of Genius; Musical Politics in Vienna 1792-1803 by Tia DeNora, University of California Press, 1995. This remarkable book pinpoints elements in cultural life rarely discussed openly, and is just as relevant for today's world as for the end of the 18th century. Beethoven's rise as an established composer and his stature as a genius are discussed, with research and insight into the factors that played essential roles in his developing stardom. DeNora explores the social and political forces at work in building his fame. The book is particularly interesting to harpists because a major portion of it is given to a comparison of Beethoven with Jan Dussek, who composed so many works for harp, and was Beethoven's predecessor and superior in terms of career and position. The author compares their careers and compositions, and in describing Dussek, sheds needed light on his compositional style and the transformations it underwent. Fascinatingly, the cultural influences of 19th century Vienna are still at work in the 21st century.

Debussy Remembered, edited by Roger Nichols, Amadeus Press, 1992. A heartfelt collection of reminiscences of Claude Debussy, this book is filled by a variety of people who knew and worked with him and contribute their insights into his music and character. They include: conductors Gabriel Pierné, Ernst Ansermet and Henri Busser; singers Maggie Teyte and Mary Garden; composers Paul Dukas, Ernest Chausson, Erik Satie and Igor Stravinsky. Several pianists discuss Debussy's coachings and interpretive ideas.

Reading these tributes one gets a sense of the deep and abiding affection in which Debussy was held, both as an artist and as a person. While the book is not designed as a reference, it is quite useful for the performer who wants to know the spirit of the composer and his music. It is also a great resource for writing program notes.

French Music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism 1789 – 1830 by Jean Mongredien, Amadeus Press, 1996. Harpists who appreciate and want to further understand the development of harp music and its character will find this book to be essential reading. Just looking at the music of this period raises questions such as: why are there so many "Favorite Airs" from operas, with their unending Alberti left hand figures underneath a pretty, sentimental melody? and, why is none of the music contrapuntal? The book informs us as to the beginning of the harps' role in orchestras.

The period of 1789–1830 encompasses the transitions of many musical styles within the overall passage from the Baroque to the Romantic styles in French music. The author conveys all the color and passion of the time, exemplified by the book-cover's painting of a harpiste performing by candlelight, her hair disheveled by rampant emotion, passion, or is it divine madness? Rather than simplify his examination of the period's music, Mongredien illustrates the many parallel paths individual composers took.

References to the harp are extensive. For example, there are descriptions of harp ensembles as early as 1800, and the use of twelve harps in opera. Typical concert programs and the use of the harp are described; harp virtuosi and composers are discussed. In this book can be found the reason and context for much of the harp's history and music. It should be required reading for all students of music history and for all harpists.

There are numerous recordings of music of this period to read by. Two very fine recordings are by Erica Goodman on the BIS label, one with flutist Robert Aitken, and one of music for harp and horn.

French Pianism: A Historical Perspective by Charles Timbrell, Amadeus Press, 1999. Here is a volume that is a fine example of writing about the transitory art of music teaching. It is related to the harp

by the methods of instruction that are much the same, and there is a valuable discussion of the curriculum and pedagogy of the Paris Conservatoire, where so many important harpists were trained and have influenced how we study and teach the harp. It also describes the music background in which such harpists as Carlos Salzedo and Bernard Zighera received their piano training. This reader altered his use of technical exercises to great benefit after reading this book.

Marcel Moyse: Voice of the Flute by Ann McCutchan, Amadeus Press, 1994. This biography of celebrated yet overlooked flute virtuoso Marcel Moyse is a pleasure to read. Moyse was a heroic artist whose difficult life was full of tribulations and limited rewards. He is inspiring in his drive to struggle against the odds, with his dedication to his ideals. His artistic ideas and philosophy are of interest even to non-flutists. It is clear that there are parallels between the flute and harp worlds, and for those harpists who play with flutists it is an informative view of their technique and art. There is a little discussion of his performances with harpists, and the very thorough discographies list many recordings made with Lily Laskine and Denise Megevand. Some of these recordings have been re-issued, including Moyse and Laskine's recording of the Debussy Sonata.

Theodore Thomas; America's Conductor and Builder of Orchestras; 1835–1905 by Ezra Schabas, University of Illinois Press, 1989. This book is a thorough, scholarly venture through the life of Theodore Thomas, one of America's first and most important conductors. It is lively, though slightly dry, but not too dry. Schabas probes into Thomas' mind and artistry, and recaps the tremendous struggles he went through to become a great conductor, and to establish symphonic orchestras as a permanent fixture in American cultural life.

Of particular interest to harpists is the

tale of backstage maneuverings between Thomas, Edmund Schuecker (then-principal harpist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra), and Lyon and Healy Harp Manufacturers during the preparations for the Great Chicago Exposition of 1893, which featured a massive harp-ensemble concert.

Harp Notes

by Saul Davis

A Song for Emily

Minnesota harpists will be glad to hear that Emily Halpern, excellent harpist and Twin Cities resident of the early 1990s has, as of Fall Semester 2002, been appointed to the faculty of Boston University. She joins Ann Hobson Pilot in their sterling harp department, succeeding her teacher Lucile Lawrence, who recently retired from teaching in Boston but is still teaching at Manhattan School of Music. Emily is

currently the co-president of the Boston chapter of the American Harp Society with Felice Pomeranz. She is the harp teacher of Phillips Academy in Andover, and enjoys teaching at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. She remains a part-time consultant to *The Harp Connection*.

Orchestras in Flux

The word on the harp beat is that no less than three orchestras that had full-time positions for a harpist have eliminated these positions. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra has apparently turned their principal harp chair, formerly held by the great Judy Loman, into a free-lance / per-service position. And the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra confirms that rather than hold auditions to fill the now-vacant chair of Principal Harp, they have decided to reduce harp to a free-lance / per-service "job." A midwestern orchestra has followed the same downward path.

Shame on the administrators and executives who chose this cowardly, artistically

corrupt direction, and shame of the music directors as well as the other players who didn't stop them. I think that orchestras should strike rather than give up having a colleague that they can rely upon in such a key position. We can only hope that this news will not discourage would-be professional harpists further, not encourage conservatories to further reduce their harp programs, already nearly minimal at key schools.

Saul Davis was educated at MacPhail School of Music, Macalester College, Tanglewood and Manhattan School of Music, and privately with Lucile Lawrence. After residing in New York for thirteen years, he currently performs, teaches, writes and composes in his present studio in Philadelphia. He recently joined the board of Philadelphia Music Makers, a new classical music magazine. He is planning an autumn performance in collaboration with his father, Lionel Davis, at the St. Paul Jewish Community Center. †