

TILLY FLEISCHMANN, *TRADITION AND CRAFT IN PIANO-PLAYING*, edited by Ruth Fleischmann and John Buckley (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2014), ISBN 978-1-909325-53-1, 300pp, €50.

The literature on piano pedagogy represents a fascinating but somewhat eclectic body of work. Many pedagogical writings present the wisdom and insight gained by famous teachers and artists through their own experience of teaching and performing. Others are based on research into areas such as physics, mechanics and physiology, while another type of literature derives from the students of famous pedagogues who report on the beliefs, ideas and practices of their teachers. It is into this last category that Tilly Fleischmann's *Tradition and Craft in Piano-Playing* fits best, concentrating as it does on the Lisztian tradition of piano playing as passed down to her through her teachers, Bernhard Stavenhagen and Berthold Kellermann, both of whom were students of Franz Liszt.

Tilly Fleischmann (1882–1967), author, pianist, teacher and scholar, was born in Cork of German extraction, studied in Germany (1901–5) and returned to live in Cork where she performed extensively and taught piano in the Cork School of Music, establishing herself as a major figure in Irish musical life. In the foreword to this book, which was drafted by the early 1950s, she states: 'In producing this book now I have attempted to record what I learnt in Munich at the start of this century from my teachers Bernhard Stavenhagen and Berthold Kellermann as regards piano-playing in general, and the interpretation of Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin and of Liszt in particular' (1). Previous accounts of Liszt's piano teaching have addressed such issues as his inspirational personality, his interactions with students at his weekly master-classes, his manner of demonstrating and modelling for his students and his use of analysis and imagery in his teaching.¹ While this publication provides some perspectives into these aspects of Liszt's teaching, they are incidental rather than central to this book, whose main focus is on providing detailed descriptions and explanations of how Liszt approached technical and interpretative issues in his teaching and in his performance. In this, Fleischmann's work makes a unique contribution to the piano-pedagogy literature.

The book is divided into three sections: 'Technique and Practice', 'Interpretation' and 'Interpretation and Tradition'. The first begins by stating: 'It seems strange that after some two centuries of piano-playing pianists should still dispute questions of technique, tone and colour, still indulge in altercations regarding percussive and non-

¹ See Reginald R. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Technique*, (Washington and New York: Robert B. Luce Inc, 1974).

percussive touch, rigidity and relaxation, whole-arm and forearm action' (5). Fleischmann sidesteps the controversial debates around what she refers to as the 'mechanical foundations of piano technique' (5), preferring instead to present 'a practical course based chiefly on the Liszt style of piano-playing' (5). This practical course begins with a comprehensive array of technical exercises for fingers, thumb, wrist and arm, and in particular areas such as scales, arpeggios, various types of octaves and trills. A short chapter on touch and tone follows and here Fleischmann warns against overly percussive tone and describes singing *cantabile* tone as 'the life and soul of piano playing' (20). Further chapters in this section deal with general methods of practice along with the technical aspects of pedalling, memorizing and sight reading.

The chapter on practice deserves particular mention for the thorough and holistic approach adopted. Fleischmann considers that 'A sound method of practice is the pianist's most essential requisite' (21). She emphasizes hard work and concentration and places a major focus on the need for a systematic approach, on various types of 'slow practice' and on practising mindfully, phrase by phrase, and building a performance over time. It is through slow practice that the pianist can 'lay a sure foundation for ultimate technical mastery' (22). The importance of preliminary analysis is stressed along with the need for careful fingering. Practice is seen to involve the mind and the ear as well as the physical mechanics of playing the instrument; the pianist should 'watch every movement involved', allowing the mind to take in 'the order of the progressions and the muscular movements and the significance of each' (22). Rhythmic problems are dealt with along with 'use of emphasis' (23), practice routines and preparation for performances.

In discussing interpretation, Fleischmann includes separate sections on phrasing, dynamics, *rubato*, rhythmic shaping and grouping, pedalling and ornaments. The approach throughout is to present general principles illustrated with specific examples from the repertoire. There is a strong emphasis on stylistic considerations and the examples are chosen across a range of styles. There is a not unexpected emphasis on the Romantics, but examples from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Debussy are also included, along with others from later composers such as Rachmaninov, Bartók, Bax, Moeran, Ireland and Fleischmann's son, Aloys. The descriptions, definitions and explanations provided are clear and precise, and Fleischmann always justifies her approach which is informed by matters of style and 'artistry'.

The other two sections in this part of the book, 'Interpretation and the Text' and 'General Editing', are of particular interest and show evidence of extensive scholarly research. Here Fleischmann emphasizes the importance of the pianist using 'a trustworthy and helpful edition of the text' (94) and addresses issues around an edition's value and reliability. One senses that Fleischmann might have made an exacting editor. In the chapter on 'General Editing', she discusses editorial issues with reference

to specific music examples, comparing and contrasting an impressive array of editions. She also discusses the importance of background information on compositions, such as original inscriptions from the composer, titles attached to pieces or poems and stories which may have inspired a work.

The material presented in the second section of the book, 'Interpretation', provides a framework for the final section, 'Interpretation and Tradition', within which Fleischmann provides detailed critical commentaries, extensive background information and precise and invaluable performance guidelines for a substantial number of selected works from the piano music of Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann and Liszt. Fleischmann approaches the pieces 'in terms of the tradition which has become associated with them' (161) and the broad scope of her commentaries and her insights are most impressive. Refuting Toscanini's view that 'tradition is to be found in only one place—in the music', Fleischmann argues that a knowledge of tradition is derived from other sources: great performances, studies with a master, a composer's other works, exploration of the period within which a composer worked and acquaintance with 'ideals and influences which permeated his [*sic*] thought as a whole' (157). As a pianist, Fleischmann was steeped in tradition and her work is clearly informed by such sources along with her own performing experience. In her commentaries she draws on the views and performances of Stavenhagen and Kellermann and on accounts of Liszt's performances and utterances, and includes various sources of information on the composers and the background to the pieces. She provides critical comment on a range of editions available at the time of writing as well as referencing the literature and art of the periods involved. In this last context she presents a fascinating discussion of Chopin's *ballades*, highlighting the connections between Chopin's compositions and the poems of the Polish revolutionary poet, Mickiewicz. This section of the book is informative not only for the interpretative observations to be found in Fleischmann's critical commentary but also for the breadth of her research and for the philosophical nature of her discussions on concepts such as the role of the performer and the relationship between the score and the performance. She emphasizes the importance of 'authentic utterance', arguing that 'the printed notes are merely the bare bones of a work' and that 'its living soul must be created by the artist's imagination' (161).

In considering Fleischmann's work in the context of other twentieth-century recognized authorities on piano pedagogy, a distinction can be made between general principles and individual perspectives. The book covers many of the usual technical and interpretative issues to be found in piano-pedagogy literature but goes beyond the purely pedagogical to emphasize artistic principles within the framework of 'craft' and 'tradition'. Having guided us through the 'craft' of piano playing at the outset,

Fleischmann then takes us a step further, into the higher realms of 'tradition', to 'give the works perspective and stimulate the pianist's imagination' (3).

While obviously steeped in the Lisztian tradition and despite its many authoritative references to Stavenhagen and Kellermann, this book does not merely recount the views and practices of Fleischmann's mentors and of their inspirational teacher, Liszt. Indeed Fleischmann herself comments that 'it has not always been feasible to distinguish between opinions and precepts derived from my own experience and those derived from my Munich masters' (3). The tradition is not presented as 'a code of procedures handed down impersonally, and blindly adopted' (182–3) but as 'a living code which continues to be modified and improved upon from one generation to another' (183). The 'tradition' is mediated by Fleischmann's own experiences as performer, teacher and researcher. A very strong, individual musical personality comes across and a musicianship and artistry informed by scholarly study across a range of disciplines.

It could be argued that Fleischmann was ahead of her time. On reading her discourse on 'Interpretation and the Text' and 'General Editing', and particularly in the final section on 'Interpretation and Tradition', one is reminded of more recent research into the 'practice of performance', of the ongoing debates around 'authenticity' in music performance and of new developments in the general area of 'artistic research'. Fleischmann would seem to epitomize the concept of 'performer as researcher'. One can identify high levels of 'performer's analysis', a term coined by John Rink who describes how this type of analysis 'is not some independent procedure applied to the act of interpretation' but rather 'an integral part of the performing process' involving considered study of the score, focusing on 'contextual functions and the means of projecting them'.²

The concept of 'artist-teacher' also permeates Fleischmann's work. A term current in music-education circles and highlighted more recently in the context of music-teacher education debates, artist-teachers are perceived as inspirational musical role models for their students. Fleischmann points to the role of the artist-teacher in passing on the 'tradition', the concept so central to this book. She stresses the importance of 'continuity' whereby 'the artist-teacher will transmit his experience and that of his predecessors to his pupils, who will in turn transmit them further' (158).

² John Rink, review of Wallace Berry, *Musical Structure and Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), in *Music Analysis*, 9 (1990), 319–39: 323, quoted in John Rink, 'Analysis and (or?) performance', in John Rink (ed.), *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 35–58: 36.

(Although it seems dated today, Fleischmann's consistent use of the male personal pronoun reflects the writing practices of the early 1950s.) In this context, one is reminded of the work of philosopher and music educator, Estelle Jorgensen, who observes: 'As artist-teachers, we feel compelled to be true to the traditions of which we are heirs. Each artistic practice is marked by particular beliefs and practices that are valued in the tradition ... we need to remain faithful to those things that we consider to be precious'.³ One senses that Fleischmann considers both 'craft' and 'tradition', along with 'artistry', to be 'precious' in the context of piano playing and piano teaching.

It would be remiss to review this book without providing some comment on the lengthy process involved in its publication. As explained in Ruth Fleischmann's preface which gives the background to the writing and publishing of the book, Fleischmann's work, finished in 1953, remained unpublished in her lifetime. An abridged version was published privately by a former student, Michael O'Neill, in 1986 (the centenary of Liszt's death), and reissued in 1991 by Wendover music publisher, Kenneth Robertson and Theodore Presser Company of Pennsylvania. The volume under review here is a good example of collaborative research between individuals and institutions. The main collaborators include Ruth Fleischmann (granddaughter of the author), John Buckley (composer and faculty member at St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Dublin City University) and Gabriela Mayer (Head of Keyboard Studies at CIT Cork School of Music, where Tilly Fleischmann had taught for many years). The book has been meticulously edited by Ruth Fleischmann and Buckley, and, given Tilly Fleischmann's observation that Liszt always illustrated 'how he achieved this or that effect' (5), it is appropriate that the music examples, on the accompanying DVD, are performed by Mayer with obvious faithfulness to the original descriptions in the text. The individual prefaces written by Ruth Fleischmann, Buckley and Mayer illustrate the collaborative research process. The prefaces, in conjunction with Patrick Zuk's paper 'An Irish Treatise on the Lisztian Tradition of Pianism' (xvii–xxiii), and some well-chosen historical illustrations from the Fleischmann Collection in the archives of University College Cork, also provide the reader with details of Fleischmann's life and career along with helpful historical and musical contextual background. This publication represents a reference book for pianists, piano teachers and all those interested in piano playing.

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³ Estelle R. Jorgensen, *The Art of Teaching Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 212–3.