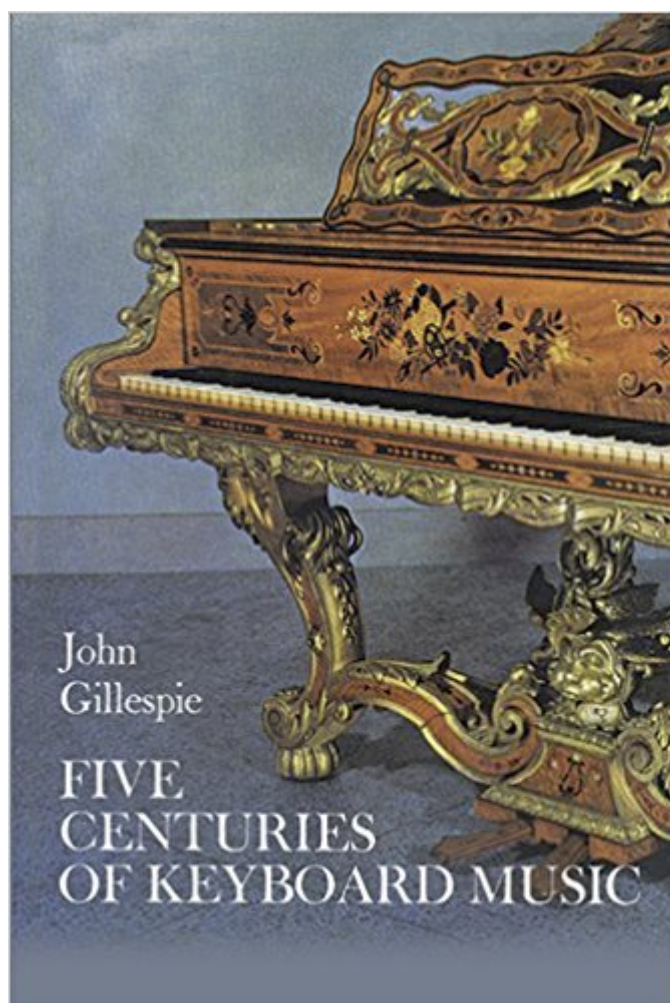


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Five Centuries Of Keyboard Music (Dover Books On Music)



Synopsis

Gillespie discusses 350 composers and their works for harpsichord and piano, including Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Debussy. Includes 116 musical examples, illustrations, and a glossary of musical terms.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a great resource for any pianist. It is clear and concise and contains lots of good information and anecdotes pertaining to piano literature.

A welcome addition to any keyboard player's library.

awesome, should be read by every music lover!

This is a very helpful and interesting book. I am taking a class at the university, based on this book. Perfect gift for musicians!

Mr. Gillespie was a marvelous keyboardist and his book is a wonderful history of keyboards. Any musician will love it.

I purchased it as a textbook. The conditions of this book which I received several weeks ago is just

fine. However, the dealing fee (postage, I mean) is much expensive than the price of this book.

In places a good read. In other places, wrong, or too brief, and lacking probative insights. The below comments are just a few examples. In places, the author mistakes his own personal views for scholarship. As an example, he writes that Liszt's Dante sonata is "bristling with technical difficulties, the music nevertheless is completely ineffectual." Really? I wonder whether the author has ever played the work. If it is "completely ineffectual" why did Arrau, Brendel, Ranki and a host of other great pianists record it or perform it at recital? So, I would say the author's description is nonsense. What he should have written is that he does not like the work. In truth, the Dante sonata is not at the peak of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor which is one of the greatest piano works ever written. But it is still a wonderful work, and a book that dismisses it so abruptly as being "ineffectual" without even attempting to justify its position makes me wonder whether the author is reliable in his appraisals of other works. Having said that, the author does praise the Sonata in B minor for its originality, but then later (as noted below) suggests the Romantic composers' piano sonatas contain their least effective piano music. Other cases show the author to be at odds with fact. For example, at p 232 he states that Chopin's Sonata in B Minor "more strictly adheres to tenets of classic sonata form." The author is simply wrong here. The first movement does not adhere to classic sonata form, but is in a loose sonata form which Chopin modified - like virtually all great creators he knew the rules, but saw fit to bend or break them when his artistic purpose required. Perhaps the author would claim he was referring to the overall construction of the sonata's four movements, and how these seem to be more balanced than the extraordinary sonata op 35. But the author does not qualify his statement in any way so as to clarify his meaning. This sort of loose language could well mislead those who don't know the works well. Again, however, the author partly redeems himself by describing the third movement Largo as inspired and written in song form. It certainly is, and the middle section of the third movement is one of the most beautiful passages in all piano literature - yet the author does not bring this out. There is no informative discussion of Chopin's greatest Ballade in F minor - instead the author contents himself with musings whether it was inspired by a Lithuanian ballad. Of its mastery of form and imagination, its extraordinarily difficult coda with ascending double chromatic thirds, the author says nothing. I would be far more interested in reading something about Chopin's artistry and depth of imagination, than reading the author's speculation as to whether Chopin's inspiration was a work of literature (which we may never know). The piano music of JS Bach is another example. At p 138 the author states "The chromatic fantasy and fugue and the Italian Concerto are the best of Bach's single pieces." There is no doubt the first part of this statement is correct. But I cannot agree

that the Italian Concerto is the best or even one of his best single works. In preference to it I would include Bach's Fantasy and Fugue in A Minor BWV 904, the Prelude in A Minor BWV 922. Others might have different choices. But the author should avoid such sweeping statements - they are his opinions but presented as objective fact, and the omission of mention of these works suggests he is unaware of them. Another example is on p 185 where he describes the Waldstein sonata as having just two movements. Sorry but the author is wrong here. The sonata has three, and always had three movements, but what many may be surprised by is that Beethoven thought his excellent original second movement was too long. So he published it later as the Andante Favori WoO57 and removed it from the Waldstein. In its place, he inserted the existing second movement. Those wanting to learn more can read Romain Rolland's excellent (and rather poetic) Beethoven The Creator at p 132FF. The author's error is the type of error that only someone who has never played the work could make. But in a work of scholarship as this book has to be the error here is surprising. Reference to the score shows that the sonata is clearly marked as three movements in Urtext editions. It is true that Beethoven (very late in the composition process) came to treat the middle movement as a sort of introduction to the final movement, and it is true that the final movement begins without a pause after the concluding sustained chord of the Introduzione. But the second movement stands alone as a very necessary balancing movement to the first and third movements. A small point perhaps, but quite a significant one: Henle's Urtext edition for example clearly delineates the movements, and Beethoven places the word "Rondo" at the start of the third movement because it is in a different tempo, has a different theme, and is in a different key and mood. And we are not talking about an obscure work here, but rather Beethoven's Waldstein sonata - one of his hardest and most famous sonatas. Does the author know the score? Has he ever played the sonata? I doubt it, otherwise he could never make such an elementary error. He might have just listened to the work (where on a casual listen it can sound like it is in two movements), but if he had ever played it, or bothered to look at the score he could never have made such an erroneous statement. Despite this basic error, the author has a good discussion of the last three Beethoven sonatas, describing the op 110 as "one of Beethoven's most astonishingly expressive works." I agree. Yet the discussion is really too brief to be thoroughly engaging. So, we have some poor final editing (either by the author or his publisher), mixed with some probing descriptions in other places. Another example is that while the author discusses Schubert's sonatas, the late A Major sonata is merely mentioned as one of the three "skilled essays" which he calls the last three sonatas. All three are in fact masterpieces, but aside from the superficial discussion of the Bb sonata, all three are dealt with cursorily. Another simply untrue assertion appears at p 204: "the

Romantic composers...professed a desire, sometimes halfheartedly, to write sonatas. Weber, Schubert, Schumann, Liszt, Chopin, and Brahms all used sonata form at times, but (excluding Weber and Schubert) their sonatas represent their least effective keyboard writing." What nonsense! For example, Liszt's B Minor Sonata is widely acknowledged as one of the great piano sonatas after Beethoven, even if it is not in strict sonata first movement form as such. It shows the possibilities of presenting a principal theme not merely in first movement classical sonata form, but as the theme for an entire sonata - the sonata ends on the same theme as it begins, and that is something no one had done before on this scale. It is unquestionably a peak in piano literature. Chopin's op 35 and 58 contain some of his most inspired writing and are regularly played. Brahms' second and third sonatas are amazing works, and Schumann's sonatas, whilst somewhat rambling, are well worth exploring. So, to describe the Romantic composers as writing some of their least effective piano music in their sonatas is a basic error. There is a good discussion of the piano music of Debussy and Ravel. This is one of the odd facets of this book: there are basic errors in parts, and sweeping conclusions that suggest lack of familiarity with the music. In other places, the author provides cogent and well written discussion of the works. The discussion of Rachmaninov at p 276-7 is generally well written, but to say that the etudes-tableaux do not match the splendid achievements of the preludes is an exaggeration. Has the author never heard the magnificent A Minor and Eb Minor Etudes-Tableaux? These two works are as fine as any of his preludes, and his second piano sonata. But even Busoni does not escape the authors mistakes. At p348 he says that the Chaconne from the "fourth violin Partita" is particularly outstanding. No, he is wrong, although other good authors have likewise grouped the partitas and sonatas into six also. I am sitting here with the Henle edition of this work which is the Chaconne from the Partita No 2 in D Minor (which I am presently playing). The transcription by Busoni of Bach's Chaconne from the second partita in D Minor is one of the masterpieces for the piano. A Busoni transcription of a Chaconne from the fourth partita does not exist. In fact no fourth solo violin partita exists - Bach wrote three solo violin partitas and three solo violin sonatas. I suppose the author's intent is clear to those who know the work. So, although the book is often an enjoyable read, I cannot recommend it as highly as some have. Perhaps part of the problem is that it seeks to cover too much and too many lesser works, without exploring in detail the great masterpieces of piano literature. But some of these problems should have been corrected in final editing. All in all, an enjoyable book, but not one that can be recommended without reservation. The author makes contradictory statements at various parts of the book, and sometimes presents his opinion as objective fact when the opinions do not reflect fact. I rather suspect the author does not have first hand knowledge of some of the works he writes

about (I can think of no other explanation for a false description of the Waldstein as having two movements - no one who has ever bothered to look at the score, play the work, let alone research it could commit such a gaffe). Or it may be the author either failed to read the book through, or else it was written by several people - the bizarre description of Liszt and Chopin's B Minor sonatas above as among the composers' "least effective works" and the contrasting praise for them elsewhere is just one example. As the author was a professor of music, there is no excuse for some of the errors he makes. Having said that, I have given the book four stars, because the author generally writes well, and the subject matter is interesting. This could be a better book if a new edition fixing its errors and expanding the discussion of the Romantic composers' piano sonatas (preferably by someone who has deeper insights) was published. It would then be five stars.

I ordered this book out of a glossy Dover reprints catalog that I in turn ordered from the inside cover of a Dover reprint score. This five-century survey was my first introduction to keyboard music and 25 years later, bits and pieces of this book are still ingrained in my musical awareness. It has influenced the repertoire selections I have practiced, the repertoire I have sought when purchasing CD's, and its chapter-end bibliographies have directed my attention as to where to learn more. I first learned of the Liszt b-minor piano sonata reading this book & later sought out the seminal Horowitz recording of the same from the 1930's to hear what I was reading about. Any piano student starting out desiring to get a lay of the land would do well to begin here. It's interesting to look back at this book and see which names and works did and did not make it into its pages. One glaring omission is Leopold Godowsky whose name appears nowhere, not even in the chapter on pianist-technicians. How tastes have changed!

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