

Jenny Macmillan is won over for the first time by Alfred Masterwork editions

As a committed lover of Urtext editions, I was somewhat concerned to be asked to review these newly published books from Alfred. Would I be able to say anything positive about these books? The answer, Alfred will be pleased to learn, is yes – with reservations, but definitely yes.

The books are excellent "performing editions". They give some historical background and provide suggestions for fingering, pedalling, ornamentation, dynamics and articulation. A Naxos CD of all the pieces in each book is included. These Alfred Masterwork editions would be very helpful when used in conjunction with an Urtext edition in order to give ideas for performance. They are much cheaper than most Urtexts. They are also less bulky, lighter to carry around, and open better on the music stand. Choice of fingering is an individual matter but, by and large, the suggestions are good – and better than the rather wayward fingering offered in many Henle books.

However, the music is not attractively laid out on the page. The margins are too small, the spacing between systems varies from page to

page – the pages look messy. The page turns seem planned neither for convenience for turning, nor to clarify structure, for instance, at the end of a section.

Alfred should be congratulated on providing recordings. But the difference between listening to a performance by an outstanding pianist and a mediocre one is huge. Works which seem dull can come to life when performed by an

exceptional musician. Most of the Alfred recordings are perfectly all right, just missing variety, lacking in light and shade, and are neither particularly exciting nor inspiring. However, if they whet a student's appetite to wish to study a piece and to find other recordings of it, then all well and good.



J S Bach: Italian Concerto

(ed Palmer & Linder) Price: £7.95

The excellent introduction speaks good sense on origin, ornamentation (giving several possible interpretations), articulation, phrasing, dynamics and tempi. I find the grey-printed editorial suggestions for dynamics, articulation and ornamentation clutter the page and make it confusing if they need to be crossed out and alternatives written in. The editors don't discuss the thorny question of pedalling, but at least they don't add suggestions for pedalling which some teachers would want to cross out. Much of the fingering is good. However, scale passages often mark where to play thumbs, but not whether it will be a 3 or a 4 before/after the thumb, which I consider is the essential finger to know.

Schubert Impromptus Op90 and Op142

(ed Baylor) £8.50 and £9.50

The editor provides a lengthy historical note and detailed analysis

of each Impromptu, together with a list of recommended reading and listening. However, for my taste, more editorial pedal markings than necessary are added to the score. Why add legato pedal markings through the whole of the G flat major Impromptu? It just clutters the page. More use of pedale come sopra would keep the pages clearer.

Schumann Carnaval, Fantasiestücke and Études en Forme de Variations

(ed Hinson) Price: £9.50, £9.50 and £10.50

Extensive introductions give interesting historical background information with quotes from, for example, Schumann's letters. The editor recommends becoming familiar with the literary works of ETA Hoffman and Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, as well as Schumann's literary works, particularly his letters, in order to find the true nature and spirit of Schumann's piano music. Each piece/movement/variation is given a substantial paragraph of suggestions for practising and performing.

Liszt: Six Consolations

(ed Hinson) Price: £7.95

The foreword explains the source material for these pieces, how each piece is distinctive and yet of a consoling mood or character, and how they bear some resemblance to Mendelssohn's 'Songs Without Words' and Chopin's 'Nocturnes'. The pieces are briefly analysed and some technical issues are discussed.

Debussy: Preludes Book 1

(ed Hinson) Price: £9.50

[Book 2 also available]

An informative foreword explains the titles to each Prelude, Debussy's metronome marks, pedalling and fingering, followed by a brief analysis of each Prelude. We all have different ideas about fingering. I like the editor's suggestions, eg in *La fille aux cheveux de lin*. On the other hand, the pedal markings in this piece seem very strange to me. Admittedly, the editor points out in the foreword the major problem of deciding pedalling and emphasises that his are only suggestions, that the final decision

comes from the ear, and depends on factors such as the individual interpretation, the acoustic of the room, the instrument being played – all good sensible advice. At the end of the book is an admirable comprehensive glossary of Debussy's French performance directions translated into English.

Bartok Romanian Folk Dances

(ed Hinson) Price: £5.95

The interesting and well-written introduction informs us that these Dances are based on folk melodies representing different dance forms from Transylvania (previously part of Hungary), originally for violin or shepherd's flute, to which Bartok added his own unusual harmonies. For each of the pieces we are told about the mode(s) used, meanings of the dance titles, a little about each dance (eg No 1: "young men's solo dance, with various figures, the last of which consists of kicking the room's ceiling"), and how to perform Bartok's different accents. I'm pleased that the editor implies that some of Bartok's own pedal

indications are a little wayward - I've never been able to make them work.

Villa-Lobos A Prole Do Bebe No1

(ed Appleby) Price: £9.50

The editor suggests that Villa-Lobos's music "reflects the full range of the rhythmic richness and diversity of the urban music of his Afro-Brazilian heritage". The Baby's Family (A Prole Do Bebe No1) was first performed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1922 by Arthur Rubinstein. The introduction points out that Brazil is a multi-racial society. Apparently it is not unusual to find Brazilian families in which the

skin colour of family members ranges from near white to almost completely black. The doll family depicted in this collection represents the ethnic diversity of such a family.

Gershwin Three Preludes

(ed Hinson) Price: £7.95

The brief but interesting foreword tells us about Gershwin as composer and performer, about performing his music on the piano and, in particular, these three Preludes. Also included are suggestions for further reading for those who wish to discover more.

Tcherepnin Bagatelles Op5

(ed Olson) Price: £7.95

These Bagatelles are probably Tcherepnin's most popular works, and he also made a version for piano and orchestra. This Alfred edition for piano solo has an irritatingly written introduction about the composer ("Alexander matured to become a pianist and composer", "Tcherepnin passed on in Paris in 1977"). Study notes for each of the ten Bagatelles discuss tempi, dynamics, technique and pedalling.

Conclusion

Having spent most of my life unable

to see the point of edited editions of the classics, I am now being persuaded of their use as guidance for teachers and students. These Alfred editions provide starting points and help with fingering, interpretation and technique that Urtext editions do not set out to do. They are aids to getting young players up and running. They are totally different from, and complementary to, the Urtext editions (remembering that some "Urtext" editions, such as Henle, are not strictly Urtext anyway). Although I wouldn't want to learn solely from these scores, I can see their uses. I can certainly recommend them for study purposes. JM

REVIEWS

BRONWEN BRINDLEY, SALLY CATHCART, MELVYN COOPER, NADIA LASSERSON, NANCY LITTEN, MARK TANNER, ANTHONY TAYLOR, ALEXANDER THOMPSON

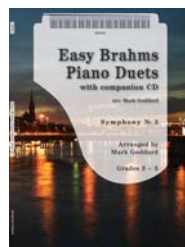
Batik (transcribed by Pawel Markowicz): BLUES IN F (for Charly)

Publisher: Doblinger 01 676

A video performance of Roland Batik performing the original version of this work can be found on the composer's website and is well worth watching for anyone who loves jazz. Here, on this website, there are also several useful tutorials on voicing, the building of chords and the technique of blues composition that make compelling reading and are an excellent introduction to this transcription of Batik's Blues in F.

Roland Batik was born in Vienna in 1951 and has been teaching at the Vienna Conservatory since 1978. Apart from his own compositions, he has made complete recordings of the Mozart and Haydn piano sonatas and regularly performs in public. Blues in F is a short piece of about four and a half minutes' duration, requiring a good stretch and hand size for an accomplished performer. Some of the improvised runs, tremoli and brilliant

finger passages have been written out clearly in this transcription by Pawel Markowicz and simplified to some degree, leaving room for the performer's imagination and own improvisation. Batik's own playing is a wonderful example of perfect rubato, or, perhaps, "correct" rubato, the right hand performing intricate and rhythmically complex fioratura passages over a constant chordal bass of steady minims and crotchets. It is a fascinating, deceptively laid-back piece and would sound good on any concert programme, provided it is played by a performer who understands the genre. BB



Brahms: Easy Brahms Piano Duets: Symphony No.3, Grades 3-5

Arranged by: Mark Goddard.

Publisher: Spartan Press SP821

Fresh from Spartan Press, situated in an idyllic wee corner of the Scottish Highlands, comes an eyebrow raiser from Mark Goddard, who is no

stranger to the not inconsiderable task of making 'difficult' music 'playable'. You'll quickly spot what I mean by this, for Brahms's Third Symphony, arranged for easy to intermediate piano duet might, on the face of it, seem a bit of a non sequitur - but read on. In the course of a brief chat with Mark about his thoughts on capturing the gist of this mammoth work, I learned how sincere and realistic his intentions are. Undoubtedly, the best starting point for writing an arrangement is a genuine feeling of connection with the original piece, and from here springs all the necessary ingenuity and sensitivity needed to re-imagine the music for pared-down forces. At the heart of Brahms's symphonies lies the composer's extraordinary capacity for pulling off brooding, enduring melodies; yet, coupled with this, is his knack for cleverness with cross-rhythms, his opulence of scale and immaculate sense of build-up to points of climax. So, what of this new realisation? I've been very impressed, actually; in it, Goddard succeeds in crystallising each of the four movements in a musically viable, pianistically possible way. The whole is always greater than the sum of the parts in good duet writing/arranging, and it quickly becomes clear that the

textures survive the heavy abridgement needed. Goddard retains the original key scheme for the symphony (F major, C major, C minor, F minor/major) which is good to see, as well as the tempo markings for each movement (Allegro con brio, Andante, Poco Allegretto, Allegro). The first movement springs to life delightfully and, despite being truncated to just 51 bars, we get the measure of the ensuing drama very appropriately. The primo part understandably has some octave-apart unison work in the stratospheric region, but some approachable part writing also makes for satisfying music-making; the secondo part in this movement is obviously that bit more busy, with quaver momentum sustained most of the way through; but, again, it's all very readable and calculated to generate a rousing effect. At the time of its writing, back in 1883, the Third Symphony was proclaimed by leading personalities as being Brahms's 'Eroica', and this point is never more apparent than in the touching waltz-like charm of the third movement. Here, the rhythmic value of the music is carefully divided between the parts, avoiding too much fussiness in the presentation. The finale, which is also driven as much by melody as by rhythmic energy, is well