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Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas: A Guide For The Listener And The Performer



Synopsis

Boris Berman, renowned concert pianist and teacher, is one of the world's foremost authorities on Sergei Prokofiev. In this book, he draws on his intimate knowledge of Prokofiev's work to guide music lovers and pianists through the composer's nine piano sonatas. These cherished works, composed between 1910 and 1951, are today considered an indispensable part of the repertoire of every serious concert pianist. The book, written with a deep appreciation of Prokofiev's style and creativity, looks at the sonatas within the context of Prokofiev's complete oeuvre. For each sonata, Berman provides general information about the work and a discussion of the composition's details and features, and in a section entitled "Master Class" he offers suggestions for interpretation and specific advice for performing. Berman also corrects for the first time various misprints in published scores and includes a helpful glossary of musical terms.

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Customer Reviews

This new book by Boris Berman is a magnificent read for those who care about the ingenious music of Prokofiev. Dedicated to his mother, Berman tackles the virtually limitless piano repertoire, the

piano sonatas of Prokofiev which are considered a serious part of the repertoire by almost every accomplished concert pianist. He was the only 20th century composer to give such consistent attention to form. Prokofiev had a lifelong compassion of the sonata form and Berman begins the book with an outline of how sonata form evolved from Beethoven to Schubert, Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms, continuing into the important composers of the 20th century. Berman provides an in depth chapter on Prokofiev's life and the evolution of his "musical language", which also includes reference and descriptive discussion on how all of his compositions came to fruition. The book then devotes considerable insight to "Prokofiev the pianist", which conveys how the piano played a central role in his oeuvre. Berman sites specific examples of movements, bars, types of piano textures of his early and late works as well as his articulations, active finger work and resulting sonorities. The incredible fascination of this book truly begins when Berman gives each of the piano sonatas an in depth discussion and overview. Berman then leads us to the next step called "Listening Closely". Each movement is analyzed in a well laid out format showing examples of thematic material, what is taking place in each hand, and even gives measure numbers and timing spots where the examples occur on the disc. It is most important that you write bar numbers in your scores, as Prokofiev never provided bar numbers. By doing this it makes for less searching when locating Berman's examples.

Sergei Prokofiev is one of my favorite composers, and I have performed several of his sonatas with hopes to play more in the future. When I discovered that Boris Berman, whose Prokofiev recordings I admire, had written a book about the great Russian composer's piano sonatas, I couldn't wait to read it. I ended up being disappointed in the result, however. Going into this book, I was hoping for something along the lines of Messiaen, by Peter Hill (another fine pianist) and Nigel Simeone, which delved into the letters and musical sketches of another of my favorite composers to give a deep portrait of his life and works. Berman does draw on certain Russian sources that are basically inaccessible to western readers, but too often in a superficial way only (e.g. "Givi Ordzhonikidze observed another trait of the Ninth Sonata: the important role played by the imagery of children," p 194--here Berman merely quotes another author's opinion without comment, rather than drawing on some primary source). There was some extremely valuable information that I hadn't seen elsewhere, however, such as the comparison of Prokofiev's manuscript for the Ninth Sonata with the published version, which has several mistakes. I wish Berman had been able to consult more manuscripts, sketches, and the like, as this would have made for a more enlightening book. After two chapters discussing Prokofiev's life as a composer and pianist, respectively, Berman considers

each sonata individually. Each of these chapters has two main sections: "Listening Closely" and "Master Class." In the former, Berman gives a chronological account of what happens in each movement.

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