

BOOK REVIEW

Complete Accord

Miriam Hyde

Currency Press, Sydney
237 pages
\$45.00

Reviewed by: Denis Condon

I wonder how many suburban Australian families greet domestic crises and joys by breaking into poetry? The Hyde family certainly does and they obviously subscribe to Alexander Pope's epigram "Truth shines the brighter clad in verse". These lyrical outbursts add even more charm to the already charming narrative which recounts Miriam Hyde's fairly adventurous life from a suburban girlhood in Adelaide in the 1920s to quiet genteel living in the Sydney suburb of Enfield where she finished this autobiography.

There must be a readership of thousands of pianists and would-be pianists who have found that the drudgery of preparation for AMEB examinations has been greatly relieved by the presence of pieces by Miriam Hyde in the grade books published by the Board. The Australian Music Examination Board's twice-yearly tests, set out in eight grades and two "letter gaining" examinations, are undertaken all over the country by singers and instrumentalists. Those examinations have, generally, provided a standard which has greatly enriched our musical community. Miriam Hyde's part in this has been an important one; she has provided teaching pieces of considerable substance for these examinations. It would be natural that examinees should seek out more information about the woman who has provided them, year after year, with such worthwhile material. Many, sadly, could find the stiff RRP of \$45 might inhibit their enthusiasm.

So this is a book, in the main, for pianists. Miriam Hyde's mother, Muriel, who was her first teacher had a solid first class repertoire, and soon discovered that her talented daughter not only had perfect pitch but that she had a phenomenal musical memory too. This, together with a brain teeming with musical ideas, proved to be an unbeatable combination for the young aspiring composer.

Miriam Hyde's account of her student days in London in the 1930s is great reading. She was associated with so many musicians who have become legends sixty years on - including Sir Percy Buck, R.O. Morris, Howard Hadley and C.H. Kitson. A later chapter is devoted to her tours of Europe in her more mature years. This was, for me, the only part of the book that had its longeurs: it reads like a travel brochure.

Readers will be pleased to find worthy attention to the naming of music heard or performed. So many biographies will have phrases like "I played some Chopin that night". Not so Miriam Hyde! In this book it will be "I played Chopin's Scherzo in C# minor that night". And so it is

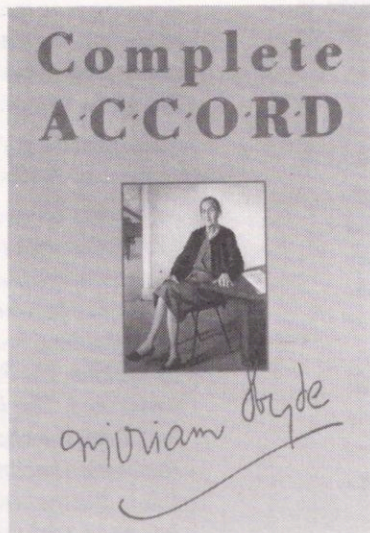
throughout the book, concerts attended and performances given are described in welcome detail.

Reading through a list of Miriam Hyde's works at the back of the book is to encounter, time and time again, titles which refer to nature: "Magpies at Sunrise", "Brownhill Creek in Spring" and the like. These are not idle musings on the composer's part, they are genuine acknowledgements that so much of her delightful music finds its inspiration from her sensitive reactions to her environment. Throughout the book we are constantly reminded of the influence nature has on its author. Another influence can be found on the first page of the book, Scriabin's 'Mystic Chord' resolving into a dominant seventh.

All has not been 'complete accord' though. The chapter entitled 'Eclipse and Investiture' finds Miriam Hyde facing domestic problems at an age when these things are often resolved. The honest narrative here must have been hard to set down. It is touchingly well done.

Admirers of Miriam Hyde's compositions (there must be thousands of them who have enjoyed playing her pieces) will be fascinated to read this worthwhile and beautifully produced book. To get to know the woman behind the music will surely give them further insight and delight when they tackle yet another of her engrossing works. An ideal book for prize givings, birthdays and Christmas time.

Any profits from the book will be donated to the Elder Overseas Scholarship, University of Adelaide.



More Than Music

Felix Werder

Council of Adult Education, Melbourne
116 pages
\$12.95

Reviewed by Peter Platt

I was immediately attracted to this volume of essays because it promises a fresh perspective, from a most distinguished and experienced composer/critic. The author explains that the book is a collection of his thoughts on music,

not on what is commonly called 'music history', but rather a look at music as part of the wider art scene in its own day... This is not a book of facts: it is a book of ideas which explores changes forced on society by economics, these changes in turn producing new philosophies and art styles. (pp. vii-viii)

The fact that the author presents himself as (more or less) anti-academic is a further enticement. Anyone who has been involved, as I have, with the amazing industry of the current music/scholarly world with its year-by-year proliferation of often-but-not-always illuminating monographs and journal articles on every conceivable musical topic - historical, regional, analytical - is always half-expecting it to collapse under its own weight. One is pleased when the enlightened passionate practitioner -

Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Tippett, Elliott Carter, Boulez, Rosen of *The Classical Style* - presents a fresh view.

These essays are lively and thought-provoking and if I do not find them entirely satisfying it certainly is not for their lack of ideas, which are superabundant, but because the ideas are presented in sort of scatter-bombardment-technique which continually cries out for amplification: there are at times too many over-simplifications and apparent *non-sequiturs* for comfort. One does not question the author's erudition and there is no doubt of the brilliance and originality of his mind but within the space of the short essay there is often barely room for the thought to communicate fully. And the text cries out for music quotations and visual illustration.

It is only fair to say that the author is acutely aware of the gap between musical and verbal argument, and it is his intention to stimulate *the reader* to do the thinking:

The great composers communicate through music; that is their language. The meaning of a Mozart quintet is in the music; that is why Mozart chose music as a means of communication, and not literature. Criticism and literary essays are only signs to point you in the right direction; they are not a substitute for the real thing... All a book like this one can do is open up new horizons of sensibility so that, like our first intellectual, Eve, you can distinguish between good and bad taste. (p. viii)

The book's literary style then is lively and deliberately provocative. It is also very close knit, to the extent that quotation risks tampering with it unfairly - but anything else will not do it justice either. I shall quote here rather extensively from the first chapter, entitled *Sinfonia: Why do composers write music? Why do people listen to it? What are they looking for?*, to give some idea of style and method.

The chapter is headed by a quotation:

"If music be the food of love", warbled Duke Orsino in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, "play on, give me excess of it".

The text begins:

Mozart's Don Giovanni held a similar view. Music, to him, was an enticing sinfonia to nocturnal activities.

But others used music for different purposes. J.S. Bach wrote his Goldberg Variations as a cure for a patron's insomnia and achieved the opposite result. Offenbach wrote music for nineteenth-century female aerobics while Handel wrote simply to keep the wolf from the door. Wagner wrote his operas as a substitute for religion and Tchaikovsky as a substitute for physical encounters of the first kind.

In short, music will do for all seasons. This has resulted in the situation where there are many more lectures on the pleasures music may provide than on its meaning and purpose.

There follows a lively discussion whose aim is to point up the twin claims of enjoyment and understanding and which concludes (p.3):

Obviously with the ultimate masters like Mozart, Monteverdi and C.P.E. Bach, enjoyment and meaning complement each other. A good example of this double pleasure - to be derived from first responding to the pure sensuousness of sound and then marvelling at the intellectual wizardry in creating it - is the last movement of the Mozart Jupiter Symphony. When the greatness of this piece has been revealed through understanding, the listener moves to another level of enjoyment.

Arriving at an intellectual grasp of the Mozartian miracle brings about a spiritual maturation in the listener. Music is no longer the food of love but of the human spirit.

At this point the author broaches the social/environmental perspectives of his book.

No man is an island; least of all the composer. Composers are the products of their age, their environment and an historical evolution. The difference between Mozart and Beethoven is not one of talent but of changing socio-economic conditions. The French Revolution is the dividing watershed. The ironic philosophies of Voltaire and Beaumarchais which heralded the French Revolution became music in the works of Mozart. But in Beethoven's Eroica Symphony the irony has been replaced by hard facts. In the 1790s many sections of society tried to ignore the horrors of their day - and they had their composers too. There were Salieri and Auber, whose enjoyable doodlings wafted gently past the Bastille in a smooth tempo di valse... "To everything there is a season", says the Preacher in the Old Testament. To compare Salieri with Mozart is silly, for, as Pushkin points out in his play about the two composers, each fulfils a different function.

It is fitting that in our adolescence romantics such as Chopin and Tchaikovsky should fill our emotional life, and that on first hearing the virtuosity of Paganini or Liszt we become seduced by the combination of sentimentality and brilliance in the performance. But if this is still so in later life, one's own whole relationship to music as an art must be called into question.

This prose is full of ideas, and the general message is clear enough. In any case the book is not meant to be an academic exercise: the generalisations and special pleadings are shortcuts towards a vivid exposition of the point at issue. There is nevertheless a danger that the reader without Felix Werder's experience and large-mindedness may take literally the suggestions that Handel's sole motive was mercenary, that the difference between Mozart and Beethoven is an exclusively socio-economic one and that we should sooner or later 'grow out of' Chopin and Tchaikovsky.

In similar vein is a passage picked out by the publisher, to proclaim no doubt the provocativeness of the material:

Mozart wrote many of the finest, if not the finest,