

After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance

Kenneth Hamilton

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Kenneth Hamilton : After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. How we got here from thereBy klavierspielIn its relatively concise length, Kenneth Hamilton's book deals with several related questions concerning the history of piano performance in a remarkably comprehensive fashion. Beginning with the broadest questions, such as where and for whom pianists customarily performed in the nineteenth century, the author, himself a distinguished pianist, continues

with issues such as the length and composition of concert programs, the role of improvisation in public performances, memorization, and the eternal problem of fidelity to the printed score and respect for the composer's intentions. It is inevitable that the figure of Franz Liszt would take center stage in a book that asks whether there was indeed a "golden age" of pianism. One of the singular virtues of Hamilton's work is that the great pianist and composer is presented as the complex, multifaceted figure he was. His public performances were very different from piano recitals today, with assisting artists, improvisation, so-called "preluding," and above all, vocal and frequently riotous audience expression. In fact, they were quite a bit like popular music concerts are today. How we got from those lively, frequently lightweight and sloppy, but exciting events to the solemn, reverent affairs that piano concerts are today is a central, though hardly the only, topic of Hamilton's discourse. He shows us that although something has arguably been gained by this transformation, something also has been lost. There are some tedious stretches in the book--it is difficult to enliven, for example, a chapter that is basically a recitation of concert programs played by this or that pianist--and not all of the author's observations are fresh. It is hardly news to read, for example, that modern recording technology has altered both performer's attitudes toward and audiences' expectations of live performance. Nevertheless, Hamilton's perception and frequent sharp wit serve to make "After the Golden Age" an engaging and entertaining read, despite copious footnotes and documentation.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. After the Golden Age: An excellent walk to the past in piano history By Dennis E. Ferrara A truly excellent reference book including a proper discussion of various eras as well as famous pianists of the past. The bibliography section is extremely noteworthy; moreover, Hamilton presents both positive and negative sides of several questions. There is humor as well as fantastic examples of past writings of famous pianists. This book is highly recommended for pianists, music lovers and aficionados alike. One only wishes that photographs were available. Pianists could learn much from this book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. this is a good insight to how piano playing has changed so dramatically ... By Randall Reade Well researched. this is a good insight to how piano playing has changed so dramatically over the past hundred years or so, to our detriment. Today, all pianists sound the same, but back then, everyone valued individuality in their performances. I think it was more interesting back then.

Kenneth Hamilton's book engagingly and lucidly dissects the oft-invoked myth of a Great Tradition, or Golden Age of Pianism. It is written both for players and for members of their audiences by a pianist who believes that scholarship and readability can go hand-in-hand. Hamilton discusses in meticulous yet lively detail the performance-style of great pianists from Liszt to Paderewski, and delves into the far-from-inevitable development of the piano recital. He entertainingly recounts how classical concerts evolved from exuberant, sometimes riotous events into the formal, funereal trotting out of predictable pieces they can be today, how an often unhistorical "respect for the score" began to replace pianists' improvisations and adaptations, and how the clinical custom arose that an audience should be seen and not heard. Pianists will find food for thought here on their repertoire and the traditions of its performance. Hamilton chronicles why pianists of the past did not always begin a piece with the first note of the score, nor end with the last. He emphasizes that anxiety over wrong notes is a relatively recent psychosis, and playing entirely from memory a relatively recent requirement. Audiences will encounter a vivid account of how drastically different are the recitals they attend compared to concerts of the past, and how their own role has diminished from noisily active participants in the concert experience to passive recipients of artistic benediction from the stage. They will discover when cowed listeners eventually stopped applauding between movements, and why they stopped talking loudly during them. The book's broad message proclaims that there is nothing divinely ordained about our own concert-practices, programming and piano-performance styles. Many aspects of the modern approach are unhistorical--some laudable, some merely ludicrous. They are also far removed from those fondly, if deceptively, remembered as constituting a Golden Age.

"jolly and entertaining... full of wit and interest, and written with passion... a delightful and instructive book" - Charles Rosen, Times Literary Supplement

"Hamilton's healthy mixture of common sense, insightful arguments, and considerable experience as both scholar and pianist demonstrate just how far our current notions of performance etiquette, textual fidelity, and audience responsibility can be from those of practitioners a century or more removed." - Jonathan Kregor, Notes

"After the Golden Age is written in an engaging and entertaining style, and it covers a wealth of material, making a major contribution to the study of performance style. Bluntly, it should be required reading for all piano literature classes, read by all serious students of the piano, and likewise by anyone interested in the ways performance styles and personalities intersect with the literature...[It] will probably retain its relevance for decades." - Jonathan Bellman, Journal of Musicological Research

"After the Golden Age is a lively reminder that classical music once passed for mass entertainment..." --John Terauds, Toronto Star

"Hamilton's book explores this almost mythical 'Golden Age of Pianism' and the links between then and now.... We shouldn't resurrect every idiosyncrasy, says Hamilton, but with period performance having become mainstream, surely it's also time for us to open our imagination to the more recent past?" --Classic FM Magazine

"The pianist and author Kenneth Hamilton is an ideal guide to the changes of recitals, his dry Scottish humour the perfect weapon with which to skewer egos and pomposity.... A

delightful book."--Susan Tomes, *The Independent*"Kenneth Hamilton's excellent new Oxford history of romantic pianism"--Norman Lebrecht in *La Scena Musicale Online*"A wonderful book."--*The Guardian*"Since very many people share Kenneth Hamilton's fascination with the piano and its music, his skilful handling of so many sources of information to build up a lively picture of the world of the Romantic pianist will likewise fascinate a wide readership."--Peter Williams, *The Musical Times*"[A] deft, sympathetic account of the old-school virtuosos and their gaudy habits...Hamilton, an accomplished Scottish pianist, contrasts the showmanship of Liszt with the "sheer routine and funereal boredom" of many recitals he hears today"--Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*"One only has to read the preface of Kenneth Hamilton's 'After the Golden Age' to know that the book will be beautifully written, informative, entertaining- and highly controversial. Mr Hamilton is a knowledgeable musician as well as a scholar...he states his facts and opinions brilliantly in an easy-going style."--Seymour Bernstein, *Chamber Music Magazine*"A fascinating book."--Christopher Morley, *Birmingham Post*"An impressive and thoroughly engrossing piece of scholarship" Jeremy Nicholas, *Gramophone*"Deftly, wittily, humorously, the author, himself an international pianist, traces the development of piano playing from Liszt to Paderewski and beyond with illuminating perception and detail...He also has the rare knack of expressing complexity with simplicity"--*Piano Magazine*"Hamilton's delightful wit, narrative flair and wealth of anecdotes..." *Wholenote Magazine*"An important new book by Kenneth Hamilton...His style is dryly witty, his scholarship immaculate and his conclusions challenging." Terry Teachout, *Commentary Magazine*"Brilliantly researched, beautifully written, and filled to the brim with amusing anecdotes (capped by the author's wry humour)"--*Symphony Magazine*"After the Golden Age recounts the more arcane habits of historical pianism...Hamilton brings back what has been missing from concerts in these politically correct times- an unapologetic sense of fun." Dr Chang Tou Liang, *The Straits Times Singapore*."Kenneth Hamilton's excellent new Oxford history of romantic pianism"--Norman Lebrecht in *La Scena Musicale Online*"A delightful book."--*The New York Times*"After the Golden Age is a *cri de coeur*, lamenting the loss of a passionate, individualistic, free-form performance style -- Dionysus in the concert hall -- and arguing for its reconsideration. For all that, Mr. Hamilton's own prose style is gentle and deft."--James F. Penrose, *The Wall Street Journal*"A wonderful book."--*The Guardian*"A compelling and richly detailed volume. Kenneth Hamilton puts the 'golden age' of romantic pianists into broad historical perspective, shrewdly confronting issues over authenticity, 'grand manner', and continuity with the present."--William Weber, Professor of History, California State University, Long Beach"A thoughtful, highly stimulating look at the golden age of pianism and its nineteenth-century exponents. Kenneth Hamilton wears his considerable scholarship lightly as he re-examines stylistic markers of the great pianists and argues cogently for their relevance to modern performers." --R. Larry Todd, Arts Sciences Professor, Duke University, and author of *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*"This book is a tour de force, a milestone in the history of musical performance. Kenneth Hamilton's vivid, evocative prose admirably reflects the virtuoso character of his subject. He calls into question the very nature of music, while throwing down a series of challenges to today's performers. A truly magnificent achievement!"-- Colin Lawson, Director, Royal College of Music, London"An impressive and thoroughly engrossing piece of scholarship" Jeremy Nicholas, *Gramophone*"An important new book by Kenneth Hamilton...His style is dryly witty, his scholarship immaculate and his conclusions challenging." Terry Teachout, *Commentary Magazine*"Deftly, wittily, humorously, the author, himself an international pianist, traces the development of piano playing from Liszt to Paderewski and beyond with illuminating perception and detail...He also has the rare knack of expressing complexity with simplicity"--*Piano Magazine*"After the Golden Age recounts the more arcane habits of historical pianism...Hamilton brings back what has been missing from concerts in these politically correct times- an unapologetic sense of fun." Dr Chang Tou Liang, *The Straits Times Singapore*."Hamilton's book explores this almost mythical 'Golden Age of Pianism' and the links between then and now.... We shouldn't resurrect every idiosyncrasy, says Hamilton, but with period performance having become mainstream, surely it's also time for us to open our imagination to the more recent past?"--*Classic FM Magazine*"The pianist and author Kenneth Hamilton is an ideal guide to the changes of recitals, his dry Scottish humour the perfect weapon with which to skewer egos and pomposity.... A delightful book."--Susan Tomes, *The Independent*"After the Golden Age is a *cri de coeur*, lamenting the loss of a passionate, individualistic, free-form performance style -- Dionysus in the concert hall -- and arguing for its reconsideration. For all that, Mr. Hamilton's own prose style is gentle and deft."--James F. Penrose, *The Wall Street Journal*"Brilliantly researched, beautifully written, and filled to the brim with amusing anecdotes (capped by the author's wry humour)"--*Symphony Magazine*"A delightful book."--*The New York Times*"A compelling and richly detailed volume. 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calls into question the very nature of music, while throwing down a series of challenges to today's performers. A truly magnificent achievement!"-- Colin Lawson, Director, Royal College of Music, London"...An interesting and insightful look into the nebulous and wide-ranging performance practices of the nineteenth-century." Timothy H. Lindeman, College Music Symposium"Entertaining, informative and thought-provoking...'After the Golden Age' will engage every piano lover, professional and amateur, teacher and student, and everyone interested in the performance styles of that time." Clara Levy, Music Educators' Journal"...should be on a required reading list in all music schools and conservatories, required not only for piano students but for their teachers as well... an illuminating, refreshing, and entertaining book." --Vincent Lenti, ARSC Journal"[A] mesmerizing study." --Heather Macdonald, City Journal"A revelatory analysis of musical interpretation... rarely can any new musicological treatise have been so densely crammed with jaw-dropping insights, or so enjoyable a guide to an alien mindset, as this one." - R.J.Stove, The University Bookman"This much-reviewed and best-selling book seeks out origins, through careful scholarly research, of many of the myths and stories handed down through generations of high-level pianists and their serious piano students...it inspires musical self-reflection." -- Stephanie McCallum, Musicology Australia "I hope Hamilton's eminently laudable contribution to the discourse has a seismic impact. His prose reads, for the most part, like silk: fizzing with humour, some timely sarcasm, and written through the perceptive eyes of one pianist evaluating another." --David Trippett, 19th Century Music "After the Golden Age is a provocative book in which Hamilton gives a virtuoso performance." --Daniel Gallagher, Ad Parnassum "In this delightful survey, [Kenneth Hamilton] discusses aspects of 19th century piano performance, highlighting the practical and aesthetic differences between that age and our own...he encourages pianists to question received wisdom." --SOM Times (Australia) "A main advantage of the title is Hamilton's unquestioned expertise in this milieu...Highly recommended for Hamilton's exhaustive research and enthusiasm." --Fontes Artes Musicae"This is beyond doubt an important, if controversial book, befitting a new century and brilliantly argued..." --Malcolm Troup, Piano Journal

About the AuthorDescribed after a recently televised performance of Chopin's First Piano Concerto with the St. Petersburg State Radio Symphony Orchestra as "an outstanding virtuoso--one of the finest players of his generation" (Kommersant Daily, Moscow), Scottish pianist and writer Kenneth Hamilton has appeared worldwide as a recitalist and concerto soloist. He has made many international television and radio broadcasts and is a regular performer and lecturer on music for the BBC in his native Britain. His doctoral research at Balliol College, Oxford, was on the music of Liszt, and he has for many years been a member of the Music Department of the University of Birmingham, UK. Numerous festival appearances have included a particularly memorable combination of pianism and scholarship in his highly successful re-creation of Liszt's 1847 concerts in Istanbul for the Istanbul International Festival.