

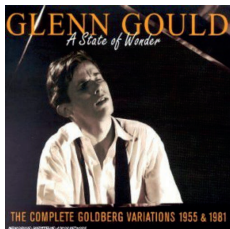
Book Case

PROFESSOR PASCAL MCKEOWN PICKS SOME PIANO WORKS

There is something profoundly therapeutic about sitting at a piano and playing music. Cristofori (1655-1731) from Padua is credited with the development of the modern piano. Prior to this, the main keyboard instruments were the harpsichord and the clavichord. As such, whilst these recommendations relate to ‘piano works’, you may find it interesting to explore recordings of these pieces on other instruments.

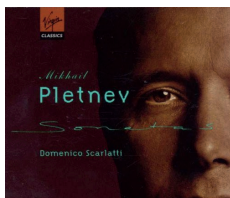
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750): GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

This piece was originally written for the harpsichord. As it is one of the most recorded of Bach’s works, which one should you choose? Possibly Glenn Gould who recorded it twice but at very different tempi – the 1955 recording lasts just over 38 minutes, whereas the 1981 recording lasts 51 minutes! If you listen closely you may also hear Glenn Gould humming along. Alternatively, Rosalyn Tureck’s masterful recording is played at a very slow pace (just over 90 minutes). Indeed, Jacque Loussier’s jazz trio has also made a recording of it and there are other transcriptions of this work for string quartet or orchestra.



DOMENICO SCARLATTI (1685-1757): SONATAS

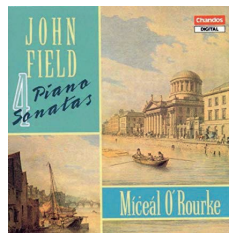
Scarlatti is reported to have written over five hundred sonatas for the harpsichord. They demonstrate amazing inventiveness. The broadcaster



and music writer, Jeremy Siepmann, has stated: ‘..in the main the fast sonatas are dominated by the dance... while the slower ones derive their rhythmic character from the nature and span of human breath, and have much of their inspiration in song’. My suggestion is to listen to a selection of these sonatas in the remarkable recording by Mikhail Pletnev.

JOHN FIELD (1782-1837): SONATAS

Field is credited with the development of the ‘nocturne’ - interestingly, he even gets a mention in Tolstoy’s War and Peace. However, I recommend his Sonatas, in particular in the recording by the Irish pianist, Míceal O’Rourke.



FREDERIC CHOPIN (1810-1849): WALTZES

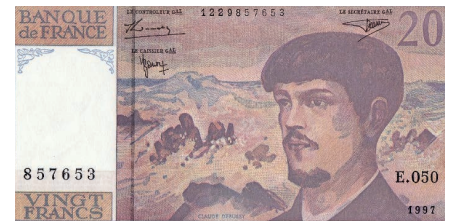
Chopin wrote mainly for the piano and composed a wide range of pieces, including mazurkas, waltzes, preludes, nocturnes, and sonatas. He was greatly influenced by his Polish roots and by the Irish composer, John Field, in particular with regard to the development of the nocturne. His collection of waltzes is a wonderful display of virtuosity – you may already be familiar with the so-called ‘Minute’ waltz as it is used as the theme tune for the BBC Radio 4 programme ‘Just a Minute’.



CLAUDE DEBUSSY: (1862-1918): PRELUDES

Debussy published his first book of preludes in 1910, with individual pieces based on legends, poems and quasi-religious themes. As an introduction to this music you may wish to consider

‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’ (The girl with the flaxen hair) or ‘La cathédrale engloutie’ (The submerged cathedral).



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975): 24 PRELUDES AND FUGUES

In 1950, Shostakovich visited Leipzig to take part in a festival of Bach’s music. At that time it was not common for Soviet musicians to travel abroad.



However, this visit to Leipzig, where Bach had spent a large period of his life and written the second part of his Well-tempered Clavier (a set of pieces in all twenty-four major and minor keys), inspired Shostakovich to compose a very different set of preludes and fugues.

KEITH JARRETT (1945 -): THE MELODY AT NIGHT, WITH YOU

Keith Jarrett is a composer who is internationally renowned for his jazz music as well as his recordings of classical music. In this album he has recorded improvisations from a wide range of sources. My personal favourite is his transcription of the traditional American folk song, Shenandoah.

