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by Susan Tomes**

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Sleeping in temples, by Susan Tomes. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014; ISBN: 9781843839750 (£19.99)

Sleeping in temples is the fourth book by the Edinburgh-based pianist and author Susan Tomes. The book is drawn from the author's memories, experiences and thoughts about the music she has been intensely and sincerely committed to as a pianist performing at the highest international standard for many years. Tomes describes the book as being about the music she loves: throughout, this is underpinned by the way she describes the rewards and challenges of being a classical pianist performing 'long-form' music in an age that perpetuates the instantaneous and immediate. The book is refreshing in its willingness to cut across fashionable ideologies (the visual aspect of classical performance is given a dressing-down on more than one occasion), as is Tomes's willingness to articulate her thoughts about music through her lived experience, as opposed to academic discourse.

There is a clarity and directness to this book that opens it to music lovers and makes it useful for performers. The writing is full of vivid anecdotes and Tomes proves herself to be a master storyteller throughout. Tomes introduces the book by saying that 'being a classical musician is something that mystifies people... including the musicians themselves... I often find it helps me if I attempt to explain it to myself' (p.x). In these explanations I found there to be

rich musings about the ontology of music, the chapter titled 'Play the contents, not the container' gives an outstanding demonstration of how performance can inform scholarship. I also found that at all points there was a symbiosis between the way Tomes aspires to communicate as a performer and the way she communicates as a writer, a quality that should be valued in autoethnographic writing.

Though much of the content under discussion is timeless, just as Tomes wants us to understand classical music as being, the book also comments on a range of issues in and around the performance of classical music today. Using analogies to architecture, art and cooking, Tomes wants to get into music as a writer just in the same way she does as a performer. No stone is left unturned; everything from concert etiquette, the popular/classical divide, TV talent shows, contemporary art and the internet are all presented with illuminating commentary that will be comforting for those already in or aspiring to be in the profession, as well as those who make up a very necessary component of performance: the audience.

Performers coming to the book (whether pianists or not) will find well-balanced and persuasive arguments that we should prepare for performance by confronting music on its own terms. Preparation is done between the performer and the score; we should seek to understand each piece without preconception. Much is said about the value and use of recordings, as well as the dangers of them: a case in point is given with an extended discussion of the Schubert Sonata D960 and how the first movement is often performed slowly under the influence of certain recordings, although there is no marking in the score to corroborate this trend.

Performers will also be rewarded by Tomes's lucid writing about her experiences with Sándor Végh. Tomes describes how 'Végh believed that music could be made to "speak", not

by imitating actual human words, but by looking deeply into the composer's markings (such as staccato, legato, dots under a slur, rests) to understand what light and shade they could convey, as well as what texture they could bring to the surface' (pp.150–151). To me there is a strong sense of authority in Tomes's ideas about performing music, not least because of her stature as a pianist, but because of the sincerity with which she relays her early experiences, whether as a student at the Junior Academy of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music (now known as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) or when she was a recent graduate undertaking self-financed concert engagements. Music students and graduates will take comfort from hearing about the amount of work Tomes has invested at all points in her life, and how as a child the desire to play music caught on strong and hard. They will also be comforted by Tomes not pretending that embarking on a career in classical music today, when the standard is so high, is an easy thing.

To Tomes, the 'great works' of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert et al. are like 'temples'. Only by way of summary at the end of the book does Tomes tell us that the ancient Greeks used to sleep in temples to help them conjure dreams that might offer a perspective on woken reality. Tomes's thesis is that long-form classical music is an art that speaks to us about change and transformation. As a practice-led researcher myself who often feels that making any claims about what music is or isn't is taboo, I found the underpinning theme of the book to be about having confidence in our own feelings about music, and seeking to uncover our feelings without distorting what is already there. Tomes believes that the classical music which we enjoy the most has a narrative because we can hear musical material to which things happen, we can sense narrative because we know what change feels like. She tells us that 'we instinctively understand what is turmoil and what is calm, or what is certainty and what is doubt' (p.50). There is

a striking resemblance here to Charles Rosen's *Music and sentiment* where he asserts 'grasping [the] emotional or dramatic meaning [of music] is either immediate or requires only becoming familiar with it' (p.ix).

Tomes's dedication to her art is a message to us all. I personally was reminded that before anything else, our duty as a performer is to go about our music making with uncompromising care and honesty.

Reference

Rosen, C., 2010. *Music and sentiment*. London: Yale University Press.

About the review author

BEDE WILLIAMS studied as a trumpeter and conductor at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and at international masterclasses. In addition to his concert schedule, Bede is New Music Coordinator, Research Coordinator and Teaching Fellow at the University of St Andrews. He is Music Director of the St Andrews New Music Ensemble, Conductor of the St Andrews Chamber Orchestra and Leader of the Alba Brass Quintet. His practice-led research focuses on interpretation: this research supports his performance as a trumpeter and conductor of existing and new repertoire.