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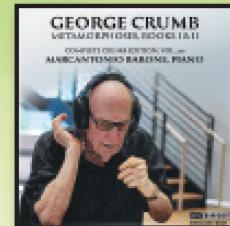
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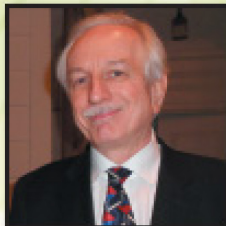
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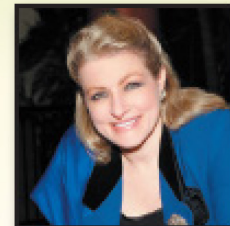
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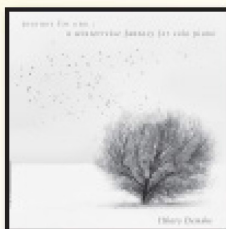
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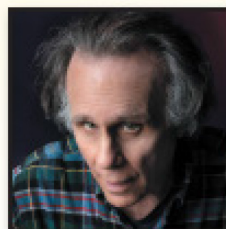
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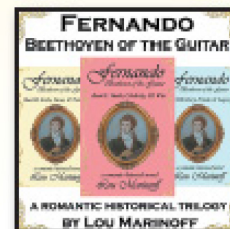
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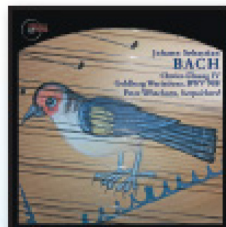
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Lou Marinoff



Olivia Vermeulen



Peter Watchorn



William Goldstein



Xiaoyang Ye

FERNANDO: Beethoven of the Guitar (Volumes 1–3). By Lou Marinoff

Cardiff, CA: Waterside Productions, 2021. 3 vols. 879 pp. \$ 50.85

If ever there was a labor of love, this is it. Lou Marinoff's guitar playing is certainly a known and respected entity, but here he creates a "Romantic Historical Novel" that sets forth the life and times of composer Fernando Sor (1778–1839) in meticulous detail. The advantages of this approach are multiple. It is instantly involving; it allows in creativity on the part of the author (which means Marinoff can fill in gaps in Sor's life through that imagination); and it allows for supplementary discourses on history and philosophy to provide a fuller picture of Sor's environment—colorful local color, if you will. And, as Marinoff puts it so succinctly, "History strives for perfect accuracy but never tells a complete story; historical fiction strives to tell a complete story but never claims perfect accuracy."

The synchronicities Marinoff outlines in the interview above do seem to imply a sense of inevitability to the present enterprise (the parallel journeyings of Sor and Marinoff from Madrid to Cordoba, for example). And indeed what results is as satisfying a literary experience as one could ask for; the three volumes are first and foremost a joy to read. The gestation period for the project was around a decade, the lion's share of which was research; Marinoff only started writing Book 1 in early 2018. And although the concept was initially for just one book, its move to three (each subdivided into three parts) gives necessary (and somewhat comforting) structure, moving from early to middle then late Sor.

Fleshing out what we know into constructed dialogues is incredibly stimulating on an intellectual level: a case in point is the connection between Sor and Goya. We know they almost certainly knew each other, something that Marinoff extends to a sort of Blut-Bruderschaft.

The sense of place in history (the backdrop is the Napoleonic era) and the significant and seminal figures around Sor are a vital part of the engagement these books achieve. Marinoff's understanding, and explanation, of history in terms of Wellington and Napoleon, is a central part of the books' exegesis. A vital and unsurprising aspect of that "placement" is Marinoff's sometimes extended consideration of the philosophical voices of the time: Goethe, The New Humanism, Voltaire, Rousseau. It is all part of the 360-degree consideration, of course, but with Marinoff it comes with an especial level of authority: he is after all Professor of Philosophy and Asian Studies at The City College of New York and founding President of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. Not to mention as well that Marinoff is the author of multiple best-selling titles on philosophy. This intention of creating the ambience around Sor seems to indicate a baseline honesty from Marinoff; as discussed in the interview above, the author busts some myths about Sor in the process of his novel (for example, that Sor introduced the guitar to English musical life, rather than consolidated the guitar's position in it).

There is humor to the books, too (I reference the description of the English through Sor's eyes above). Even the chapter titles dare us not to read their contents, "Montserrat, The Magic Mountain" being a case in point. Each volume contains several appendices: a bibliography, a filmography, and an extended webography. Further supplementing the books is Marinoff's YouTube channel, but it cannot be stated strongly enough that this set of books is beautifully

self-sufficient in and of itself. Marinoff's enthusiasm for his subject "Fernando" (and we do feel by the end that we should be calling him by his first name, so intimately do we know him) is infectious. As Marinoff says in the first volume, "Out of gratitude to the Spanish people for their enthusiastic reception of my popular philosophy books, I decided to unearth this buried treasure of their nation, polish it, set it like a precious gem, and offer it to Spanish readers—and beyond them, to aficionados of the Spanish guitar and music-lovers everywhere—as a token of my esteem." Fernando would have been proud. The invitation is clear: Now that we know him as a person, we should know his music—perhaps starting with Marinoff's own recordings, and then moving further afield.

From the gypsy prophecy that loomed over Fernando's life to his sensitive descriptions of Sor's reactions to the loss of loved ones, Marinoff is masterly. He is simultaneously an historian (and is certainly expert when it comes to overviews of conflicts), a Sor enthusiast (possessed of limitless enthusiasm), and a guitar cognoscente; from this perspective, he is indeed the ideal person for the task of revivifying Fernando Sor. And how he succeeds! You will be entertained, engrossed, and, most of all, you will learn so much. Reading this trilogy has been a terrifically, even magically, enriching experience. Colin Clarke

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