



**DVD Margaret Leng Tan: She Herself Alone - The Art of the Toy Piano 2: Cage Suite**

for Toy Piano; **Dream. Griswold** *Old Macdonald's Yellow Submarine*. **Twining** *An American in Buenos Aires (A Blues Tango)*. **Crumb** *Put My Little Shoes Away*. **Kizke** *The Animist Child*. **Bolleter** *Hymn to Ruin*. **Liben** *She Herself Alone*.

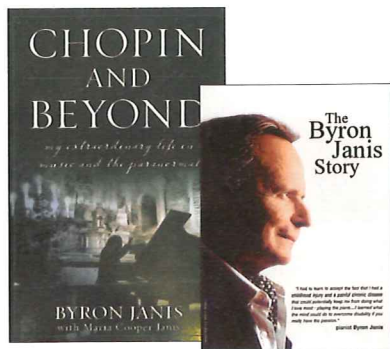
**Margaret Leng Tan** (pf/toy pf/music box/psaltery/perc)

Mode 221 DVD, 60 minutes

As with her hero Cage, a note of the bizarre accompanies Singaporean pianist Margaret Leng Tan's deeply serious work. She is the toy piano's leading exponent, and here performs Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano* from 1948, which uses just nine (white) notes and an improbable range of dynamics from ppp to ff. Eric Griswold's *Old Macdonald's Yellow Submarine* is more engaging. It's for prepared grand piano, toy piano, music box and assorted percussion, and an advantage of DVD is the close look at the preparations, and at the surprisingly varied toy piano collection that Tan uses. Her performances are very visual – in Toby Twining's *An American in Buenos Aires (A Blues Tango)*, she plays with a red rose in her mouth.

For ruined-piano maestro Ross Bolleter's affecting *Hymn to Ruin*, Tan has located ruined toy as well as full-size instruments; the grainy visuals of this track take the appropriately dreamlike ones for Cage's *Dream* a step further. Laura Liben's haunting *She Herself Alone* is for toy piano and psaltery. Tan plays the toy like a conventional piano, though expressive gestures achieve little given its simple mechanics. Her project has that slightly demented though still appealing quality, evident from her Cage concert.

ANDY HAMILTON



**BOOK Chopin and Beyond: My Extraordinary Life in Music and the Paranormal**  
**Byron Janis**, with **Maria Cooper Janis**

Wiley, ISBN 978-0-470-60444-1, 270pp, £17.99

**DVD The Byron Janis Story**

Prod., dir. & photographed by Peter Rosen  
Pro Musicis Foundation/WQED Multimedia  
DVD, 55 minutes

By some cruel twist of fate, of three great American pianists born in 1928, Leon Fleischer and Gary Graffman lost the use of their right hands, while Byron Janis became crippled with psoriatic arthritis in his hands and wrists, blighting his career from the mid-1970s. His is an unusual story of great talent and perseverance.

Born Byron Yanks, he very nearly didn't have a career at all: when he was eleven he accidentally pushed his left hand through a glass door, severing the tendons in the little finger and leaving it permanently numb. His teachers included Vladimir Horowitz, under whose spell he fell at the age of 17. Janis brought the same high-octane thrill to many works that his mentor, paradoxically, never recorded: Rachmaninoff's Concertos Nos 1 and 2, Prokofiev's Third Concerto, Liszt's concertos and Strauss's *Burleske*, to name some of his finest discs; strangely, Janis makes no mention of Fritz Reiner with whom he made some of them.

The book is charmingly written with many revealing anecdotes and much speculation on paranormal phenomena, a subject of fascination for Janis. Peter Rosen's compelling DVD tells the salient points efficiently with excellent archive footage. Janis, who at the height of his career in the 1960s was one of the most exciting pianists on the planet, is now an Ambassador for the Arthritis Foundation. As pianist and patient, he commands our admiration. JEREMY NICHOLAS



**BOOK Piano-Yoga - Transform Your Hands**  
**GÉNIA**

Piano-Yoga Ltd, ISBN 978-0-9561184-5-5, 113pp, £24.95 pb ([www.piano-yoga.com](http://www.piano-yoga.com))

This ten-week course of exercises from GÉNIA, the great-granddaughter of Regina Horowitz, is designed to make hands and fingers more flexible, dexterous and malleable, chiefly through concepts inspired by conventional yoga. As she explains in the preface to her lucid and attractively presented course, 'I wanted to devise a system that would allow me to stretch my fingers, widen my hand span, and increase the capacity of my hands. Despite extensive research, I could not find one coherent exercise programme... designed to enable me to do this.'

Before readers remember with horror Schumann's injuries (caused by a so-called 'finger stretcher' mechanism that left him permanently damaged), it is worth pointing out that GÉNIA's methodology insists on warm-ups, and includes alternatives for those with large or small hands. The flat-finger exercises (echoes of GÉNIA's legendary Great Uncle) are particularly crucial here, as is the need to take things extremely slowly.

Following the first stage of 'core' exercises (seven in total) there is a section devoted to breathing and stretching based on 'Yin' Yoga. Finally, stage three deals with more advanced issues in six exercises, that are complex and include increasingly wider intervals within the chords.

A fascinating issue. I would urge caution, however, and stress the need never to use a book as a substitute for a teacher. Perhaps this book would be best used in conjunction with a forward-thinking mentor. Certainly GÉNIA's website and forthcoming videos will offer more guidance than can ever be obtained from a book, even one as clear and precise as this one. MURRAY MCLACHLAN