



Timpani: A History in Pictures and Document

Edmund A. Bowles

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This volume represents a unique iconographical and documentary history of the timpani. Combining a wealth of pictorial material with extensive written sources, it offers a rich and comprehensive survey of the instrument's history from the middle ages to the present. In so doing, it fills a gap of long standing in the published literature of kettledrums by providing for the first time a combination of visual and descriptive evidence. Presented here is a wide-ranging pictorial lode drawn from a variety of sources - for example, astronomical clocks with their instrumental automata; paintings; baroque organ cases topped by angel-musicians; engravings from books describing court festivals; prints and drawings; decorative etched glassware and inlaid tables; wood carvings; photographs. Written references reflect a wide and fascinating panoply of descriptions concerning the construction, musical contexts, and performance techniques of the timpani - for example, eyewitness accounts chronicling the role of instruments at various historical events; archival documents dealing with payments to musicians or the make-up of instrumental ensembles; regulations concerning court musicians; and even patent specifications. In addition, a prefatory chapter presents a detailed, succinct overview of the history, orchestral role, and performance practices of the timpani, including numerous illustrative musical examples. A chart depicting representative milestones in the music for kettledrums highlights such works as the first published opera featuring timpani, the first major composition for two pairs of drums, music with unusual tunings - very high or very low notes demanding unusually small or large instruments, unique playing techniques such as using the fingers, coins, a wire brush, etc., and the key examples of music requiring multiple timpani and two or more players in various configurations. In short The Timpani: A History in Pictures and Documents is a fascinating and most unusual book, of interest not only to performing musicians, teachers, and scholars alike, but one which provides the general reader or music lover with a glimpse into the world of a hitherto neglected musical instrument.

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