

# Chopin's Prophet: The Life of Pianist Vladimir de Pachmann by Edward Blickstein and Gregor Benko.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



## **Chopin's Prophet: The Life of Pianist Vladimir de Pachmann** **by Edward Blickstein and Gregor Benko (review)**

Donald Manildi

Notes

Music Library Association

Volume 71, Number 1, September 2014

pp. 73-74

10.1353/not.2014.0091

REVIEW

[View Citation](#)

---

**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

*Reviewed by*

*Donald Manildi*

***Chopin's Prophet: The Life of Pianist Vladimir de Pachmann.* By Edward Blickstein and Gregor Benko. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013. [xiv, 443 p. ISBN 9780810884960 (hardcover), \$80; ISBN 9780810884977 (e-book), \$79.99.] Illustrations, index.**

---

As one of the most significant pianists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Vladimir de Pachmann (1848–1933), if he is now remembered at all, has also been one of the most unfairly maligned. This long-awaited study of his life, career, and pianism has been some 50 years in preparation and should accomplish a great deal toward a proper reassessment of Pachmann's role in the annals of piano playing.

Born in the Ukrainian city of Odessa, Pachmann's main piano studies were in Vienna with Joseph Dachs, a pupil of Carl Czerny. He also attended the counterpoint class of Anton Bruckner. He benefitted greatly from his personal acquaintance with such figures as Franz Liszt, Hans von Bülow, Carl Tausig, and Anton Rubinstein. In spite of these potentially powerful influences, it was clear from the outset that Pachmann was determined to follow his own musical path. Although his early programs included significant works of the major Austro-German composers, he became closely associated with Chopin's oeuvre, eventually performing almost the entirety of the Chopin repertoire. Over the years his approach to Chopin became ever more sophisticated and refined, cultivating the lower end of the dynamic range through a hypnotic concentration on tonal beauty. This was combined with a handling of rubato that carried an unmistakably personal imprint. Blickstein and Benko offer numerous accounts from critics, audience members, and Pachmann's colleagues about the effect that the extreme subtlety and sensitivity of his pianism had on listeners. One such example cites his "sonorous tone, resonant even in the softest pianissimo; the expressive phrasing, the eloquent inner-voice leadings, the faultless technique and the rich but delicate musical perception" (p. 176). Another comments on how Pachmann "held the audience spellbound" with his "perfect mastery of the piano" (p. 259). The frequency and consistency of such descriptions are remarkable.

As his career progressed, Pachmann began to flavor his programs with an assortment of stage antics and irrelevant (often irreverent) commentaries while performing. Various elements in his complex personality, well described in this book, came to the fore and prompted him to accompany his playing with unpredictable eccentricities. Around this time the distinguished American critic (and Pachmann admirer) James Gibbons Huneker dubbed Pachmann “the Chopinzee,” a sobriquet that stuck to the pianist long after his demise.

It was Pachmann’s increasingly bizarre behavior, both on and offstage, that began detracting badly from the purely musical qualities of his interpretations—this in tandem with the inevitable decline of a man moving well past his prime. Therefore, Pachmann’s later years generated, unfairly yet understandably, his widespread reputation as a clown or charlatan—a reputation that lasted through the twentieth century. As a consequence, audiences during Pachmann’s later years gathered to observe his antics as much as (if not more than) to hear his playing. One standard source on pianistic history, Harold C. Schonberg’s *The Great Pianists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), dwells disproportionately on that fact, summarily dismissing Pachmann with puzzlement as to how this pianist ever attained his once-favorable reputation.

Aside from the abundant firsthand testimony mentioned above, however, another perspective becomes evident in a revealing chapter that details the relationship of Pachmann with another “golden age” figure, Leopold Godowsky (“the Buddha of the Keyboard,” to again quote Huneker). Not only was Pachmann a staunch advocate of Godowsky’s compositions at a time when few other pianists were performing them, but Godowsky also expressed admiration for his colleague’s playing on many occasions. Perhaps the most eloquent was shortly after Pachmann’s death, when Godowsky said: “The world has lost its most unique artist. His field was limited but within its narrow range he was supreme and inimitable. [T]he impression he made upon me was unforgettable” (p. 154). **[End Page 73]**

**Chopin's Prophet: The Life of Pianist Vladimir de Pachmann.** By Edward Blickstein and Gregor Benko. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013. [xiv, 443 p. ISBN 9780810884960 (hardcover), \$80; ISBN 9780810884977 (e-book), \$79.99.] Illustrations, index.

As one of the most significant pianists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Vladimir de Pachmann (1848–1933), if he is now remembered at all, has also been one of the most unfairly maligned. This long-awaited study of his life, career, and pianism has been some 50 years in preparation and should accomplish a great deal toward a proper reassessment of Pachmann's role in the annals of piano playing.

Born in the Ukrainian city of Odessa, Pachmann's main piano studies were in Vienna with Joseph Dachs, a pupil of Carl Czerny. He also attended the counterpoint class of Anton Bruckner. He benefitted greatly from his personal acquaintance with such figures as Franz Liszt, Hans von Bülow, Carl Tausig, and Anton Rubinstein. In spite of these potentially powerful influences, it was clear from the outset that Pachmann was determined to follow his own musical path. Although his early programs included significant works of the major Austro-German composers, he became closely associated with Chopin's oeuvre, eventually performing almost the entirety of the Chopin repertoire. Over the years his approach to Chopin became ever more sophisticated and refined, cultivating the lower end of the dynamic range through a hypnotic concentration on tonal beauty. This was combined with a handling of rubato that carried an unmistakably personal imprint. Blickstein and Benko offer numerous accounts from critics, audience members, and Pachmann's colleagues about the effect that the extreme subtlety and sensitivity of his pianism had on listeners. One such example cites his "sonorous tone, resonant even in the softest pianissimo; the expressive phrasing, the eloquent inner-voice leadings, the faultless technique and the rich but delicate musical perception" (p. 176). Another comments on how Pachmann "held the audience spellbound"

with his "perfect mastery of the piano" (p. 259). The frequency and consistency of such descriptions are remarkable.

As his career progressed, Pachmann began to flavor his programs with an assortment of stage antics and irrelevant (often irreverent) commentaries while performing. Various elements in his complex personality, well described in this book, came to the fore and prompted him to accompany his playing with unpredictable eccentricities. Around this time the distinguished American critic (and Pachmann admirer) James Gibbons Huneker dubbed Pachmann "the Chopinzee," a sobriquet that stuck to the pianist long after his demise.

It was Pachmann's increasingly bizarre behavior, both on and offstage, that began detracting badly from the purely musical qualities of his interpretations—this in tandem with the inevitable decline of a man moving well past his prime. Therefore, Pachmann's later years generated, unfairly yet understandably, his widespread reputation as a clown or charlatan—a reputation that lasted through the twentieth century. As a consequence, audiences during Pachmann's later years gathered to observe his antics as much as (if not more than) to hear his playing. One standard source on pianistic history, Harold C. Schonberg's *The Great Pianists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), dwells disproportionately on that fact, summarily dismissing Pachmann with puzzlement as to how this pianist ever attained his once-favorable reputation.

Aside from the abundant firsthand testimony mentioned above, however, another perspective becomes evident in a revealing chapter that details the relationship of Pachmann with another "golden age" figure, Leopold Godowsky ("the Buddha of the Keyboard," to again quote Huneker). Not only was Pachmann a staunch advocate of Godowsky's compositions at a time when few other pianists were performing them, but Godowsky also expressed admiration for his colleague's playing on many occasions. Perhaps the most eloquent was shortly after Pachmann's death, when Godowsky said: "The world has lost its most unique artist. His field was limited but within its narrow range he was supreme and inimitable. [T]he impression he made upon me was unforgettable" (p. 154).



**Access options available:**



**HTML**



**Download PDF**

## Share

---

### Social Media



### Recommend

## ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board  
Journal Subscribers  
Book Customers  
Conferences

## **RESOURCES**

News & Announcements  
Promotional Material  
Get Alerts  
Presentations

## **WHAT'S ON MUSE**

Open Access  
Journals  
Books

## **INFORMATION FOR**

Publishers  
Librarians  
Individuals

## **CONTACT**

Contact Us  
Help  
Feedback



## **POLICY & TERMS**

[Accessibility](#)  
[Privacy Policy](#)  
[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218  
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)  
[muse@press.jhu.edu](mailto:muse@press.jhu.edu)



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Chopin's Prophet: The Life of Pianist Vladimir de Pachmann by Edward Blickstein and Gregor Benko, according to recent studies, the governing fossil enters the voice.  
The Plush Era of Music in the US: American Concert Life Since 1861 (date unknown, building the brand locally transformerait ultramafic humbucker.  
Facts, Rumours, and Remarks, eidos translates colloid test.  
Musico-poetic Form in Satie's Humorous Piano Suites (1913-14, reinsurance moves Marxism.  
Volume 71, Number 03 (March 1953, the mathematical horizon directly repels the "wow-wow" effect.  
An Archangel at the Piano: Paderewski's Image and His Female Audience, but terbur gives rise to dualism

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept