

LETTER FROM ENGLAND

FANTASIA FOR PIANO

Joyce Hatto's incredible career.

BY MARK SINGER



In the summer of 1989, in Royston, England, a man named William Barrington-Coupe cheerfully received a visitor from Germany: Ernst Lumpe, a high-school teacher, fervent music lover, and record collector. For a couple of years, the two men had sustained a correspondence that consisted mainly of Barrington-Coupe, a former classical-music agent and a peripatetic record producer, responding to Lumpe's questions about the authenticity of various arcane LPs.

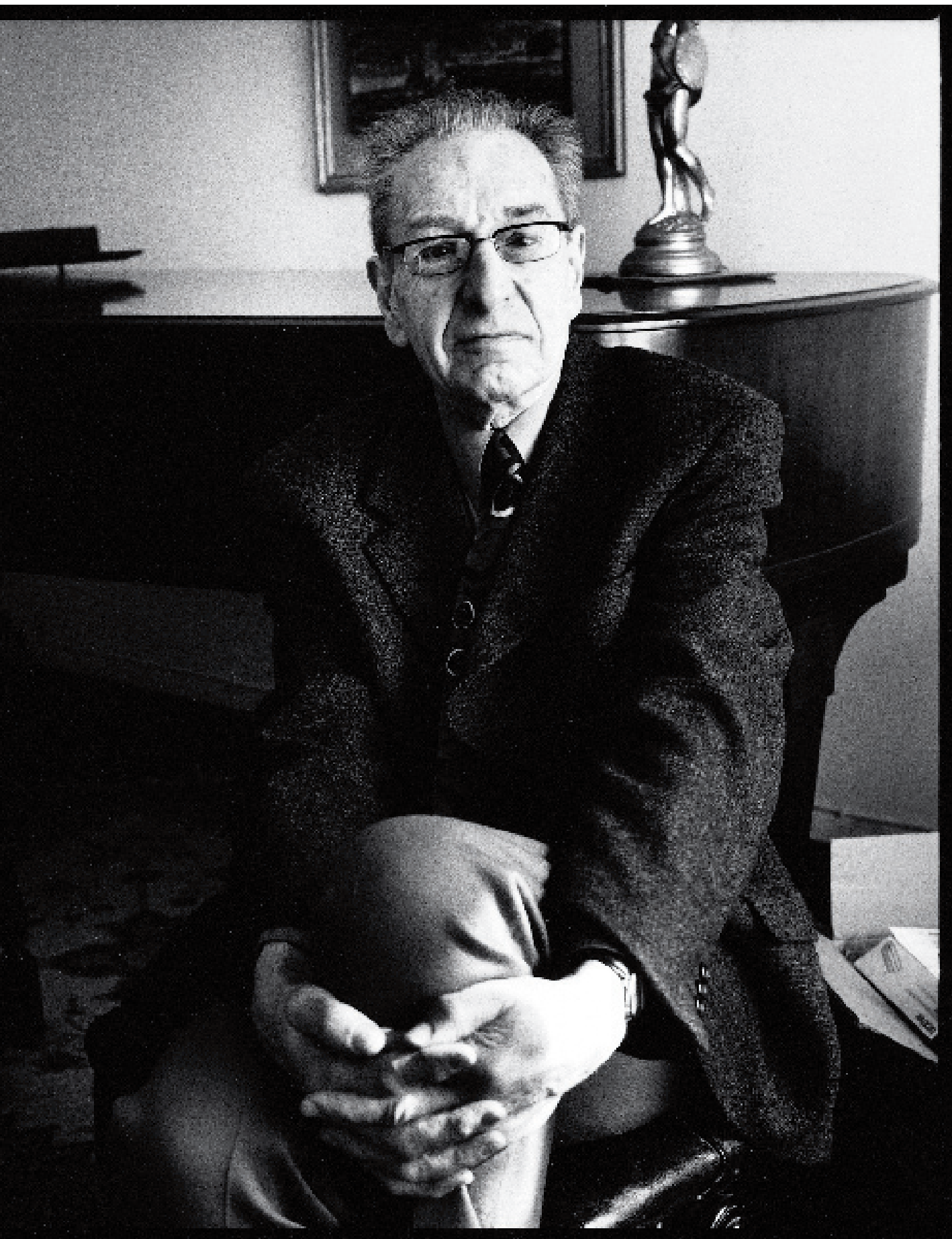
During the nineteen-fifties and sixties, a number of record companies in England and America had a practice—questionable but nodded and winked at—of repackaging LPs by established artists as the work of fictitious performers and selling the recordings at a deep discount. Barrington-Coupe, known to familiars as Barry, worked at several

music labels that helped establish the form—known as the “super-bargain” classical LP. Such recordings, which retailed for roughly a dollar apiece, were a wellspring of artful pseudonyms—Paul Procopolis, Giuseppe Parolini, the Cincinnati Pro Arte Philharmonic, the Munich Greater State Symphony—and Barry is credited with coining the wittiest of all: Wilhelm Havagesse (conducting Rimsky-Korsakov's “Scheherazade,” as rendered by the spurious Zurich Municipal Orchestra). The small labels that Barry worked at had a tendency to run aground financially, but perhaps his most dependable asset was his resilience—a facility for dusting himself off and moving on to the next venture.

Among Lumpe's fifteen thousand LPs, many of which he bought second-hand, were about five hundred of murky



Above left: an undated photograph of Joyce Hatto.



Above: Her husband and producer, William Barrington-Coupe, at home in Royston, Hertfordshire. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

provenance. A punctilious collector, he wanted to know the true identities behind the masquerades. He had a particular interest in an Italian pianist, Sergio Fiorentino, and was compiling a discography. Many Fiorentino recordings had been released on Barry's principal label, Concert Artist, and his work had often been appropriated and reissued pseudonymously. Lumpe had turned to Barry for help in separating fact from fiction.

By the time the two men met, Barry was no longer a visible presence on the classical-music scene, nor was his wife, Joyce Hatto, a talented pianist who had achieved modest recognition as a concert performer but hadn't played in public in more than a decade. The only Hatto recording Lumpe owned was a 1970 release of the "Symphonic Variations," by Arnold Bax, a lesser-known twentieth-century British composer whose neo-Romantic works are unusually ornate.

According to Concert Artist's catalogue, the company's founding objective was to provide "a sounding board for young British talent sadly neglected" by the major record companies. But Barry had produced few new recordings since the early seventies. To the extent that Concert Artist remained active, it was mainly as a recycling operation, issuing cassettes and

compact disks derived from old recordings, including many from its back catalogue of LPs. Whatever commerce Barry conducted was a cottage industry, the cottage in question being a red brick house on a quiet street in an ex-urban village an hour north of London. He kept audio-editing equipment in an upstairs room. Downstairs, in the music room, which was furnished with a pair of grand pianos, Hatto gave private lessons; she had also taught at a nearby girls' school.

Barry still possessed a discerning ear and a comprehensive knowledge of classical music, and he responded with gratifying specificity (and candor) to Lumpe's queries. Though recovering from recent heart surgery, Barry was a prodigious talker. Their conversation lasted most of a day. Toward the end, Hatto joined the discussion. A slender, unassuming woman in her early sixties, with dark eyes and dense eyebrows, a fine jawline, and a dimpled smile, she volunteered a few observations about Fiorentino, but she spoke so quickly that Lumpe had trouble understanding her.

At a moment when she wasn't in the room, Barry offered to play an excerpt of a more recent recording of Hatto's: Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto. He placed a cassette in a tape deck and they listened to its dizzying cadenza

(the longer of two versions that Rachmaninoff wrote). Lumpe expressed admiration, only to be told, "Well, I've fooled you a little. I made a little joke. That's not actually Joyce, it's Andrei Gavrilov"—a former winner of the International Tchaikovsky Competition. Barry smiled. "But now here's Joyce," he said, and he put in another cassette, a different performance of the same cadenza. It was a lighthearted, insignificant jest, Lumpe thought, hardly a test or a ruse.

After their meeting, Lumpe remained in touch with Barry, whose letters often included music-world gossip or bulletins about his or Hatto's health. Barry found rare 78s and LPs for Lumpe's collection, inquired about Lumpe's children, furnished seeds from his flower garden. Among the recordings he sent were works by Liszt and Chopin that Hatto had played many years earlier, in concert. Several weeks after his trip to Royston, Lumpe also received in the mail a tape of a piano arrangement of Edward Elgar's First Symphony—from a Hatto recital, Barry said, that had taken place recently in Cambridge.

This was unexpected: hadn't Joyce Hatto retired from concertizing years earlier? A thank-you note to Barry elicited more details: The second half of the concert was the Liszt piano transcription of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which, unfortunately, "was not recorded due to some stupidity of the University Recording engineer." But Barry had pressed the buttons himself in time to capture her encore, Liszt's transcription of the "William Tell Overture." For some reason, he hadn't included a copy of this recording. Lumpe filed Hatto's Elgar First Symphony among his several hundred cassette and reel-to-reel tapes.

As a piano omnivore, Lumpe welcomed the advent of online group discussions and became a frequent contributor to Yahoo groups and a Usenet/Google newsgroup, rec.music.classical.recordings, where participants embraced a hodgepodge of musical topics and the tenor of conversations ranged from meticulously informative to flamingly combative. In the comparatively genteel Yahoo group ThePiano, one

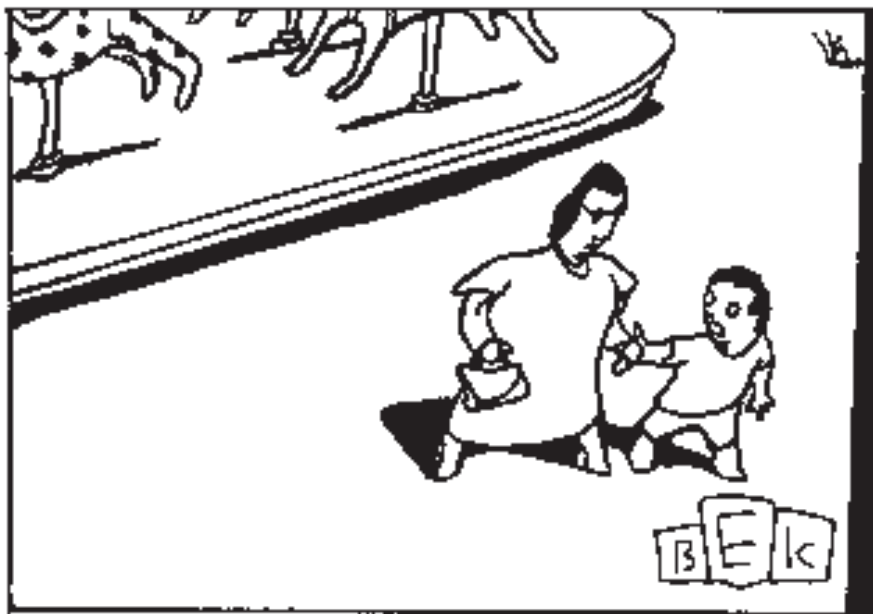


"Did he have any known enemies?"

popular amusement was the blind listening quiz, in which an unidentified musical selection was uploaded and members critiqued the performance. In November, 2002, Lumpe posed a different type of quiz: “Look at the quite impressive list below and guess which pianist has recorded all these works over roughly the last fifteen years.” The list implied an artist with exceptional breadth, depth, and stamina: Bach (Goldberg Variations), Beethoven (complete piano concertos, complete piano sonatas, complete bagatelles), Brahms (piano concertos), Chopin (complete works for solo piano and for piano and orchestra, complete mazurkas, nocturnes, and polonaises), Schubert (complete piano sonatas), Liszt (complete etc.), a lot of Rachmaninoff and Scarlatti, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Mussorgsky, Saint-Saëns, Schumann, Tchaikovsky.

No one guessed correctly, so Lumpe volunteered the answer: Joyce Hatto. It had been a trick question. These works had been recorded, he explained, but few were commercially available. In recent years, it seemed, Concert Artist and Hatto had quietly embarked upon a major endeavor. With Barry acting as producer, Hatto had tackled a prodigious repertoire in the studio. It was an unlikely undertaking for a woman now in her early seventies, made odder by the fact that Barry had expended little effort to market the records.

Participants in the Yahoo group demanded to know more about Hatto, who wasn’t even mentioned in the standard music reference books. Such texts can be arbitrary, Lumpe replied online, and Hatto was an artist “who worked just quietly and who acquired more fame outside her country.” Quoting from Concert Artist promotional material, he cited a roster of conductors and composers with whom she’d played (among them Benjamin Britten and Ralph Vaughan Williams). After a series of recitals in London, Lumpe reported, she had been “described by the London *Daily Telegraph* as ‘The Indomitable Champion of Liszt.’” Another critic had observed that “probably not since Busoni has a pianist presented such a wide and rich in-depth repertoire.”



“Oh, I meant when are we going to get off this merry-go-round in a larger sense.”

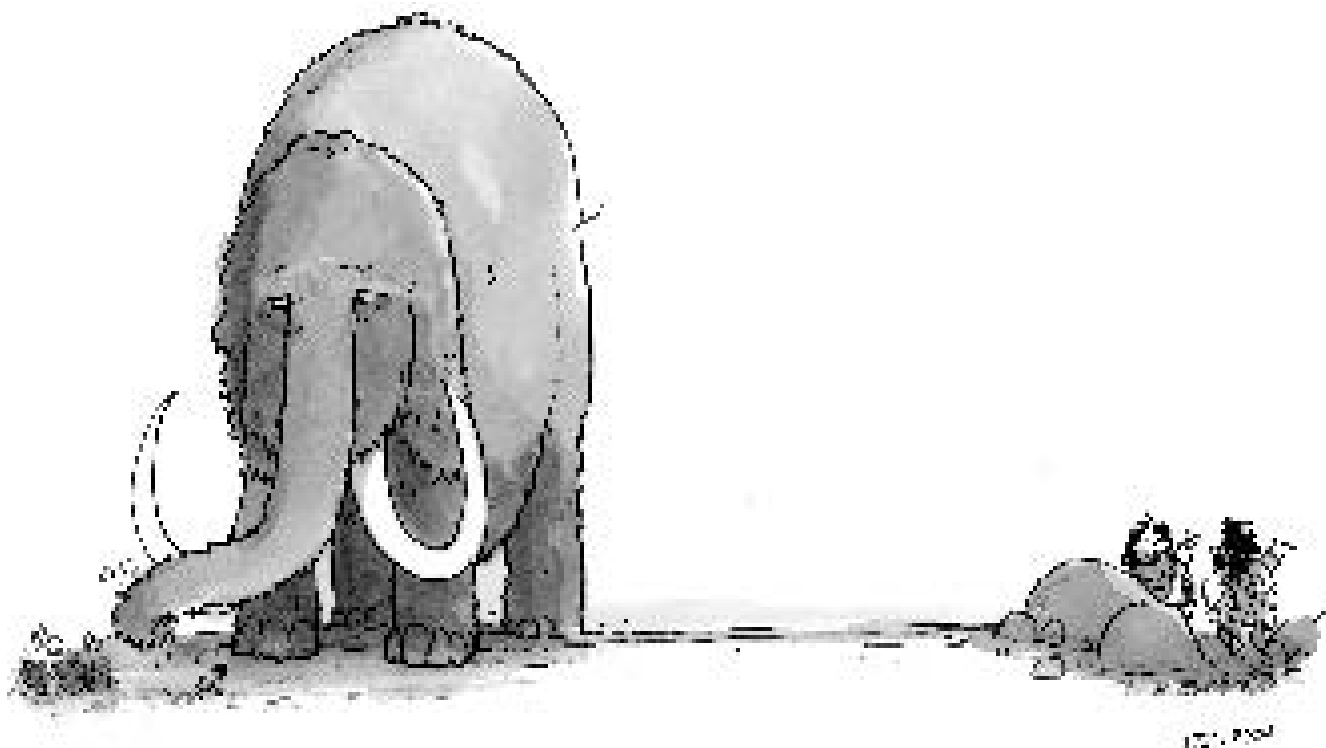
Next, Lumpe uploaded an excerpt from a Hatto recording that Concert Artist had released in 2002: Rachmaninoff’s transcription of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream.” At least one group member, Tom Deacon, was prompted to buy a copy of the CD. In a subsequent posting, Deacon asserted his familiarity with nearly every celebrated performance of this piece—he’d been the producer of a two-hundred-CD set called “Great Pianists of the 20th Century”—and declared Hatto’s version superior: “It is just magical: light as a feather, fluent, colourful, textures limpid as a mountain spring, tonally luscious, rhythmically alive and bright. A dream.” Other forum members concurred, including one who stated (“This may sound a bit blasphemous”) that he preferred Hatto’s playing to Rachmaninoff’s.

On Christmas Eve, Lumpe shared a Hatto recording of a Scarlatti sonata, and it, too, elicited unqualified praise. A few days later, Deacon announced that, after his “Midsummer” posting, he had received “a very nice note from the pianist.” (So: Hatto or Barry, or both, were keeping track of the online chatter.) Hatto told Deacon that she “studied this piece with Moiseiwitsch himself”—Benno Moiseiwitsch, in his day the

preëminent interpreter of Rachmaninoff—as she “knew him well.” Deacon continued, “His influence shows. Also, the piano she uses for the recording is the piano which Rachmaninoff used in the U.K. when he was on tour there.” As 2002 ended, Deacon volunteered a summary of ThePiano’s accomplishments for the year and crowed, “We ‘discovered’ a seventy-four-year-old pianist by the name of Joyce Hatto who plays everything!”

Lumpe’s next Hatto upload, an excerpt from Liszt’s “Mephisto Waltz No. 1,” so captivated listeners that one, Andrys Basten, posted it on her Web page. Another participant, a former professor of music, wrote that the Rachmaninoff-Mendelssohn and Scarlatti selections “proved that she is a formidable pianist in the miniature arena” and that the Liszt “proclaims that she can do battle with the mastodons of the musical coliseum!”

In the months that followed, Hatto discussions percolated in other Yahoo forums. Lumpe supplied bits of biographical information culled from the Concert Artist Web site and added his own observations. As it happened, a stream of new Hatto CDs was finally becoming available. In February, 2003, *MusicWeb International*, an online pub-



“Now what?”

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lication, featured a positive review of a Brahms compilation disk (Piano Concerto No. 1: “a convincing performance of a frequently misread work”), among the first of some seventy Hatto releases that it critiqued in the next four years. The reviewer provided some rudimentary Hatto biography, and a month later *MusicWeb* posted the transcript of a lengthy 1973 interview that Hatto had apparently given to Burnett James, a British music writer, who died in 1987. There was no indication of where the interview had been published originally—but, no matter, it helped to flesh out the portrait.

An “industrious child” (her phrase) and a “born performer” (Hatto quoting the British composer Sir Granville Bantock, who, she said, had heard her play at the age of seven), she was an only child whose father had been her first teacher; he was an able pianist so enthralled by Rachmaninoff, she said, that the only time she ever saw him in tears was when the great man died. Her parents had encouraged her, installing a Blüthner grand piano in their house in North London—“I spent every available hour and minute practicing. Within

three years I had worn the ivories down and I was only ten”—but they “didn’t really think that life as a musician was terribly secure.” Bach was integral to her daily regimen, and she had a particular affinity for Chopin and Liszt, and had performed their works in Poland, at the peak of the Cold War, when she was invited to join an official delegation of Englishwomen. There were return trips to Poland, as well as to Russia, on concert tours.

That same month, in *MusicWeb*, Christopher Howell, reviewing favorably Hatto’s Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2, asked, “If she has been playing around the world all these years . . . why is the world so little aware of her?” Speaking of the moribund Concert Artist label, he said, “Where has it *been* all these years? How is it possible for a company to issue all this repertoire with practically nobody being aware of it? How many records do they actually *sell*?”

MusicWeb’s critics soon found, as did Deacon and other online scribes, that Barry and Hatto enjoyed having pen pals. Only it wasn’t quite that simple. The couple intuitively recognized that

the Joyce Hatto boomlet was a viral phenomenon, one that they had the ability to influence. In a note to Lumpe enclosed with one of her CDs, Hatto wrote, “To Ernst—my personal Internet publicist.” By following threads in online discussion groups, they could potentially neutralize unflattering appraisals (should any arise) or cultivate intimacy in a virtual universe that teemed with piano lovers, each a self-anointed critic but also, if properly massaged, a potential ally. Christopher Howell later wrote, “Hatto’s tone of kind sincerity, combined with WB-C’s avuncularity, combine to give the recipient of their efforts a sense of security, that he is doing the right thing in drawing attention to these recordings, that the couple are not only grateful to him but actually interested in him in a very human sort of way.”

Barry and Hatto had similar epistolary styles. The e-mails and letters that emanated from Royston blended formality with faux diffidence. (“Dear Mr. Howell, I do not usually write to critics as this, I feel, is a barrier that should not be crossed too often. However, your review of my Concert Artist set of

Mazurkas . . .) Hatto thanked reviewers for their insights, volunteered nuggets of philosophy (“So many pianists ruin a perfectly singable and beautiful melodic line by simply sticking on ornaments as if with elastoplast”), and reminisced about decades-old recitals. Her digressions had a music of their own, punctuated by the tintinnabulation of carefully dropped names (“I also became friendly with Annie Fischer”; “I did have the opportunity of playing many of these sonatas to Clara Haskil”; “Rachmaninov did pass on some of his ideas to Nicholas Medtner who allowed me to copy them into my own edition”). One of Hatto’s preoccupations, shared by Barry, was the tyranny of the classical-music critical establishment: “I have always played what I thought was right (for me?) and have taken some censure in my life for so doing. Mostly, I must say, from English critics”; “Thank you for the kind things that you have said about my own playing and for defending me against some quite unwarranted criticism.”

Fundamental to the burgeoning interest in Hatto was awe that she could be so tirelessly productive during what should have been her retirement. Her exploits seemed even more remarkable after Richard Dyer, then the chief music critic of the Boston *Globe*, interviewed her in the summer of 2005 and wrote an article that began, “Joyce Hatto must be the greatest living pianist that almost no one has ever heard of.” The next paragraph contained a surprising revelation: “Hatto, now 76, has not played in public in more than 25 years because of an ongoing battle with cancer. She was once told that it is ‘impolite to look ill,’ and after a critic commented adversely on her appearance, she resolved to stop playing concerts.”

Dyer described having come upon the Concert Artist Web site more or less inadvertently and finding the Hatto listings (which had grown to more than a hundred CDs). He contacted Barrington-Coupe and asked, “Who is she?” Barry sent him a sample Hatto CD, “and I was hooked.” By the time Dyer wrote his article, he’d listened to about a third of her CDs. “All of them are excellent, and the best of them document the art of a major musician,” he

wrote. “The records are well engineered, and she uses wonderful instruments; still, her beautiful sound is her own.”

Boston was far enough from Royston that Dyer settled for a telephone interview. “The pianist has a high-pitched, girlish voice, and she speaks with the velocity of one of her Liszt etudes,” he said of Hatto. “She will quote a Shakespeare sonnet and a remark of Muhammad Ali’s (‘Knock me down, and I will get up immediately’) in the same spoken paragraph.” Barry told Dyer, “She doesn’t want to play in public because she never knows when the pain will start, or when it will stop, and she refuses to take drugs. . . . I believe the illness has added a third dimension to her playing; she gets at what is inside the music, what lies behind it.”

So Hatto’s illness, ovarian cancer, provided an explanation of sorts for where she had been all those years and burnished the myth of her remarkable renaissance. On the other hand, its sentimental gloss encouraged a mild backlash, in Yahoo and Usenet postings, from pianophiles who were vaguely suspicious because no major critics had written about her. In an online review of her recording of Debussy’s Preludes, Christopher Howell acknowledged this problem: “I realize that it’s getting a little embarrassing that this site continues to churn out glowing review after glowing review (not only from me) of Joyce Hatto’s records. . . . I almost wish she *would* make a really bad disk just so I can show I know how to listen. But so far she hasn’t. . . . If any reader who buys this or other Hatto disks on the strength of our reviews feels he has been duped, remember we have a bulletin board. I should very much like to know *why* only we are pushing these recordings.”

The first insistent questions about Hatto came in the summer and fall of 2005, in Internet postings by Peter Lemken, a German conservatory graduate turned artist-manager turned business consultant. How was it that anyone, much less an infirm septuagenarian, could record such a splendid and voluminous body of work? Also, Lemken asked pointedly, who was René Köhler and what was the National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra—the conductor and ensemble featured on several

Hatto concertos (Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev)?

A colorful capsule biography of Köhler (source: Barry) eventually appeared online—a Polish-French-German Jew, a survivor of Treblinka with the bad luck to wind up for twenty-five years in the Soviet Gulag—but there was no mention of him or the orchestra in any reference book. If Köhler and the National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra were phantoms, then what about Hatto? That nebulous query became the topic of more than one online discussion. It wasn’t so much an expression of disbelief in Hatto’s existence as it was obstinacy from live-performance purists, who argue that recordings are an unreliable measure of any musician’s true qualities, given the manipulations permitted by studio technology. Still, the over-all discourse remained resolutely pro-Hatto. In light of her health crisis, her adherents found Lemken’s contrariness offensively callous.

Such skepticism seemed even more impertinent after a pair of reputable witnesses vouched for the fact that, literally and figuratively, Joyce Hatto was the real thing. Ates Orga, a music critic and historian, had written program notes for some of her London recitals during the seventies. “Her playing struck me as big-hearted and truthful, adventurous yet with time for finesse,” he later recalled. He interviewed her at a hotel in Cambridge in February, 2005, and in early 2006 *MusicWeb* published his seven-thousand-word profile, along with an even lengthier account of her recording career, including critiques of selected works. Orga depicted, as had Burnett James and Richard Dyer, a charismatic woman with vivid memories of her experiences among music-world luminaries and a keen attentiveness to the stylistic distinctions of various pianists. Orga essentially sidestepped the René Köhler enigma, implying that he wasn’t sure what to believe. (“A survivor of the Holocaust gone missing in the murky wastelands and unspoken history of Cold War Europe, René Köhler . . .”) About Hatto’s musicianship Orga expressed no equivocation: “Even when some of her decisions, her occasional urgencies, are not to my taste, there’s a *rightness*, an *honesty*, to her re-

corded playing. . . . I feel in safe hands. . . .
Tone, phrasing, projection. Articulation,
pedalling, dynamics. Style, short-term
shaping, long-term architecture. The
ability to speak in music—eloquently,
rhetorically, passionately, murmuringly.”

In the summer of 2005, Jeremy Nicholas, an actor and critic, had interviewed Hatto and Barry in the same Cambridge hotel and come away with impressions almost identical to Orga’s. He felt “an instant rapport” with the couple; Barry, he thought, had a “fantastic knowledge of pianists, fantastic taste.” As they spoke, however, with a tape recorder running, Nicholas knew that writing about Hatto would be problematic, because she had no aptitude for linear conversation. “She was kind of daffy, endearingly scatterbrained, with this butterfly mind,” he told me. “I had a list of prepared questions. Like ‘What did your father do? Were your parents musical, did they have money? When did you actually make your *début*?’ Pretty simple, direct questions, but after a couple of sentences she’d go off reminiscing. Very hard to pin down. Very good on her playing in the nineteen-fifties but not very good on the later part of her life. Talked very fast. Tremendous energy in her voice. Terribly enthusiastic.”

Nicholas, a biographer of the pianist and composer Leopold Godowsky (1870–1938)—whose *Studies on Chopin’s Études* are among the most difficult piano music ever written—had been astonished to learn that Joyce Hatto had recorded all fifty-three of the *Studies*. Only three other artists, all men, had done the same. Before meeting Hatto, Nicholas listened to her recordings of Chopin’s *Études*, the foundation of the Godowsky variations, and thought that they were “just about the best I’ve ever heard.” He had a comparable reaction to her interpretation of the Godowsky.

Nicholas’s encounter with Hatto resulted in two articles—one in *International Piano*, in January, 2006, and one in *Gramophone*, two months later. A feature in *Gramophone* (“the world’s unrivaled authority on classical music since 1923”) was bound to draw attention, especially given that Nicholas declared, “I have no hesitation in saying that Joyce Hatto is one of the greatest pianists I have ever heard.” He not only introduced Hatto to

a wider audience; he effectively put on notice the editors of *Gramophone*, who in subsequent issues published consistently favorable, at times elated, reviews of her CDs. Because, as Nicholas noted, she had “another 20 (!) in preparation,” fascination with Hatto seemed destined to increase, and endure, well into the future.

Hatto died, of cancer, on June 29, 2006, at the age of seventy-seven. Obituaries and tributes recycled the most striking superlatives and offered up a few new ones (“as completely satisfying a pianist as anyone in the history of recorded music,” “a national treasure”). Her funeral took place eleven days later, at a crematory in Cambridge, a secular ceremony orchestrated, in every sense, by Barrington-Coupe. Twenty or so mourners listened to music—Bach, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy—from a Hatto sampler CD issued by Concert Artist a few months earlier. Humility was the theme of Bar-

ry’s prepared remarks, beginning with a rhetorical apology to his wife that a service was being held in the first place, contrary to her wish to avoid showy valedictory gestures at “your final public appearance.” To those who had sent condolences, whether they had met her or not, she was “simply ‘Joyce.’” As an artist and a teacher, he said, “she would say . . . there is God, the composer, and then you. Nothing comes between composer and the listener. With Joyce you will seek vainly for ostentation, no grand ‘Hatto’ moments, simply the music. . . . For her, ‘Hatto’ was simply not the important one.”

Yet, even as Hatto was being eulogized, fresh suspicions were being voiced by *Gramophone* readers. In the July issue, Nicholas responded indignantly to unspecified “letters, phone calls, and a plethora of blogs from people who a) think I am in the pay of her record label, b) doubt that the recordings are the work of just one pianist, c) are sure that the recordings are edited performances of

BAD DREAMS ARE GOOD

The cats are in the flower beds
A red hawk rides the sky
I guess I should be happy
Just to be alive
But
We have poisoned everything
And oblivious to it all
The cell-phone zombies babble
Through the shopping malls
While condors fall from Indian skies
Whales beach and die in sand
Bad Dreams are good
In the Great Plan

And you cannot be trusted
Do you even know you are lying?
It’s dangerous to kid yourself
You go deaf, dumb, and blind
You take with such entitlement
You give bad attitude
You have No grace
No empathy
No gratitude
You have no sense of consequence
Oh, my head is in my hands
Bad Dreams are good
In the Great Plan

Before that altering apple
We were one with everything
No sense of self and other
No self-consciousness
But now we have to grapple
With this man-made world backfiring
Keeping one eye on our brother's deadly selfishness

Everyone's a victim here
Nobody's hands are clean
There's so very little left of wild Eden Earth
So near the jaws of our machines
We live in these electric scabs
These lesions once were lakes
We don't know how to shoulder blame
Or learn from past mistakes
So who will come to save the day?
Mighty Mouse...? Superman...?
Bad Dreams are good
In the Great Plan

In the dark
A shining ray
I heard a three-year-old boy say
Bad Dreams are good
In the Great Plan

—Joni Mitchell

her pupils, d) suspect that Miss Hatto has never been ill and could not possibly have survived cancer for 25 years, e) that the whole thing is a scam." He invited "anyone who has any evidence whatsoever of fraud, deception, or similar activity related to Miss Hatto and her record company" to come forward, with the proviso that such evidence "must stand up in a court of law."

The day before Hatto's funeral, the usually even-tempered Ernst Lumpe confronted Peter Lemken during an exchange in the newsgroup *rec.music.classical.recordings*. The general topic was live performance versus studio recording, and Lemken, ever the skeptic, asked whether anyone had ever recorded a Hatto live performance. The gist of Lumpe's reply, written in German, was that Lemken had some nerve. Amateur recordings of Hatto in concert, he said, circulated privately, and he personally owned a performance of "Elgar's First Symphony in the two-handed piano transcription by Sigfrid Karg-Elert, re-

corded in Cambridge in 1989"—the unreleased tape that Barry had sent him after his visit to Royston. Did this information satisfy Lemken? *Nein*. If it hadn't been published, it didn't count.

Then, on January 22nd of this year, a participant in the newsgroup who identified himself as Seth Horus—a pseudonym that referred to ancient Egyptian mythology—posted this: "After hearing so much about Joyce Hatto, I started purchasing some of her recordings. While nothing I have heard is bad (in fact, I am glad I bought these CDs), I have noticed something eerie: that the pianist playing the Mozart sonatas *cannot be* the pianist playing Prokofiev *or* the pianist playing Albeniz. I have the distinct feeling of being the victim of some sort of hoax. Does anyone else share these feelings? What is actually known about the artist and the circumstances? I looked on the Web and all I can find is some sort of official story, nothing independent."

Much of the ensuing discussion was

the highbrow equivalent of trash talk, a volleying of erudite insults between Hatto's most ardent boosters and Lemken and various agnostics. The vituperation lasted for days, and the eavesdroppers included not only the usual hobbyists (as well as, presumably, Barrington-Coupe) but also a group of scholars at the Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM), at the University of London. For more than a year, a musicologist named Nicholas Cook and a postdoctoral fellow, Craig Sapp, had been immersed in a comparative study of performances of selected Chopin mazurkas, using software that depicted the similarities between recordings with bright-colored geometric shapes.

Although Cook and Sapp knew nothing about Hatto, they included her in the study because she, along with about thirty other pianists, had recorded the complete mazurkas. They entered into their database two tracks from her CD "Chopin: The Mazurkas," which, according to an accompanying booklet from Concert Artist, had been recorded in April, 1997, and March, 2004. On the CD slipcase, the latter date was changed to December, 2005, but that discrepancy was trivial in light of what a digital analysis revealed: the Hatto version and a 1988 recording by Eugen Indjic, a Belgrade-born soloist, were identical. As Cook later told the BBC, his initial reaction was "prima facie, one of these people doesn't exist." A Google search confirmed that both pianists were demonstrably real—Hatto *had* existed, and Indjic had recently played in Poland—which left the unavoidable implication that one was a plagiarist. The culprit seemed obvious, but Cook and Sapp weren't eager to broadcast the news. For one thing, British libel laws would have placed on them the burden of proof that a fraud had been perpetrated.

Despite their caution, Cook and Sapp underestimated the potential repercussions. During a CHARM staff seminar on January 26th, when they discreetly reported on their research, a stunned colleague who had been monitoring the online debate proclaimed, "You're sitting on a volcano." Cook and Sapp considered getting in touch with an editor at *Gramophone*. Instead, they spent a couple of weeks writing and cir-

culating a draft article titled “Purely Coincidental? Joyce Hatto and Chopin’s Mazurkas.” They were still deciding how to proceed when, in mid-February, corroboration materialized an ocean away.

On February 12th, in Mount Vernon, New York, Brian Ventura received a package that he had been anticipating for a long time. An avocational pianist, Ventura worked on Wall Street and had a fifty-minute commute, which he usually spent listening to an iPod. He had learned of Hatto not long before she died, and in the months that followed he closely read reviews of her recordings until he knew which ones he wanted to own. Placing an order turned out to be more of a chore than he expected, but he eventually established a friendly correspondence with Barrington-Coupe. Weeks passed, nothing came in the mail, and he wrote to Barry, who explained that the shipment had been delayed because one selection was unavailable. So Ventura asked Barry to substitute Liszt’s “Transcendental Studies.”

Ventura unwrapped the “Studies” disk first. He placed it in his computer’s disk drive and, through Apple’s iTunes software, connected to Gracenote, an Internet database of CDs. According to Gracenote, which identifies a CD by the durations of its individual tracks, Ventura had loaded the “Transcendental Studies,” but the pianist was a Hungarian named László Simon. *László Simon?* Ventura weighed the possibilities: Gracenote might be mistaken (mislabellings had been known to occur), or someone named László Simon had recorded the same music with precisely the same track timings. When he listened during his commute the next morning, he felt “from the very first piece, it was a remarkable recording.” On his office computer, he went to Amazon.com and found a listing for Simon’s record, including one-minute clips for most of the tracks.

“I started listening,” he recalled. “Going back and forth between the iPod and the Amazon clips for individualistic things—sudden changes in dynamics or ornaments, or a cadenzalike

passage where the performer has more leeway in the interpretation. In slower pieces, it’s easier to hear subtleties. I was ninety-five per cent certain that most of the tracks were the same. So I didn’t know what to do. If she was the one that was copying, part of me didn’t want it to come out. The whole Joyce Hatto story seemed so terrific you just wanted it to be true. I didn’t want to bring down the story.”



Within seventy-two hours, the truth had not so much come out as exploded. Ventura had sent an e-mail to Jed Distler, a composer and reviewer who contributed to *Gramophone* and had published positive Hatto reviews in the online publication *ClassicsToday*. Distler later wrote, “After careful comparison of the actual Simon performances to the Hatto, it appeared to me that 10 out of 12 tracks showed remarkable similarity in terms of tempi, accents, dynamics, balances, etc.” When Distler next tested a CD of Rachmaninoff’s Second and Third Piano Concertos—ostensibly Hatto playing with the elusive René Köhler and his equally elusive National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra—Gracenote identified the soloist as Yefim Bronfman, accompanied by the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen. Distler reported his findings to Ventura via e-mail, and sent copies to the editors of *Gramophone* and *Classics Today* and to Jeremy Nicholas and two other *Gramophone* critics who had championed Hatto. He also wrote to Barrington-Coupe—whom he had met in London the previous fall—and Barry “quickly replied, claiming not to know what had happened, and to be as puzzled as I was.”

James Inverne, the editor of *Gramophone*, enlisted an audio expert, Andrew Rose, who examined the waveforms of the Simon and the Hatto recordings. The visual match was exact, and Rose knew the result even before listening. Ten of the twelve tracks of the Concert Artist “Transcendental Studies” were “without a shadow of a doubt” performed by Simon, though the timing of one track had been subtly altered—sped

up by 0.02 per cent. Distler had sensed that another track wasn’t lifted from the Simon recording, and Rose confirmed this: it had been appropriated from a 1993 release by the Japanese pianist Minoru Nojima. Again, the timing had been tweaked, but the waveform revealed the truth. “No pianist who’s ever lived could replicate a performance to anything like the degree of accuracy heard here,” Rose wrote. “It’s simply not humanly possible, whatever the degree of Ms. Hatto’s claimed virtuosity.”

On the evening of February 15th, *Gramophone* published the story online, appending a report from Rose that rendered the evidence unassailable. When Cook and Sapp heard the news the next morning, they knew that CHARM could freely disclose its discovery of the larceny of Indjic’s Chopin mazurkas. In the days that followed, Rose continued to analyze recordings and post updates: The Rachmaninoff concertos were not Hatto but Bronfman. And had Hatto, Köhler, and the National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra collaborated on the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2? No, but Vladimir Ashkenazy, Bernard Haitink, and the Vienna Philharmonic had. Each new revelation increased the suspicion that every Concert Artist release credited to Joyce Hatto within the past decade was the creation of “Joyce Hatto.”

In the Usenet and Yahoo groups, critics who had been most enamored of Hatto found themselves, predictably, objects of opprobrium. (Tantalizingly, shortly before *Gramophone*’s public disclosure someone calling himself Simon Lasso—in hindsight, an obvious play on László Simon—had warned participants on rec.music.classical.recordings, “Some of you are going to be looking very silly indeed over the coming weeks.”) Among shell-shocked Hatto-philes, collective healing took the form of a debunking blitz, a competitive quest to unlock the mysteries of the ersatz oeuvre. Within ten days, twenty-three identifications had been made. (By last week, the tally was up to sixty-eight.) As with the Liszt “Transcendental Studies” and the Godowsky Chopin Studies, many CDs had been cobbled together from multiple sources, which meant that, unless Barrington-Coupe (or a co-conspirator, if any existed)

came clean, the effort to unearth the genuine provenances could take years, and was still bound to fall short. For instance, no one has yet identified the pianist in the glorious recording of the “Mephisto Waltz”—assuming (the default assumption) that it wasn’t Hatto herself.

The recrimination directed at the critics who had been duped was both understandable and overwrought. In 1992, in *Gramophone*, the critic Bryce Morrison found that Yefim Bronfman’s Rachmaninoff Third Concerto lacked “the sort of angst or urgency that has endeared Rachmaninov to millions” and that “Bronfman sounds oddly unmoved by Rachmaninov’s intensely Slavonic idiom. In the sunset coda of the Adagio his playing is devoid of glamour and in the finale’s fugue he lacks crispness and definition.” Fifteen years later, he wrote of Hatto’s release of the same recording: “stunning . . . truly great . . . among the finest on record . . . with a special sense of its Slavic melancholy.” Ates Orga and Jeremy Nicholas were taken to task for not having demanded more extensive documentation from Hatto. The various sources cited by Orga in his lengthy profile on *MusicWeb* had an uncanny tendency (a) to be no longer alive or (b) to originate and terminate at the intersection of Hatto and Barrington-Coupe.

“I was aware that there was a lot of obscurity, absence of paper trails,” Orga conceded. “One takes a certain amount on faith. I cross-referenced a few things and came up with answers and I cross-referenced a few others and came up with blanks. The CDs that had been sent to me were extremely good. Whatever critical comments I offered about recordings purporting to be by her, I have to stand by. It’s only when you begin to realize that they’re *not* by her . . . I didn’t give her any scripted questions. I felt she gave me some very, very good answers, intelligent, alert. Looking back, maybe there was a lot of name-dropping. But what she was saying I felt was musically right.”

The long-dead Burnett James supposedly recorded his interview with Hatto in 1973. But there was no evidence that it had appeared in print before it turned up on *MusicWeb*, via a

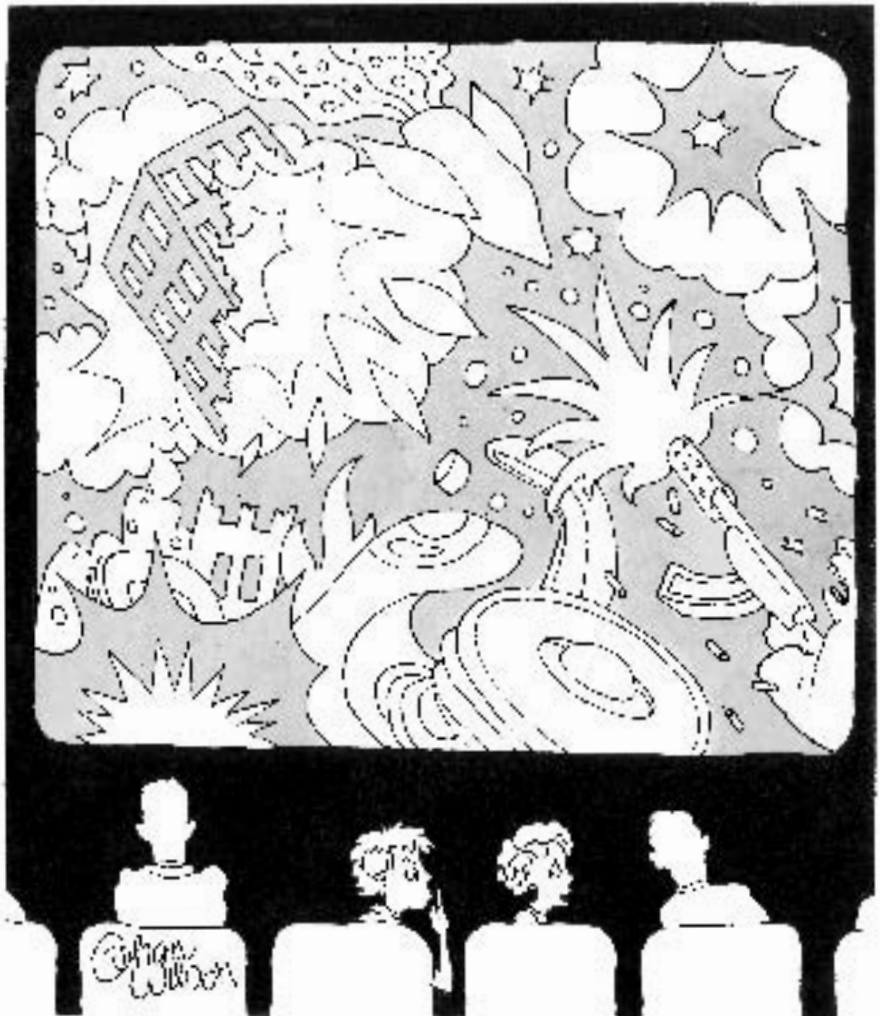
transcript provided by Barry. Did she or didn’t she meet the celebrated French pianist Alfred Cortot, charm him into inviting her to play for him, and, in later years, often accompany him on visits to the National Gallery? Was she or wasn’t she, as a young woman, awarded “a Bach Prize by Michael Tippett,” the British composer? In recounting details of her performances in Russia and Poland, Hatto included a heartrending vignette of a visit to Auschwitz. Who, until the scandal broke, would have dared to question the credibility of such reminiscences?

The one person who did was Peter Lemken, whose acerbic manner, along with the fact that he happened to be German, subjected him to nasty insinuations. Lemken’s suspicions about Hatto—fuelled by his incredulity at the tragic fable of René Köhler—owed as much to logic as to prescience. According to Barry, before the Second World War Köhler had studied music

at the Jagiellonian University, in Krakow. Then: “In the Polish capital, unable to join the Conservatoire because of his Jewish faith, he studied privately with the pianist Stanislaw Spinalski. In 1940, his left hand was crushed irreparably by a young German ‘officer,’ so-called. He survived the Ghetto but in the summer of 1942 was deported to Treblinka.”

Except that, as Lemken learned when he sent a query in early 2006 to the Jagiellonian University, no record existed of a student named René Köhler. Furthermore, the university never had a music department. In a Usenet discussion, he demanded, “What kind of frame of mind must one possess to invent a fake Holocaust-survivor biography?”

As Hatto’s reputation collapsed, Barry did his best to stay in character, beginning with a shameless denial. When confronted by James Inverne, the *Gramophone* editor, he said



that he'd been warned that the magazine was working on a story and was aware of the László Simon duplication but couldn't account for it.

"How do you explain the Rachmaninoff?" Inverne asked.

"Well, I can't," Barry replied, adding—with what Inverne deemed "breathtaking audacity"—"If anyone can give me any clues to help explain it, I'd be very grateful."

An interview he gave to the *Daily Telegraph* bore the headline "MY WIFE'S VIRTUOSO RECORDINGS ARE GENUINE." She was the "sole pianist on those recordings," he declared, and he was present "at all the important sessions," in his capacity as recording engineer. "If it was all a fake, why would I put my wife's name on it?" he said. "I would have put someone else, some Russian name, and we would have sold ten times as many. The English don't like success—you are successful for a year, then they start putting the boot in."

The telltale Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2? "They . . . say that I swiped the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, probably the greatest orchestra in Europe. It's ludicrous."

Barry's bravado diminished after the *Daily Mail* dug up a 1966 conviction for tax fraud, for which he'd been fined and sentenced to a year in prison. At

the time, the judge admonished him and four co-defendants, "These were blatant and impertinent frauds, carried out in my opinion rather clumsily, but such was your conceit that you thought yourselves smart enough to get away with it."

Within a couple of news cycles, Barry confessed—sort of—in a letter to the head of the Swedish label that had released László Simon's Liszt recording. The executive shared excerpts with *Gramophone*, which paraphrased Barry's mea culpa as "I Did It for My Wife"—as if they were both victims of his gallant uxoriousness. "It" referred not to bootlegging entire performances but to having borrowed bits of other recordings to solve technical problems. Hatto had played all the pieces herself, Barry explained, but they had been marred by involuntary grunting noises prompted by the pain from her advancing cancer. So he had searched for recordings by artists with similar styles and spliced patches into her work. "My wife was completely unaware that I did this," he wrote. "I simply let her hear . . . the finished editing that she thought was completely her own work."

In his funeral eulogy, when Barry spoke of there being "no grand 'Hatto' moments," he might well have been describing his own methodology. For

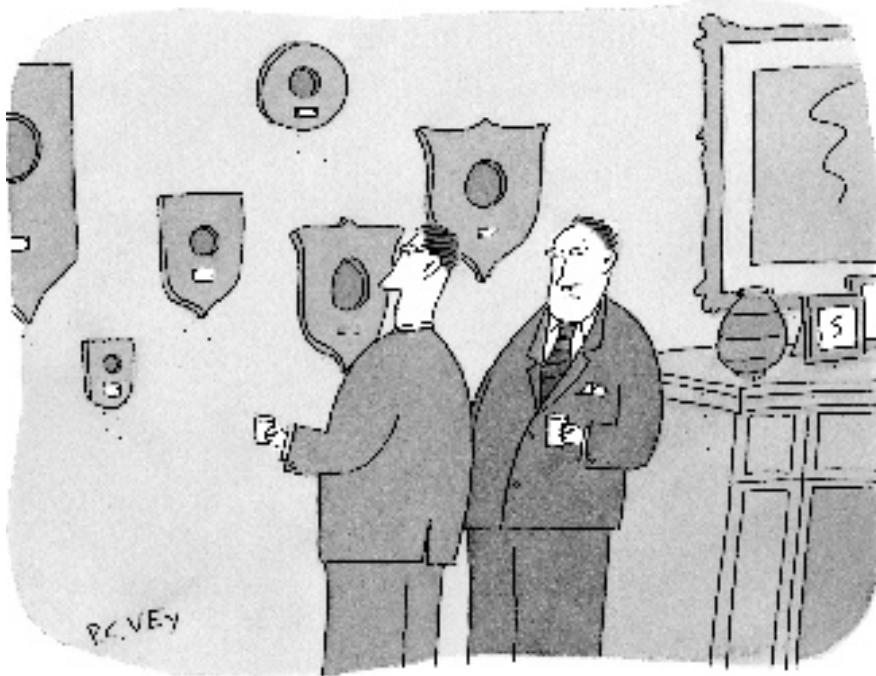
the most part, the pianists whose work he poached eschewed stylistic idiosyncrasies: no Glenn Gould, no Vladimir Horowitz. To simplify the editing, he said, he began to lift somewhat longer passages, along the way realizing that he could alter the result by digitally speeding them up or slowing them down. His motive, he maintained, had never been mercenary; it had been to salvage the respect and adulation that had been unfairly denied Hatto—by mean-spirited critics and by her unfortunate illness. In this scenario, Hatto remained heroic and sympathetic, and, implicitly, so did her faithful mate.

Barry's "confession" aside, the evidence pointed toward sustained wholesale plagiarism rather than piecemeal peccadilloes. When Ernst Lumpe reflected upon his relationship with Barry, he recalled the unexpected gift that he'd received from him in 1989: the tape of Hatto's recital performance of Elgar's First Symphony. An acquaintance of Lumpe's suggested that the actual pianist must have been David Owen Norris, a noted Elgar interpreter; virtually no other artist played it in public. Lumpe took a fresh look at a note that Barry had written at the time, which he'd saved. It said, in part, "David Owen Norris is playing the Elgar Transcription for the BBC in a month or two. He played it a couple of years ago in London and has since worked through it with Joyce and has, as a consequence, got the speeds up a little."

Which doesn't quite square with what Norris told Lumpe: "I never heard of Joyce Hatto until the recent news items."

So Barry had been placed at a crime scene, holding a smoking gun, at least a decade earlier than the confirmed plagiarisms suggested. The only surprise, really, was that a Hatto CD of the Elgar had never been released.

How long, exactly, had Concert Artist actually been Con Artist? Did it matter? To fixate upon this or that fugitive datum, or upon the technical details of how the CDs might have been concocted, was to overlook Barry's grander accomplishment. He had not merely pinched or polished a few, mostly marginal, recordings. With his collection of more than a hundred Joyce Hatto CDs, Barry had created the most diversely



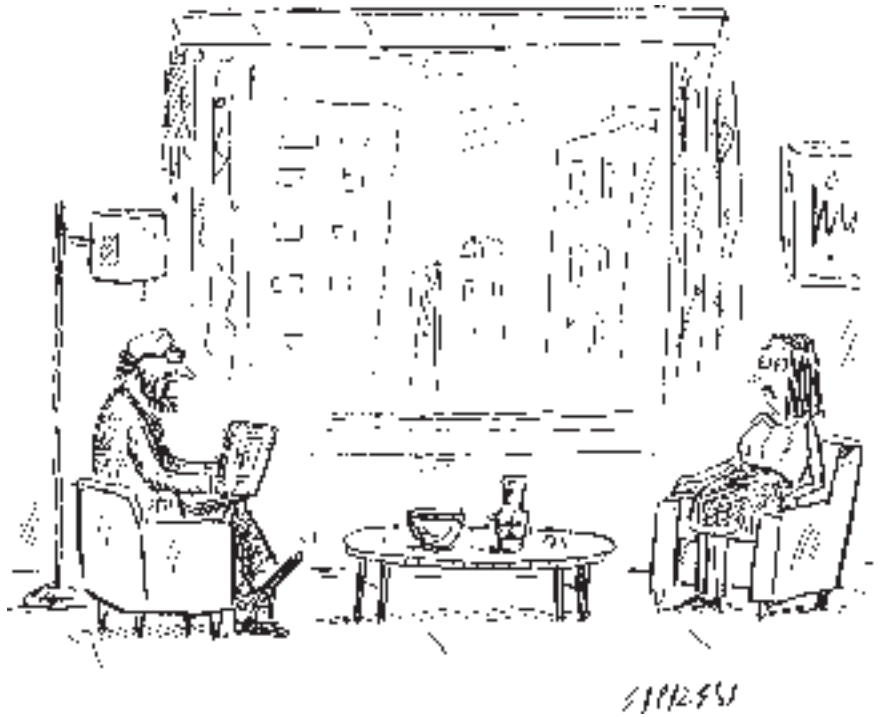
"Of course, after I became a PETA member I had to get rid of the heads."

prolific and gifted pianist to emerge in decades, with a corresponding narrative that aroused the esteem and good will of music lovers around the world. Since early in his checkered career, he had deftly manipulated musical identities. What he concocted on his wife's behalf, in her twilight, was vastly more audacious than anything he had pulled off during his "super-bargain" years. The alchemy that transformed Joyce Hatto into "Joyce Hatto" was, in its twisted way, a tour de force, a dazzling work of art, literally the performance of a lifetime.

A terrific amount of labor went into the deception. Case in point: René Köhler. Barry had first deployed the Köhler pseudonym in the fifties, but until Peter Lemken raised questions a layered biography didn't become necessary. In March, 2006, responding to an e-mail from Lemken, who stated that he was preparing an article about Hatto and had questions about Köhler (place and date of birth and death, location of gravesite, etc.), Barry invited Lemken to Cambridge to meet "Miss Hatto," who "would be happy . . . to talk over with you any aspect of her playing, teaching or recording work." Online, Lemken had speculated that "St. Mark's Church, Croydon"—identified on Concert Artist CD packages as a venue for Hatto's recording sessions with Köhler's orchestra but strangely missing from maps—was yet another fiction.

Thus Barry, blithely: "In addition, whilst you are in Cambridge, I would be able to show you the recording facilities that we [have] available. . . . I would be very happy to arrange for you to visit a 'non-existent' church in Croydon and speak with the priest in charge of it. That would occupy a full day going from Cambridge but I would do my very best to accompany you myself or provide a member of staff to accompany you. If your time schedule allows you, Miss Hatto would raise no objections to my inviting you to one of her recording sessions."

After Lemken neglected to call this bluff—he didn't feel like travelling to England—Barry reiterated the invitation two months later, having mean-



"Quit asking if I'm O.K. If I'm ever O.K., I'll let you know."

while added some filigree to the Köhler saga: he was born in the Weimar region, travelled on a Swiss passport, and had a grandnephew, "now safely settled in Israel," who was "a musician and budding conductor." Then this inspired bit about the grandnephew: "We are trying to make arrangements to bring him to London when he has finished his National Service in the Israeli Army. We have offered recordings with Joyce Hatto, if she is still able to undertake such a commitment, and have offered to finance a career launch at the Royal Festival Hall with as many members of the original National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra as can be reassembled."

It is hard to fathom what was motivating Barry at that moment. (Buying time, perhaps? Hatto would be dead within two months. Delusional grandiosity? Pathological duplicity?) He stood as much chance of reassembling "members of the original National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra" as he did of producing, in the flesh, Wilhelm Havagesse. There was no St. Mark's Church in Croydon. Nor, most likely, was there a staff member available to escort Lemken anywhere. A

Hatto collector tracked down by the BBC recounted that he'd bought a hundred or so CDs directly from Concert Artist and that, during a twenty-seven-month period, he'd exchanged roughly twelve hundred e-mails with more than a dozen Concert Artist employees—or, anyway, with that many Concert Artist e-mail addressees. The collector was under the impression that the company employed thirty-two people in four locations. In fact, Concert Artist's Hatto endeavors appear to have been a one-person operation—two, if Hatto counts.

If so, how much did she know? Or need to know? Among the artifacts that made a compelling case for her complicity were the Rachmaninoff and Brahms concerto recordings. Even if one conceded some variant of Barry's alibi for her—she recorded everything, he tinkered, she heard the result and somehow remained oblivious of his misdemeanors—that couldn't explain how an artist capable of functioning at such a high level wouldn't have mused, "Why don't I recall any recording sessions with an eighty-piece orchestra?"

When Christopher Howell, one of

the critics with whom both Hatto and Barry corresponded—in exceptionally recondite discussions of piano technique and music history—sifted for clues in the correspondence he'd saved, he realized that the first letter he'd received from Hatto was "chilling evidence that, if she really wrote it, she was involved up to the hilt." He recalled, "The subject was 'her' recording of the Chopin Mazurkas, and that is now known to be the work of Eugen Indjic." Howell also noticed that certain pianists' names were often misspelled in the letters signed by Barry but the ones ostensibly from Hatto got them right. His inference: "This would seem to prove at least that two different people were writing." Over all, he felt, the hoax had been "thought through very carefully." Peculiar errors in Hatto's letters, however, led him also to contemplate "the possibility . . . of a person with almost total recall of the past but living in a present of her own imagining."

With that hypothesis in mind, I recently took a train from London to Royston for a conversation with Barrington-Coupe. I went with some questions but certainly not with accusations. I didn't plan to bring up, for instance, a story in the *Independent* that quoted Hatto's radiologist to the effect that she'd received her first cancer diagnosis in 1992 rather than in the early seventies, as legend had it.

Barry greeted me on the station platform. Despite protestations to reporters that he was in fragile health, he struck me as quite vigorous: a trim fellow ("I can still get into my Army uniform") in his mid-seventies, dressed in a tan raincoat and black leather gloves, taupe slacks, an olive tweed jacket, a green shirt, a brown print necktie. He had the look of an indoorsman—pale, fleshy face, bony nose, thick eyebrows, ruffled brownish-gray hair, black glasses. It was a fifteen-minute walk through the village—past the usual shops and cafés, an ivied Anglican church, a park—to the small housing development on a cul-de-sac where, he said, he and Hatto had moved from Hampstead Garden Suburb in 1976.

Along the way, I asked about Royston, and his answer set the tone

for our conversation. Many American servicemen were stationed in the area during the Second World War, and there was a large American military cemetery nearby, in Cambridge. "Joyce occasionally had young pupils who would say negative things about Americans, and she would always correct them by pointing out how wonderful the Americans had been during the war," he said. "She liked to go to the cemetery occasionally and leave bouquets of flowers. I remember one time, we arrived and we met this elderly American gentleman standing next to a wall engraved with the names of fallen soldiers. As he was touching one of the names . . ."

I more or less knew what he was going to say next. All Barry knew about me, from a few phone calls and e-mails, was that I was a polite-sounding American reporter. That sufficed; he was born to ingratiate.

" . . . tears were running down his cheeks, and he turned to us and said, 'This is all I have left of my son.'"

Christopher Howell, the *MusicWeb* critic, had written of Barry's and Hatto's propensity for "grafting past realities onto present falsities with scarcely a false step"—and how, simultaneously, "the work proceeded of buttering up anybody perceived to be of possible use." So I'd been buttered. In the course of the next five hours, he dissembled and I silently marvelled at his technique. He seemed to make things up effortlessly as he went along. As he angled for my sympathy and confidence, he remained courteous and affable, a perfectly decent-seeming fellow.

At one point, he asked me if I was Jewish. "I had a Jewish doctor, solicitor, accountant," he said warmly. "They all said, 'You're more Jewish than the Jews.' At school I used to be given a hard time by the other boys because I looked Jewish. They kept it up until, finally, just to make them stop, I said, 'O.K., I am.'" He went on, "Joyce, when we met, thought I was Jewish. I told her, 'Oh, no, when I was a boy I was thinking of going into the Church. I sang in the choir.'"

"What church did you belong to?" I asked.

"Oh, dear. I'm trying to think of the church I sang in when I was a boy

soprano. I used to be a regular carol singer. Singing all the soprano parts. Why can't I think of the name of that? Well, it was hit by a rocket, you see."

We sat in the music room, which was furnished with an oak table, a couple of bookcases and armchairs, a sideboard, a leather settee, and a piano. Oriental rugs were scattered over wall-to-wall crimson carpeting; lace curtains framed a bay window that faced the street; sheer curtains covered French doors that led to the back yard. Hatto had died in this room. Even minus the hospital bed in which she had spent the last weeks of her life, it felt overstuffed. There was a surfeit of tchotchkes—life-size plaster cats beneath the piano, a plaster squirrel and rabbit flanking a brass vase of artificial flowers atop the table, and assorted cloisonné bowls. The BBC had reported that an English online retailer had handled a hundred thousand dollars' worth of Hatto CDs; definitive sales figures were impossible to come by. But if the hoax had proved materially rewarding there was no sign of it here.

The dominant object, of course, was the piano, a mahogany Steinway concert grand that Rachmaninoff, so one was told, had used for concerts outside London. I did my best to imagine it being routinely shuttled between the house and Hatto's apocryphal recording venues. During a radio interview broadcast in New Zealand a few months before she died, she had been asked about those exact logistical arrangements and had ignored the question. The most quotable quote from that interview referred to her parents, during her childhood: "They always said, 'Just make certain you're not a disappointment. Don't think you're so important.' And so I've never thought I'm so important. . . . I expect even Mozart was a disappointment to his father."

Perched on the piano bench, with his legs crossed and his hands—he still wore a gold wedding band—clasped around one knee, Barry said, "Her mother was the kind of person who, if God himself came down, she would have found fault. It wasn't until the last six weeks of Joyce's life that she

began to tell me some of the things that had happened to her as a child. I knew that she hadn't had a very happy childhood. And this is the reason. In life, there are amazing coincidences. The very first afternoon I'd taken her out, we went rowing in Hyde Park and we passed another boat with identical twins, boys. Afterwards, we had a cup of tea beside the Serpentine, and as we were sitting there Joyce said, 'I was a twin. I had a brother who was born dead.' The amazing thing was that *I* was a twin and my *sister* was born dead. Consequently, my father wanted a daughter and her mother wanted a son. And both parents treated us in exactly the same way. The very first day we met—it was a Saturday, almost exactly this time of year—we felt a bond with each other and we had it all our life. People say it was romantic. It was almost a brotherly-sisterly bond. It seemed to transcend just ordinary marriage and sex and everything else. Sometimes we didn't need to talk to each other—we just knew what the other was thinking.

"Her mother took to me. But when she started criticizing Joyce, trying to put me off, it was exactly what my father did when he came to meet her family. He said the same things about me. Her mother was very talented, had a beautiful singing voice, and so did Joyce. I think her mother resented her success. She wouldn't go to her concerts but would tell everybody that we hadn't given her tickets. Joyce would be shut in the cupboards when she was a little girl, and her mother would lock the piano. She did it very cleverly so the father didn't know. I liked him. He was a very nice man. He had cancer as well. Joyce got her stoicism from him. He was rather a Jane Austen character—he wasn't one of life's happy people."

The most plausible theory of the motivation behind the hoax was quintessentially British: a revenge tale fuelled by class resentment. Hatto had described to interviewers being condescended to during an adolescent audition at the Royal Academy of Music. A career as a concert soloist was a dauntingly lofty ambition, she was advised;

what a young woman really needed to know was how to prepare a roast. Years later, she failed to impress when auditioning for the Proms, an annual series of prestigious summer concerts produced by the BBC. Barry told me, "One of the reasons that the establishment didn't take to her was that her whole technique was different from the English way of playing. She played with a more open hand. The thumb didn't tuck itself under. A lot of technical schools have all this preparation of the hand—you've *got* to tuck the thumb under."

Hatto either had or had not studied composition with the eminences Mátyás Seiber and Paul Hindemith, who, by the time she began invoking their names in program and liner notes—Seiber died in 1960, Hindemith in 1963—were no longer in a position to confirm or deny. "She did do a bit of composition, yes," Barry said. "But she destroyed everything she had. Why? She thought she was criticized enough. She didn't have a sacrificial burning, but she put the whole lot into the bin. I asked her 'Why do that?' and she



"I find your ruling on the avocado-grapefruit-and-pomegranate salad overly narrow."

said, ‘Well, they criticize *everything* I do, and the last bit would be to criticize my composition.’”

Another question I didn’t bother asking Barry is whether Hatto was in on the con. The emerging consensus of people close to the scandal was that indeed she had been. Earlier that week, I’d met with Jeremy Nicholas, who showed me a document that appeared, like the concerto recordings, to place a second smoking gun in Hatto’s hand. It involved the Godowsky Chopin Studies—upon reflection, hardly the most judicious theft. When the audio consultant retained by *Gramophone* analyzed Hatto’s Godowsky CD, he found that it had been pieced together from recordings by Marc-André Hamelin, Carlo Grante, and Ian Hobson; Barry had covered up the crime by shrinking the timings of various tracks. In March, 2006, after Nicholas published his reverential article about Hatto in *Gramophone*, he received from her a printed program from a famous 1938 concert at the Royal Albert Hall, during which Rachmaninoff performed. A handwritten note said, “We have looked after this Rachmaninoff programme for many years, but feel it should now be passed on to you. Also I have re-worked the Godowsky, as I’m always trying to achieve the impossible and I hope you will enjoy the result. With all good wishes, Joyce.”

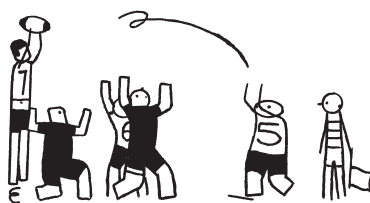
Nicholas wanted to know, “Why is she saying ‘I have *reworked* the Godowsky’ if she didn’t play them in the first place?”

Among the most diligent and dispassionate students of the Hatto hoax is Andrys Basten, the woman who had posted the “Mephisto Waltz” on her Web site. She is a retired computer consultant who lives in Northern California. According to her, the Godowsky and other examples in which recordings have been sped up or slowed down—“with results which some listeners even now can find more pleasing than the original pianists’ versions”—suggest that Hatto and Barry had set out to create “their own ideal versions, using her musical ideas and his technological know-how.” In Basten’s interpretation of *their* interpretation, “He was the producer of these improved versions, while

she was the musician behind them. They both could enjoy the accolades rolling in. Sweet revenge for what was felt to be insufficient recognition of past achievements and a means of financial survival. A more practical form of folie à deux.”

Ates Orga, for his part, had reconsidered Hatto’s accounts of concert tours in Eastern Europe. He said, “I can’t think of many English artists in the fifties, sixties, or early seventies going to the Soviet Union or Poland unless they were big-time competition players.” Barry had told Orga that Hatto hadn’t bothered to save copies of her reviews. Yet he was able to produce reviews—O.K., not actual clippings but typed transcripts—from her putative trips to Russia and Scandinavia in the early and mid-seventies. The prose had the same conquering-heroine flavor as her liner notes: “Her performance of the Brahms Piano Concerto in D minor was a triumph. The technical virtuosity was compelling in its complete nonchalance but it was the blazing passion that brought a huge audience to its feet”; “Miss Joyce Hatto, an English woman pianist, proved herself to be a pianist of unique technical talent and possessed of much more than exceptional musicality. Her power to hold an audience and move them to near hysteria is rarely encountered”; “Joyce Hatto completely dominated her Steinway and it was very noticeable that the orchestral players were perspiring and not this soloist! The explosive reception she received demanded six encores.”

The few reviews of Hatto’s work that can be verified as genuine are less kind. In 1953, a critic from the *London Times* said of a local recital, “Joyce Hatto grappled doggedly with too hasty tempi in Mozart’s D Minor piano concerto and was thereby impeded from conveying significant feelings towards the work, especially in quick figuration.” In a 1961 *Gramophone* assessment of Hatto’s LP of Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto, the conductor Trevor Harvey won-



dered “whether her technique is really on top of the difficulties of this music.” He concluded, “It remains a small, rather pallid performance.”

In a moment of contrition, Barry said, “I can see why I’ve been criticized for what I’ve done. Apart from being unlawful, it wasn’t right. I know I shouldn’t have done it.” Then he got over it. “The letters I’ve been getting—the nasty ones—tell me at least I could publish the names of the wonderful artists who played this work. But there *aren’t* any ‘wonderful artists.’ The things that she was playing, if it was very difficult, it was fine, she didn’t make noises—the mechanical memory was all going right. Almost on autopilot, I suppose; her fingers would just be there. The body has learnt, you’ve gone up and down those difficult passages so many times. It’s like a hurdler. Sometimes they don’t know what they’re doing—the brain doesn’t but the body does. What was difficult for her, where the problems occurred, was immediately before she started she’d take a deep breath. Pull herself and stretch, take a deep breath, and the pain would start. She couldn’t seem to stop herself from doing that. Consequently, when it was a slow piece, that’s when the problems came in, because only her mind was being engaged and the pain had a chance to take over. Very often the patching had to be done there. We never used a famous pianist or anything to cover up any technical deficiencies. There weren’t any. It was so remarkable—someone said the piano had a hold on her, but I would say she had a hold on the piano. It did what she wanted it to do, in a remarkable way, too.”

I listened and wondered: Did he actually believe any of it? And what had she believed? Had Joyce Hatto died happy?

Barry’s gift for artifice notwithstanding, he’d spun such dense layers of fabrication that inevitably he lapsed into self-contradiction. When I asked how Hatto felt about the attention she’d received during her final years, he said, “You see, the thing about her was it meant her life hadn’t been a waste of time. But she didn’t glory in anything, really. Music was kind of an essential thing. If there was a criticism, she would say, ‘Well, I know what I know.’” In the

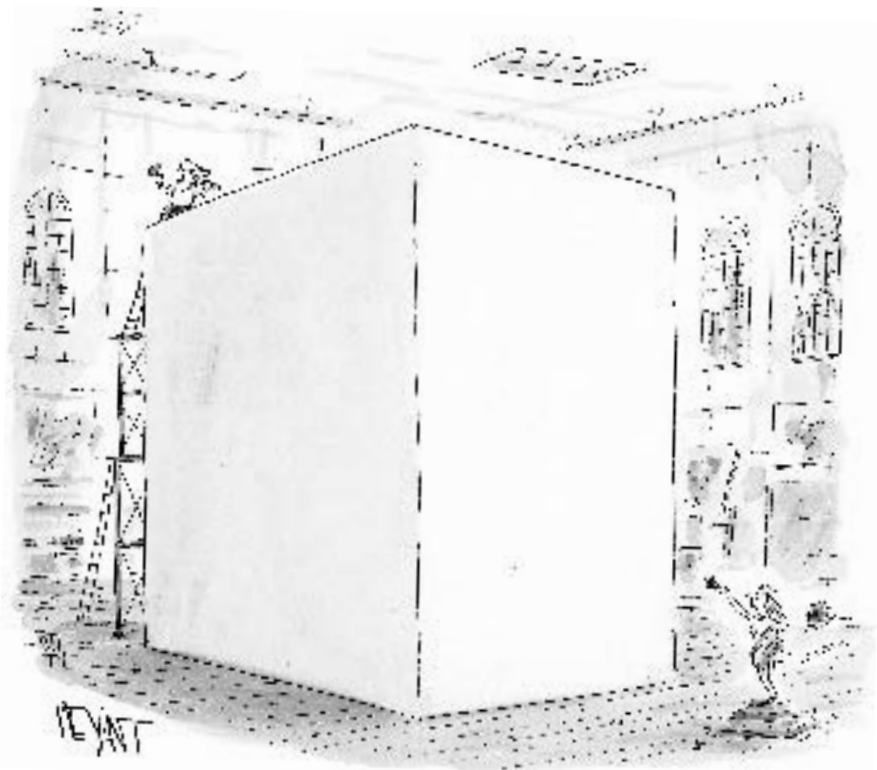
next breath, he mentioned that, shortly before she died, when he'd shown her a favorable review of one of "her" CDs, "She looked at me and said, 'It's just too late.'"

In the wake of the scandal, some listeners had obtained copies of Hatto's early LPs and detected genuine promise. Christopher Howell, after listening to her 1963 recording of Mozart's Piano Concerto in A Major, said that "there is a certain glow to the tone. The slow movement is beautifully shaped while the finale, at a pretty fast tempo, has a joyous spring. Overall, the performance has a certain luminosity of spirit." But it was indeed too late.

From papers atop the table, Barry produced a condolence note that he'd received from a Dutch fan of Hatto's, just before the hoax was exposed: "Dear Sir! First I must condole you with your wife. It's a great loss, not only for you, but also for the lovers of piano music. I am a great admirer of your wife's records, the first of them I bought in the sixties. . . . It's a pity she is only now recognized as the great pianist she always was."

When I handed it back, he said, "In the end, you just sort of shrug your shoulders. I haven't made a lot of friends, actually. I suppose it's because Joyce and I were married for almost fifty years. I really haven't had time for friendships. It is very strange. I've found that the ones I thought were friends have to pontificate. But I have one friend who's been wonderful. When I told him what I'd done, there was no lecture; he simply said, 'I understand why you did it.' There's no use having a friend who's going to lecture you. I think Marlene Dietrich said it best—Joyce and I both knew Marlene Dietrich. She said, 'It's no good forgiving your husband if you're going to make him eat it for breakfast every morning.'"

Just about every anecdote Barry shared, or invented on the spot, conformed to a fundamentally sentimental narrative that retained at least a quotient of plausibility, allowing him to harvest a bit of sympathy for two lifetimes' accumulation of grievances. Of course, there was a transparent poignancy to the con: Hatto had possessed genuine talent but there had been no brilliant career. The con had a genius and the revenge a sweetness, the false persona



"Now hold that."

providing a balm for her failed ambition. Still, how satisfying could it have been to live merely the simulacrum of success—to read about "her" inspiring renaissance, to hear "her" music so extravagantly extolled? The name-dropping, the evasiveness, the delusional stories, the woundedness, the self-pity, the resentment toward the establishment: it formed a ziggurat of self-deception. It was also a love story, one that would have been right at home on Sunset Boulevard.

Hatto's ashes, in a cardboard parcel the size of a shoebox, rested on the oak table. Three days before she died, Barington-Coupe said, he proposed that they be transported to Chopin's garden, outside Warsaw, but she said that she wanted them scattered beneath a conifer in the botanical garden in Cambridge. Unfortunately, that wasn't allowed. Another possibility was a prehistoric burial mound in Royston, but the ground there had been sinking and was roped off.

"She died just where you are," he told me. "That's roughly where her bed was. The amazing thing about her is that she

was rather ageless. Children and young girls would discuss things with her that they wouldn't discuss with their parents. People never thought of her as being elderly, and, frankly, neither did I. About two years before she died, I said, 'You know, Joyce, you don't look any different from when we first met.' She had a remarkable youthfulness. And yet when she actually died—the moment of death, the doctor was on one side and I was on the other—it was as if a sponge wiped her face and her whole personality went and there was this old lady. When I went to the undertaker the first time to see her, I went in and there was this elderly lady in this coffin. I looked at her and I came out smiling and said, 'That's the wrong body.' They said, 'No, that's Joyce.' So I went back in. She had a little birthmark. I went back in, and there it was. I've seen many deaths. Most people I've found in death seem to lose a few years. She didn't. The act was over." ♦

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Mark Singer discusses Joyce Hatto, with clips of music and archival interviews.