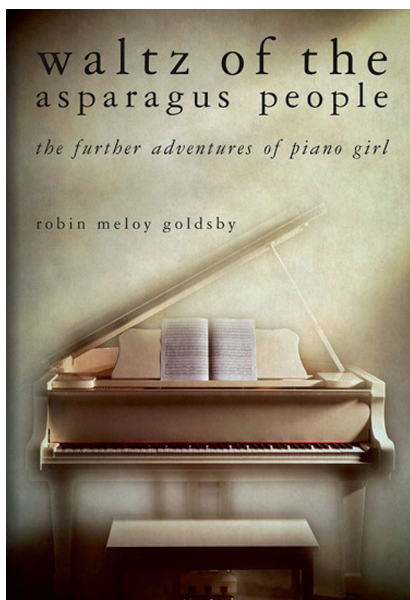


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Waltz of the Asparagus People: The Further Adventures of Piano Girl (Book) Robin Meloy Goldsby

Bass Lion Publishing ISBN-13: 978-1456477547
\$14.00. Also available in German, ISBN-13: 978-3936405507 €12.00

Robin Meloy Goldsby's collection of short-story memoirs is as palatably more-ish as a fresh fruit sorbet. Goldsby is a jazz pianist, mother and writer, an American living in Germany. Her stories are varied and whimsical, ranging through a terrific amount of incident and emotion, all of them evoked with a keenly observant eye and well-wrought language that never takes itself too seriously. The accompanying CD of Goldsby playing (mostly) her own music is a nice addition.

It shouldn't happen to a jazz pianist... Once, Robin, en route to a gig wearing a ball-dress and high heels, finds herself escorting two unattended horses out of the middle of a German road; later she watches haplessly from her restaurant

piano as a porn star arrives to enjoy lunch on Valentine's Day. Episodes in which she considers what music and the piano mean to her spill into poetic rhapsody; at other times the accounts are all too real. John, her bassist husband, faces a continual battle to load his instrument on to a plane. Airline girl: 'Double bass? Does that mean he's checking in two?'

But in the middle of the quirky encounters – among them, nakedness in German spas, exquisitely dressed asparagus dolls, the ever-watchful Kate (voice of the sat-nav) and a hilarious memory of starring in a slasher movie – there's a devastating account of the illness and death of a close friend, who asks Robin to play the piano to her down the phone just as her bone marrow transplant operation is about to begin.

If this is all part of life's rich tapestry, then Goldsby's stitching sparkles with detail, while its background is infused with a sense of beauty that manages to wear its lyricism lightly. JESSICA DUCHEN

UK London Piano-Yoga Retreat Kings Place 15 May

I'm always on the lookout for new ways to alleviate some of the stresses and strains of being a professional pianist, so when the opportunity arose to attend a one-day Piano-Yoga retreat at Kings Place I jumped at the chance.

Run by the charmingly vivacious pianist GéNIA, the course covered a lot of ground. GéNIA started by explaining how, at college, one of her piano teachers told her to completely avoid playing a Rachmaninov piece as her hands were too small. This made her even more determined to play it, so she devised ways of stretching her fingers by applying the principles of yoga and eventually she could play the seemingly impossible.

GéNIA guided us through some excellent shoulder and back releasing exercises then showed us a mini-workout she'd devised to strengthen thumbs, the different sections of each finger and to increase wrist flexibility. She talked about posture and showed us finger-stretching exercises using a refreshingly unusual flat-fingered technique.



Participants were invited to perform and she helped them to use breathing, 'abdominal engagement' and visualisation techniques to calm nerves, attempt tricky passages or help with phrasing and musicality (all to immediate effect) and also gave practical advice on the various stages of preparing for a performance.

With her positive, non-defeatist approach she emphasises the joy and satisfaction of playing at any level and I

would encourage any pianist, amateurs and professionals alike, to sign up to one of her courses, buy her book (see www.piano-yoga.com) and see for themselves how, with time, patience and belief, anything is possible!

ZOE RAHMAN

Upcoming Piano-Yoga retreats:

19 – 25 September at Arte Music Academy, Nicosia, Cyprus. 13 November at Steinway Hall, London.

