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BIOGRAPHY

The President's Pianist: My Term with Truman and My Life in Music
Daniel Lindley
George Manos
George Manos as told to Daniel Lindley
iUniverse
978-0-595-48716-5
Four Stars (out of Five)

“Mostly it is the president who stays in my mind and his kindness intelligence honesty and strength of character….He was unpretentious unhurried and unshakable” Manos recalls in this memoir that centers on his four years as the White House pianist.

Before detailing his service to Truman Manos starts at the beginning describing his introduction to music in a Greek-American household in North Carolina then his renown as a teen prodigy and his subsequent acceptance into the Marine Corps Band. This led to his being selected to perform for President Truman himself often accompanying the presidential entourage on cruises and to parties as well as playing for Truman alone while the president worked in his office.

Manos devotes about a third of this biography to his years with Truman but he also details his career after Truman left the White House. Manos’s accounts of performances with famous singers like Todd Duncan and Katharine Hansel his founding the Killarney Bach Festival in Ireland and his experiences as music director for the National Gallery of Art fill roughly half the book.

Throughout it is clear that Manos has always harbored prodigious musical talent. As an expert he includes his assessments of his fellow Marine Corps Band members musical luminaries and even the president: “How was Truman as a piano player? Fair… But he was serious about the piano and about music because he loved music.”

Though Manos' tenure with Truman is perhaps his most noteworthy accomplishment to readers with only a passing familiarity with classical music the entire memoir is more than interesting peopled with intriguing characters not the least of which is Manos himself. He declines to talk much about his personal life but at times his cantankerous leanings become apparent as when he curses the spoiled female students of a prep school where he taught piano.

The book is very engaging and easy to read. Daniel Lindley has clearly done his research pulling in interesting facts about Truman's presidency and the events surrounding Manos's recollections. In addition the style with which Lindley recounts Manos's career is warm and lively.

It may not include tales of power and political intrigue—in fact Manos barely mentions Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb in World War II—but this memoir will appeal to those with a penchant for presidential history or music as well as anyone who simply enjoys reading about the real lives of interesting people.