Bravura performances

Stylish composer biographies head Jessica Duchen's roundup

**CLASSICAL MUSIC**

**Handel in London**
by Jane Glover
Macmillan £25

The conductor Jane Glover conjures an impression of Handel's 18th-century London that seems baroque in every sense: flamboyant, fervid, seething with intrigue. The German composer's long relationship with the British capital is his only love affair — there's little here about his personal life — but Glover captures the finely balanced symbiosis between him, his singers, their audiences, their royal patrons and the city.

**Schumann The Faces and the Masks**
by Judith Cernaik
Faber £20

Cernaik tells Schumann's tragic story in a book full of fresh, thoughtful writing. The "masks" are the multiple personalities in his music; and his courtship of Clara Wieck, her father's determination to separate them, and their eventual marriage are brought convincingly to life. But the crunch point is his mental collapse and incarceration in an asylum: Cernaik presents many details from the medical records, to heartbreaking effect.

**How Shostakovich Changed My Mind**
by Stephen Johnson
Notting Hill £14.99

Writer and broadcaster Stephen Johnson chronicles his lifelong fascination with Shostakovich's music in the light of his own struggles with bipolar disorder. Strangely, anguished music can be the most comforting: using a delicate, self-deprecating style and references encompassing everything from Greek drama to the Moomins, Johnson explores the way Shostakovich provides catharsis, transforming the personal "I" into the collective "we". Profoundly moving.

**Speaking the Piano**
by Susan Tomas
Boydell Press £19.99

Drawing on her long experience, pianist Susan Tomas investigates, with crystalline clarity, some of the

**Fryderyk Chopin**
Walker's love of his music shines out

interferences that disrupt the flow between players and their music. The text is studded with gems of insight, encapsulating elusive matters that often defy articulation, including difficult topics such as unconscious biases against female teachers, or why some performers ham up their playing for the YouTube generation. A must-read for anyone who plays or loves the piano.

**Music Lessons**
The Collège de France Lectures by Pierre Boulez
Faber £30

In these lectures from 1976 to 1965, Boulez shows himself to be a philosopher as well as a composer and conductor. His laser-sharp analyses drill into profound issues about the study and composition of music — such as the conflict between creative process and historical research, or the impossibility of "authenticity". Chewy, intensely rewarding, it leaves one marvelling at this penetrating, questing intellect.

**What lies ahead**
Our future survival emerges as a question in Rob Kingston's select

**SCIENCE**

Back in February, the surreal sight of Elon Musk's shiny red Tesla convertible floating through space with a mannequin at the wheel gave the world the surest sign yet that the rocket game has changed. The *Space Barons: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and the Quest to Colonize the Cosmos* (PublicAffairs £17.99) is a meticulously researched account by the Washington Post writer Christian Davenport of the ambitions and rivalries of the billionaires bidding to boldly take private enterprise where no government space programme has gone before.

Their vision might just save mankind, if Michio Kaku is correct. In *The Future of Humanity* (Allen Lane £26), he asks how mankind can avoid destruction, either self-inflicted or visited on us by a supervolcano or asteroid. In short, we need to leave Earth or face extinction. Terraforming and colonising Mars sounds challenging enough, but Kaku doesn't stop there, pondering the far-off possibilities of journeys to distant stars, suspended animation and even immortality.

For now, though, stopping the planet and getting off is not an option. If that thought depresses you, you need *The Consolations of Physics* by Tim Radford (Sceptre £14.99), a poetic work that celebrates the power of science deep into the unexplored. What does the future hold? On the one hand, there is the potential for further discoveries and advancements that could lead to a brighter future. On the other hand, the world faces many challenges such as climate change, political instability, and social inequality. The dilemma is: do we have the capacity to overcome these obstacles and create a more sustainable and equitable world, or will we continue to make poor decisions that lead to further harm?