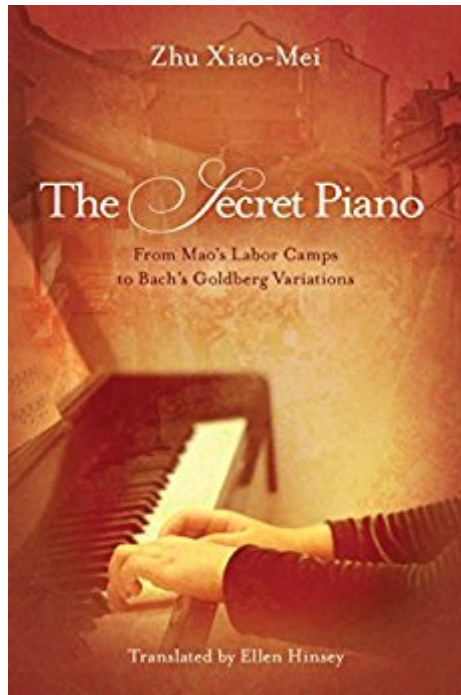


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# The Secret Piano: From Mao's Labor Camps To Bach's Goldberg Variations



## Synopsis

Zhu Xiao-Mei was born to middle-class parents in post-war China, and her musical proficiency became clear at an early age. Taught to play the piano by her mother, she developed quickly into a prodigy, immersing herself in the work of classical masters like Bach and Brahms. She was just ten years old when she began a rigorous course of study at the Beijing Conservatory, laying the groundwork for what was sure to be an extraordinary career. But in 1966, when Xiao-Mei was seventeen, the Cultural Revolution began, and life as she knew it changed forever. One by one, her family members were scattered, sentenced to prison or labor camps. By 1969, the art schools had closed, and Xiao-Mei was on her way to a work camp in Mongolia, where she would spend the next five years. Life in the camp was nearly unbearable, thanks to horrific living conditions and intensive brainwashing campaigns. Yet through it all Xiao-Mei clung to her passion for music and her sense of humor. And when the Revolution ended, it was the piano that helped her to heal. Heartbreaking and heartwarming, *The Secret Piano* is the incredible true story of one woman's survival in the face of unbelievable odds—and in pursuit of a powerful dream.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When one first thinks of pianist Zhu Xiao-Mei, those familiar with her works immediately jump to her exceptional interpretations and performances of J.S. Bach and the Goldberg Variations. Finding her autobiography, *The Secret Piano: From Mao's Labor Camps to Bach's Goldberg Variations*, was a pleasant surprise, yet autobiographies like this can sometimes be a disappointment to the reader. Happily this was not the case, as the author has presented her life in an interesting and fascinating chronological format, one that expresses the emotions that she felt along the way. Born in Shanghai into a creative middle-class family during those turbulent years following WW-II, her family moved to Beijing when she was very young. Her first encounter with the instrument that was to shape her life is movingly remembered in her own words: "I didn't know what it was, a piano. I was barely three years old, and I had never seen anything like it. I was fascinated. I wondered where it had come from, this object that spoke when you touched it. Strangely, my mother never played the piano. But every morning, she dusted it: her first act of housework. 'Such dust! In Shanghai, there wasn't so much dust. Why did you bring me here?' she would add, turning towards my father." And that curiosity sets the pace for this book in which she takes us on a journey in which we witness first hand a side that is usually veiled to most Westerners.

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