

IAN VENABLES

Complete Piano Works.

Graham Lloyd.

NAXOS 8.573156 (70.10)

Caprice op 35, The Stourhead Follies Op 4, Three Short pieces Op 5, Impromptu: The Nightingale and the Rose Op 8, Portrait of Janis Op 9. Pianos Sonata: In Memoriam DSCH op 1.

Venables has deservedly made a name for himself with his sublime songs and he is probably ranked as the finest British composer of songs and his songs are also vastly superior to some famous composers' songs. He has composed two outstanding chamber works of the highest quality and now we have his piano music.



[*\(See article about this composer on this site\)*](#)

His music is unashamedly melodic and tonal although there are some choice dissonances. Some self-appointed experts claim his music is in the Schubert, Chopin and Mendelssohn tradition but I cannot agree with that since his music is original and quite unlike those other mentioned composers. Comparisons are odious and the last resort of reviewers who have nothing better to say.

If I were to say that his Caprice is delightful, which it is, that does not mean it is cheap or banal. It has a memorable and infectious melodic line, rhythmic interest and it is a joy to hear.

The Stourhead Follies of 1984 are four romantic impressions. The first is entitled Temple to Apollo, a profound piece which, it is said, shows influences of Rachmaninov and Ravel. Someone has said that his music sounds like Villa Lobos. Personally I cannot readily see this

The second, Palladio's Bridge, is in the same vein but with a welcome lilt. Someone has said it is somewhat introspective and pessimistic. If music can be troubled then this movement is.

The third, Pantheon, is very short and lively and the most appealing of the set.

The final piece, The Grotto, is also a reflective piece with hints of modality and sadness.

Stourhead House and Gardens are in Wiltshire.

The Three Short Pieces were intended for children and have much to commend them as attractive and sensitive pieces, again with some modal touches. The last piece, Folk Tune, is compelling.

The Nightingale and the Rose is inspired by the Oscar Wilde short story and could be termed programme music. It is another reflective piece.

Portrait of Janis was first performed by the composer in California where he met many friends including one Janis. This work seems to emulate both British and American moods. It is a meditative piece.

The Sonata in memory of Shostakovich has three movements, the central one being a short allegro scherzando. I suppose for an elegiac work the content of this sonata is suitable. The opening movement stops and starts according to some; the fast sections are vigorous and the lyrical passages seem to be rather introspective, albeit music of quality. The finale is very expansive with deep feelings

It is music of quality but I wonder whether so much slowish music will have a universal appeal.

Graham Lloyd has the measure of the music and his performances and the sound quality is excellent.

It is a CD worth having and highlights the attractiveness of this composer's music.

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