

## CD REVIEW 85

### RUBINSTEIN

Piano Concerto no 4 in D minor Op 70;

### RACHMANINOV

Piano Concerto no 3 in D minor Op 30.

Joseph Moog (piano)

Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Plate,

Nicholas Milton

ONYX 4089 (69.49)

Joseph Moog is an award-winning pianist of amazing technical skill. He has won great acclaim for his recordings of the Liszt concertos. And this CD will enhance his reputation even further.

The joy of this CD is the Rubinstein Piano Concerto no. 4 which is an astonishing piece.

Rubinstein was a Russian Jew who lived from 1829 to 1894 and was an amazing pianist. He was a prolific composer of six symphonies, five piano concertos ten string quartets, four piano sonatas, five piano trios, two cello sonatas, the opera *The Demon* and the quasi-opera *Christus*. His brother Nickolai was director of the Moscow Conservatory and allegedly had altercations with Tschaikovsky.

Anton Rubinstein was a brilliant pianist touring with his pianistic displays. All the other famous instrumentalists of the time who worked with him unanimously spoke of his breathtaking talent and musicality.

Listening to this Rubinstein shows how clearly he influenced Tschaikovsky and Rachmaninov. While I like the piano concertos of Tschaikovsky I wonder if he would have written them quite like this had it not been for Rubinstein.

The Rubinstein was the concerto of the second half of the nineteenth century and is a stunning work of staggering virtuosity and lyrical beauty. The first movement is marked *Moderato assai* but it is really a very fast movement. There are chords of five notes in each hand and marvellous dissonances. Without dissonances you would not get the drama, tension and excitement as in this concerto. The gymnastics of the cascades and arpeggios are electrifying and not just padding as in some composers.

This movement is in coherent sonata form with two gorgeous melodies and which are not unlike those of Rachmaninov 3, composed many years later. And how well Rubinstein develops the material. There are composers who are adored who simply could not do this.

The material is memorable and durable and of the highest order. The slow movement, *Andante*, does not drag or languish. It has wonderful themes and more compelling dissonances. The finale is marked *allabreve* but is scintillating.

Some will dismiss it as a warhorse but that was said of Tschaikovsky's Piano Concerto no 1. Rubinstein's concerto has been described as turbulent work very often played but now comparatively forgotten.

I know many concert pianists who rubbish this concerto and say that they will never play it. If the truth were told they would not be able to play it. This pianist can and I have to commend the orchestra for their fine contribution and some of the woodwind solos are exquisite.



It seems that all young pianists are playing the show pieces such as the Liszt Sonata, Prokofiev three and Rachmaninov three. Some of them do very well and some lack the musicianship in order to favour the technique.

One very great pianist said that you have to be 40 to understand and play these works well.

I have a few reservations about the performance of the Rachmaninov. The pianist's skill and ability are not in question, but the opening is a little too fast. It needs more space so that the music can speak as it certainly does in the Ashkenazy/Fistourali version and, in this performance, the lower brass make a mess of the growls. Listen to Bryon Janis with Antal Dorati to see how it should be done, The music then races, almost, but not quite out of control, as if this was the 2,30 from Newmarket. This interpretation is a Formula 1 Mercedes racing at 180mph. At times, one is convinced that this performance is technique more than music. There are a few timing issues particularly in the last movement and some unauthorised rubatos

The spirituality of the slow movement is lost.

The speed of the finale is excessive and exhausting.

To hear the authentic speeds watch Yefim Bronfmann on You Tube.

But the playing is staggering.

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