

## CD REVIEW 125

### **Peter KATIN - Fifty years of music making.**

BACH Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor (Book 1). Recorded 1948 Southwark Cathedral.  
MOZART Rondo in A minor K511 Recorded July 1968 Colfe's Grammar School  
BEETHOVEN Sonata in C sharp minor. Mr Katin's studio 1976  
SCHUBERT Impromptus in G flat and E flat from D899. Public performance late 1950s  
DEBUSSY Suite Bergamasque. Public performances late 1960s  
CHOPIN Polonaise-Fanaisie Op 61.  
Peter Katin (piano)  
Recorded Bristol 1987  
RPMUSIC RP001



This CD can be purchased over the internet at [www.software-partners.co.uk/pkatin.htm](http://www.software-partners.co.uk/pkatin.htm) who can take credit card payments. Sales are already going very well.

Any recording of Peter Katin is always welcome and this disc celebrates over fifty years of his dedication to music. His is an exceptional talent often unrealised because he is not a showman or a show-off. Nor is he an eccentric like Richter or Pachmann. Neither is he a demonstrative pianist with a tendency to musical madness as is Kissin. And he is a very secure player, dependable and all that he does makes sense. He takes a lot of time to know the music he records so that when he does record it he knows its every nuance and turn. There are exceptions, as he has told me, and such works which he has not recorded, such as Rachmaninov's glorious Piano Concerto no. 4 in G minor and Prokofiev's Piano Concerto no. 3, he has deliberately not committed to disc although he has played both works. He felt that he did not know them well enough.

He is a slow learner not because of any deficiency but because of his thoroughness.

People are quick to forget the great artists of yesteryear. Peter gave his stunning debut at the Wigmore hall in 1948 and his Proms debut in 1952 was Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto no.2 (his best concerto) with Sargent followed in 1953 with Rachmaninov's truly great Piano Concerto no. 3 in D minor, conducted by John Hollingsworth which performance is still talked about. In fact this concerto was repeated in 1970 and televised. After watching Kissin's ghastly and wayward performance of Brahms' Second Concerto at the 2002 Proms, I played Katin's version in the Proms of 1957, also under Sargent, which was simply staggering and kept to the score.

It is the total lack of eccentricity and personal foibles that endears Katin's performances to the wise musical public.

He was initially known as the performer of the warhorses namely the big and demanding concertos of Brahms, Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky and he was afraid that he was being typecast. His playing of the Beethoven concertos is exemplary although his orchestras and conductors have sometimes been lacking.

I treasure a broadcast of Beethoven's Concerto no. 3 in C minor and also of the Emperor. His Mozart is very fresh and the sonatas were available on Olympia and they are very fine.

In the recording studio he has not always been well served. His Schumann concerto with Eugene Goossens was a truly brilliant performance (the cadenza was staggering) but spoiled by a swimming pool sound. One of his Tchaikovsky B flat minor Concerto performances was ruined by the conductor Edric Cundell who treated the orchestra as if it were a German brass band without refinement or taste. But then Cundell was not a professional conductor and this recording was a budget one for an American company called Richmond.

Katin recorded a double album of popular piano pieces for Pickwick, a brave move. His recordings with Boult of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no. 1 and the Tchaikovsky Concert Fantasia are still the best, yet reviewers never seem to refer to them. His Rachmaninov Piano Concerto no.2 was very fine pianistically under Colin Davis who was learning the trade and was very kind to Peter. His performance of the Grieg with Sir John Pritchard, a very unrated conductor, is the touchstone for all performances.

Among his earliest recordings are the Mendelssohn concertos under Anthony Collins and the Liszt Totentanz with Jean Martinon who was a most disagreeable man, I recall.

And then Peter shocked us, and very pleasantly, by recording the Piano Concerto no. 3 by William Mathias. The Welsh composer studied the piano with Katin. This concerto was not Peter's usual repertoire but it is a sensational performance and Mathias told me that!

Probably the best British piano concerto in the tonal tradition is that of Sir Arthur Bliss which Peter was asked to play at the Cheltenham Festival and at the express wish of the composer. However there was not enough time in Peter's busy schedule for him to learn it.. This is a fine concerto which Philip Fowke, one of Peter's pupils, has taken up with great success.

Sir William Walton told me that working with Katin on his Sinfonia Concertante was a real delight.

It is the honesty and integrity of Peter Katin that impresses me not only in his performances but as a person. He admits that if he does not do justice to certain pieces he no longer plays them. For example, he used to regularly play Scarlatti sonatas and well, but not now.

I admire Katin's playing of Bach although some purists might object. He does not indulge in all those annoying baroque/classical caricatures. He plays Bach with a sweetness and tenderness which is very appealing. It has been said that most pianists put the brains in their playing of Bach but Katin puts in Bach's heart and is the only one who does! There is something strangely precious about this performance of the B flat minor Prelude and Fugue. For an 18 year old it is truly remarkable and very moving.

The Mozart is also played with that rewarding simplicity of style and admirable clarity. As with the Bach all the detail is there. It is as if you have never heard it before. I put on several other recordings made by famous names, which I will not mention here; some were bombastic, others performed trills as an actor would ham it up or as if it were camp, and others took it at breakneck speed and yet others missed out notes and so on.....

But it is the Beethoven that is the greatest revelation. How well Katin avoids all the clichés. He is aware that Beethoven did not call this sonata the Moonlight. It is this daft title which causes people to play the opening movement slowly, quietly and dreamily and turn it into a sickly mess. Not Katin. Listen to the clever shift of the left hand semibreve octaves, the exquisite phrasing and note that the music does not drag. The deftness of the scherzo is telling. The finale sparkles and is very exciting. Some will quibble at the descending right hand double octave passages and the fact that they are signalled by what appears to be a rest. They stand out perhaps a little too prominently but what a dramatic effect they make and they do not contradict the score. In fact it is the other pianists who get

it wrong. When this theme appears for the second time Beethoven marks it subito forte and so that is how Peter plays it.

That I do not like Schubert is no secret. His music is too repetitive and often not developed. Prettiness in music is not enough for me since that can be superficial. But I will listen to Peter playing Schubert because he avoids all the slushiness and nausea that most people bring to this music; more so because of Katin's scintillating fingerwork. Trevor Harvey once wrote of Katin, "He performs fantastic feats of prodigious prestidigitation."

Debussy's Suite Bergamasque is given a glowing performance and this time moonlight was in the composer's mind for the movement he entitled Clair de lune. Katin is not indulgent and we have a straight and, consequently, a fine performance.

I do not like Chopin's Opus 61 and, taking a leaf from Peter's book, will not comment although following it in the score reveals this version as a true performance. It is Chopin's most fussy work. The score is littered with directions. It takes some getting to know.

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