

CD REVIEW 40

SCRIABIN

Piano Concerto;

Prometheus, the poem of fire;

Six piano pieces orchestrated by Vasily Rogal-Levitsky.

Konstantin Scherbakov, Russian State TV and Radio Choir, Moscow SO, Igor Golovschin

(DDD) Naxos 8.550818 (68.09).



This is the worst piano concerto I know although it is not the only one. It is dull, uneventful, note spinning and often sounds like Chopin in its nauseous effeminacy and tinkly music. There is absolutely nothing in the first movement... nothing to remember only its tedium.

The slow movement is a set of variations and fares slightly better but, throughout this concerto, the piano and the orchestra seem to be playing something different.

The sleeve notes quote Rimsky-Koraskov as referring to the genius of Scriabin. My books written by Rimsky himself refer to Scriabin as a warped personality, arrogant in the extreme and dangerously self-opinionated. Rimsky wrote that this concerto was poor and beyond redemption and even rewrote a section of the finale and orchestrated it with a big romantic tune and lush orchestration. But it has to be emphasised that Scriabin did not write this, although people give him the credit. Rimsky wrote the only good bits!

The passages that Rimsky wrote are from 4 minutes 50 seconds for about 20 seconds and from 7.10 for a very short while. These are the timings on this CD

There are very many concert pianists who will not play this concerto as it is so awful. One pianist said that every printed copy of this work was the death of an innocent tree. And there is no easy way of saying this but Scriabin was a really horrible person, a very nasty piece of work; and this is yet another proof of my claim that the character and life style of the man is in his music and the music is the man. The man's character is often the character of his music.

There is the famous conversation between Rimsky, Rachmaninoff and Glazunov when one said of this concerto that Scriabin had lost his mind and the others said that he never had a mind to lose.

This was not an unkind comment but a true one. Scriabin was into the occult and the Theosophy movement which encouraged paedophilia and free sex as set out by C W Leadbetter and others. Scriabin was having sex with very young girls at an early age and was later dismissed from a Music College over yet another sex scandal. He was a nihilist believing that he should not adhere to the law or any rules and approved Nietzsche's campaign against all morality. Scriabin said that he was greater than Christ and then said he was Christ and, to prove it, walked on the waters of Lake Geneva and had to be rescued from drowning.

He said that ecstasy was in his music but admitted it was eroticism and pornography. He said that the world would end with a universal sexual orgy where everybody would be shagging everybody. Even little girls would want to have sex with any boy, man or woman and there would be no shame. I find that grossly offensive, utterly repulsive, disgusting and blatantly immoral and it tells us a lot about Scriabin.

Several musicologists have said the same as the composer that unless you understand the eroticism you cannot appreciate his music. You have to understand where each copulation appears in the music said the composer.

It is irrefutable that Scriabin was mentally ill and while it cannot be said that all mentally ill composers always wrote poor music, perhaps in Scriabin's case that may be right. I am thinking of a British composer who was struck down with Alzheimer's disease and the music he wrote when so ill was really awful.

He had some strange and interesting views about colour in music and key signatures such as

C represents red and the Human Will and so if I am listening to Haydn's Symphony no. 41

in C major should I thinking about the colour red and the human will?

F is dark red and the diversification of Will

B flat sharp represents the rose or steel and speaks of lust and passion

G represents orange and signifies creative play

A flat represents lilac/ violet and the spirit moving into matter

and so on

The legend of Prometheus appealed to Scriabin since this mythical figure symbolised the human spirit's rebellion against Divine authority which was Scriabin's lifetime goal. The work is imbued with theosophy and pornography. This eroticism is introduced by a piano figure marked Voluptuous, almost with sorrow... make of that what you will. There is a good conclusion to this piece but the preceding 21 minutes has already driven you to distraction. The good conclusion is just a racket wrote one reviewer.

This orchestral chunk of music lasting 24 minutes is boring. There are no links or coherence, nor clear structure but un-unified chunks. It is excessive with spiritualism and psychic notions.

The CD ends with orchestrations of four piano preludes, a piece called Fragilite and the Funeral March from the Piano Sonata no. 1. I must confess that they are very well orchestrated but that does not save the pieces from being trite.

There is another dreadful piano concerto. Elgar worked on one from 1913 until his death and Robert Mathew-Walker has taken the sketches and turned them into a 37 minute concerto and David Owen Norris has recorded it for Dutton. Rob Barnett of Music Web. International, who is not a musician and writes rubbish, writes:

" Only Elgar fundamental purists will avoid this -- and those who do will be seen to be cutting off their nose to spite their face."

As Barnett uses extreme verbage, what does he mean?

Cutting off your nose to spite your face is self-destruction or over-irritation to a problem and acting out of pique which is a state of vexation caused by indignity or wounded pride.

My dislike of the Scriabin and Elgar concertos is certainly not my self-destruction. If anything, it is self-preservation. It is not that I am over-irritated by the music. It is simply that the music is not good. I have not suffered any indignity or wounded pride. Pride and narcissism are features of these two composers respective personalities. Pride and pomposity are weaknesses. They are defined as foolish opinions and acts of grandeur and, as such, can only be possessed by foolish people. I eschew pride as

a basic human weakness and so I have no wounded pride in my understandable and justified dislike of the Scriabin and the Elgar.

The facts of the matter are that Elgar could not write for the piano. John Ogdon told me that he regretted recording Elgar's Concert Allegro. All pianists I know have said the same about Elgar's writing for the piano. It is very poor. Unlike Elgar, Sibelius was a very great composer, but, sadly, he could not write for the piano either.

Why do people make allowances for poor and substandard music and go to so much trouble to promote it? It is this that creates problems, and highlights the people who are selfish, inconsiderate and who elevate dreadful music when better music lies dormant and should be their goal.

In conclusion, and as I am a fair man, the pianist on this CD is very good and the sound is generally fine. The conductor certainly is on top of his game. Pity about the music!

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