

CD REVIEW 44

NINO GVETADZE: Widmung

Piano works by Franz Liszt

Nino Gvetadze (piano)

Orchid Classics ORC100017 (56.29)

LISZT:

Hungarian Rhapsody no 10 in E major

Ballade no 2 in B minor

SCHUMANN transcribed Liszt:

Widmung

SCHUBERT transcribed Liszt:

Gretchen at the spinning Wheel

LISZT:

Piano Sonata in B minor



I have always admired this pianist since I saw her play the Piano Concerto no 2 in A by Liszt. It was lyrical, accurate and spellbinding. She did not set out to barn storm as some pianists do. It was a performance in which she was subservient to the music as all musicians should be, but I hasten to add that the performance was not weak or submissive but entirely satisfying.

This welcome recital includes some of the most difficult music to play. In fact, at times, the technical skill that is required is overwhelmingly formidable.

Only the very greatest pianists can really play this music, and they are comparatively few although every pianist seems to want to conquer this Everest.

The Hungarian Rhapsody no 10 is really a set of variations and is full of glissandi which I must confess does become a little wearisome. But the variety that Gvetadze brings to the glissandi is quite amazing. She keeps the theme with a precision clarity and copes well with all the technical demands. She follows the score without deviation or hesitation. It is not great music but the performance is truly great.

The Ballade no 2 in B minor presents even greater difficulties. It is a stop and start piece or, if you prefer, it is episodic. It is very problematical to make it sound like a complete piece and not just miscellaneous chunks. I believe Gvetadze does this and she has all the equipment for lyricism, feeling, excitement, skill, panache and is an excellent communicator. Again she follows the score faithfully (wish some of the famous pianists would) and one can only be staggered and overwhelmed by her performance.

Her playing is not clinical. She is not out to show how brilliant she is, although she certainly is. It is not self-promotion but the promotion of the composer who understood the piano better than any composer.

Some of the quiet passages are truly sensual and irresistibly appealing.

I never understood why Liszt transcribed other composer's music. Was it to make it known? I doubt it because in his day you would have to pay expensive entrance fees to his concerts which the common man could not afford. Did he make these transcription to improve the pieces as Mahler did with the Schumann symphonies? If so, he was wrong, for what a composer wrote is what we should hear and

in the form in which it was written. Liszt made these transcriptions to show his versatility and superlative talent and if he were to play in Vienna he would have to play Schubert who was all the rage there!

Schumann was a different matter and Liszt had a genuine liking for this troubled and tragic composer. In fact he dedicated his massive Sonata to Schumann.

Incidentally, widmung means dedication or dedicated to.

This performance is so good and it revealed a few similarities between the Ballade no 2 and the Sonata and not just because it is in the same key.

The Sonata seems to be being played by everyone now. It seems to be the pinnacle to which all pianists have to aspire. It is the ultimate goal, the finest achievement any pianist can attain. It is the ultimate test and has to be conquered.

I would not have thought that this was Gvetadze's objective. She has this masterpiece and tour de force in her grasp. Her interpretation is convincing. She possesses an enviable lyricism, a coherence, a clear understanding of the work and a performance that is in the top rank. She follows the score and again is faithful to the composer's intentions. She controls her tremendous crescendos and generates powerful excitement. Her double octaves are reliable and quite amazing. The big grandiose theme is played straight without being mawkish, as it should be, and comes across well.

Like the Ballade, the work is episodic and very difficult to resent as a continuous one movement work. I am not in favour of CD sleeves breaking the work down in sections and listing the various tempi. It gives a wrong impression of several movements which is not true.

When it comes to comparisons the Peter Katin performance on Athene is undoubtedly the best and the extra marvel of that performance is that it was live.

I believe Gvetadze comes second but I would not use the expression second best. It is a performance to treasure of what must be the finest and most challenging piano sonata of them all.

Go out and buy this CD and let us hope for more fantastic feats from this superb musician

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