

## CD REVIEW

**ANJA GERMAN:** Haydn, Chopin & Schubert, ddv 24136



**HAYDN:** Keyboard Sonata in C minor, Hob.XVI.20

**SCHUBERT:** Piano Sonata in C minor, D. 958

**CHOPIN:** Scherzo no. 2 in B flat minor, op. 31

Anja German was the winner of the 2007 Manchester International Concerto Competition for young pianists. She is 22 and comes from Slovenia and is currently studying at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. She has also won prizes in Slovenia, the European Piano Teachers Association International Competition and the ZF Musikpreis International Competition in Germany. She has given recitals throughout Europe.

The recital begins with Haydn's Sonata in C minor of 1771 in which Miss German displays clear fingerwork, unfussy ornamentation and the nuances are well caught. The music has a tragic feel often associated with the key of C minor but 'often the sun comes out and everyone rises up to play.' The contrast of intensity and playfulness is well revealed. The only blemish is the ugly pedal releases which the engineers should have put right. The slow movement in A flat major has a glorious theme but often 'early' composers spoiled such themes with ornamentation, but Miss German does release its beauty. The finale is both an allegro and a minuet which seems to be a contradiction in terms.

The Schubert sonata, also in C minor, has a convincing performance and to those of us who have grave reservations about Schubert's piano music, and many concert pianists do, I am pleased to report that I enjoyed it. There is a strength and conviction in this performance and an excellent contrast of tone. The difficulty with Schubert is that he did not complete many works, all his stage works were failures and his piano music is often mere padding. The D major sonata has about five minutes of scales and broken chords at one time. His music is repetitive and a great deal of it is 'taken' from Rossini and Beethoven. This sonata obviously has 'thefts' from Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor and the Kreutzer Sonata. Therefore it lacks originality. However, Anja German does not play it in the way many pianists do since she does not play it in an effeminate music-box way but with strength and rhythmic drive.



The Chopin second scherzo is probably the best of the four and is technically the most demanding piece on the disc. It is marked presto. I have a few misgivings about this performance. The crotchets rests in bars 18 and 19 are not observed and the pedal is left down as it is in 42 and 43. She does not spread some chords which have to be spread, bars 71 and 73 for example. There are a few unauthorised rallentandos and when we come to the middle section in three sharps there is a loss of continuity but that is Chopin's fault and the speed in this performance sometimes drops to crotchet equals about 110 which is certainly not presto. There is no instruction in the score to lessen the speed. In this central section Chopin loses his way and indulges in the salon music of his nocturnes and mazurkas.

While I may refer to the pianist's 'minor variations', it must be said that most pianists take liberties when playing Chopin as they do with Scriabin. I have yet to hear Scriabin's first prelude of his twenty four preludes played as written. Interpretation is not liberty or license. It is realising as far as possible what the composer has written.

The other problem with Anja's performance is that the top F on her piano does not have a pretty sound.

With experience and maturity will come better performances but it is a successful debut recital, a little short on playing time but the sparkle in the Chopin, the strength in the Schubert and the feeling in the Haydn augurs well for a glittering career.

But I do urge her to put the music first and not fashion, schools of thought or teachers or traditional views or to take liberties with the music. We all want to hear what the composer wrote not the pianists alterations.



I shall watch her career with great interest.

David C F Wright, DMus