

CD REVIEW 92

BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV (pianist)
SAINT SAENS arr LISZT Danse macabre
PROKOFIEV Suggestion Diabolique Op 4 no 4, Sonata
no 6 in A op 82
LISZT Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude, Mephisto
Waltz no 1
DECCA 478 3301 (70.53).

This pianist won the 2009 London International Piano Competition and played the Prokofiev Piano Concerto no. 3. The following year he gave a debut recital in the Wigmore Hall again to great acclaim. There is no doubt that he is a phenomenal pianist with an amazing and enviable technique. He is 21 and comes from Tashkent.



I occasionally use comparisons but generally they are odious. The Independent posed this question, Could this feeble-faced child be a new Horowitz? I find that offensive. Feeble-faced? A child? No child could play this repertoire although there have been a few child prodigies. In fact his performances are decidedly manly as they have to be in the percussive and dramatic content particularly in the Prokofiev. The expression feeble-faced is a ridiculous and unkind. The Independent calls his playing stunning and the MusicWeb can only manage magnificent.

There is a worrying trend today to play all these virtuoso works flat out and concentrate on power and technique. The fireworks become more important than the music. This pianist falls into that category as does Khatia Buniatishvili. Technique is fine but musicality is just as important. It is the music that should impress initially.

However, Abduraimov has a sensitive and lyrical side as shown in Liszt's Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude a piece of great beauty and depth. One would like to hear him in another Liszt masterpiece Funerailles. And to shut the mouth of The Independent these works sort out the men from the boys.

The Liszt of Saint Saens could have done with a variation in tone of the repeated note at the beginning but this pianist does sometimes capture the macabre feel of the piece with wonderfully accented bass notes. The music at the other end of the piano seems to trip gaily. The punctuation is just right. The clarity of the finger work is excellent.

I often question the need for transcribing orchestral works for the piano. There is no doubt that the orchestral version is vastly superior because it does contain the macabre and sinister elements. The piano version is too fast that the eeriness is lost. The playing, however, is sensational and the sound is very bright. There is a problem with pedalling at around 7. 30.

Now to real piano music by the finest Russian composer of piano music namely Prokofiev. His Suggestion Diabolique no 4 is creepy and has some frightening chords and plenty of action. What breathtaking climaxes. The top of the piano sounds a little too shrill for my taste but this miniature is a big work.

The Sonata no 6 is the first of his great late sonatas. It is in four movements and lasts just under half an hour. The rhythmic vitality is well caught. Prokofiev's music is anti-Romantic and therefore has a satisfying strength. But his lyrical music as in this sonata is very telling. The virtuosity is choice, the excitement utterly stimulating and the content is memorable. His characterisation in the second movement has to be heard to be believed.

It is a pity that the sleeve notes do not say much about the music but harp on about this pianist being like Horowitz which seems to put this young pianist down and there needs to be less high octane in the playing, Virtuosity must not equate with musical fireworks.

The Liszt pieces are well played and are super pieces.

If you like sheer virtuosity you will love this CD. If you want a more musical approach in the Prokofiev you can do no better than John Lill and when it comes to Liszt, Leslie Howard is your man.

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