



Commanding technique: Yukiko Kojima surveys the entire piano output to date of Japanese composer Akira Miyoshi

on this music, Sten Lassmann is no less authoritative as an interpreter and benefits from warm as well as wide-ranging sound. Those who have yet to investigate Eller's piano output should certainly begin here.

Richard Whitehouse

Godowsky

'Piano Music, Vol 11'

Six Pieces for Both Hands (Concert Album).

Märchen. Suite for the Left Hand Alone. Prelude and Fugue for the Left Hand Alone. Moto perpetuo. Symphonic Metamorphoses of the Schatz-Walzer (J Strauss II)

Konstantin Scherbakov *pf*

Marco Polo © 8 225350 (75' • DDD)



Scherbakov's Marco Polo Godowsky survey continues

Konstantin Scherbakov has been slowly working his way through the complete piano music of Leopold Godowsky since 1996. He has now reached Vol 11. The penultimate track is a dizzying performance of Godowsky's brief, early (1889) *Moto perpetuo* in F – a work that harks back to Vol 1, containing the formidable recasting of the same work made a decade later, raised a semitone and retitled Toccata, Op 13. One other early work features on the present disc: *Märchen* ('Fairy Tale'), a conventional but

catchy character piece from 1888. The remaining music comes from late in Godowsky's career, when he composed a series of pieces for the left hand alone. Six of these, issued separately, were also published in versions for two hands – the form in which they are heard here – and contain some of Godowsky's most attractive music, winningly performed by Scherbakov (well recorded, incidentally, at Wyastone).

I don't think it is the pianist's fault that the Suite for the left hand alone (1929) sounds so dreadfully dull. The perception of endless even quavers throughout the eight movements, with their Baroque titles and late-Romantic polyphony, makes for a long 31'30". Far better is the Prelude and Fugue for the left hand alone on B-A-C-H, a truly inspired work, though I prefer Hamelin's lighter touch and pedalling on his Musica Viva recording from 1988. Scherbakov finishes with the *Symphonic Metamorphoses* on themes from *The Gypsy Baron*. Leon Fleisher is more flamboyant on his 1991 Sony recording but Scherbakov makes one marvel anew at what just five fingers and two feet can achieve.

Jeremy Nicholas

Prelude & Fugue – selected comparison:

Hamelin (MUSI) MVCD1026

Sym Metamorphoses – selected comparison:

Fleisher (10/93) (SONY) SK48081 or 88725 45997-2

Liszt

Frühlingsglaube (Schubert), S557c. Frühlingsnacht (Schumann), S568. Réminiscences de Don Juan (Mozart), S418. Symphonie fantastique (Berlioz), S470. Tristan und Isolde (Wagner) Liebestod, S447 (arr Moszkowski/O'Riley)

Christopher O'Riley *pf*

Oxingle ② OX2020 (84' • DDD)

Also available on ② OX2021 (1080p)



Bostonian pianist offers Liszt on CD and DVD

Christopher O'Riley (b1956) is not your conventional concert pianist. In recital he mixes standard fare (Debussy, Rachmaninov et al) with his transcriptions of Radiohead songs.

The first thing that strikes you is the dry, unsympathetic piano sound, admittedly better on the Blu-ray film version of the recital than on the CD. Perhaps – to quote the most irritating booklet of the year – it's the studio's 'adobe-like walls' or the Steinway 'enhanced when Mike Toia of the Big Island of Hawaii shaped current New York Steinway hammers onto it, abetting its native sonority with their old-fashioned heavy felt'. Whatever that means, it lacks bloom and depth.

The second thing one notes is that the pianist plays from digital scores displayed on a monitor. If O'Riley's head nodding up and

down like a corn-fed chicken doesn't disengage you from the music, then what assuredly will is the arbitrary footage of 'Chris walking in the spring snow' and the alpine [*sic*] environment around the Colorado-based studio. The aim is 'to summon up the landscapes in which the composers wrote these pieces: musical necromancy,' says the booklet, 'where Persephone plays the spring up [*sic*]. Irrelevant. Distracting. Doesn't work.

For those more interested in the performances, O'Riley has the full measure of Liszt's technical demands but few of the musical ones. After an unconvincing start, the final pages of *Don Juan* pass by in a blur of unrelieved *fortissimo* and just-about-*presto* during which nuanced pianism is rarely on show. O'Riley includes the *ad libitum* passage before the 'finale', frequently omitted on the grounds of good taste, but oddly loses the 34 bars preceding it.

The Liebestod is a conflation of Liszt's and Moszkowski's arrangements with some additions from O'Riley. As for the Berlioz, a formidable challenge for any pianist, one tips the hat to O'Riley for a creditable dispatch of this most Alkanesque of Liszt's myriad transcriptions. It is hardly surprising that the pianist thunders towards the end of the 'Witches' Sabbath' bathed in perspiration. O'Riley, we are told somewhat disconcertingly, learned the *Symphonie fantastique* after being asked by 'Basil Twist to accompany his critically acclaimed underwater puppet show [of the same title]'. You couldn't make it up – unlike the track timings for the Mozart and Wagner items on the back covers of both formats.

Jeremy Nicholas

Miyoshi

Piano Sonata. *Chânes*. *En vers*.

Pour le piano/Mouvement circulaire et croisé

Yukiko Kojima *pf*

Odradek © ODRCD306 (68' • DDD)



First time on one disc for all Miyoshi's piano works

The piano works of Akira Miyoshi (*b*1933) may not be as well known as those of his late colleague and countryman Tōru Takemitsu, although they often turn up in recitals showcasing distinguished Japanese composers. Kumi Ogano's premiere recordings of the Sonata, *Chânes* and *En vers* came out on a long-out-of-print 1991 Koch Discover release. To these works Yukiko Kojima adds the two part *Pour le piano* and *Mouvement circulaire et croisé*, which were composed in 1995 and 1998.

Berg's harmonic language comes to mind in the earliest work, the 1958 three-movement Sonata, along with Bartókian rhythmic drive in the finale and whirling two-handed patterns that resemble what might have happened if

Messiaen recomposed the last movement of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata. Kojima plays this music with a commanding technique and a true sense of how its component parts cohere. In *Chânes*, Kojima imparts sharply contrasting character to all of the disparate textures, from slow and amorphous sustained chords to rapid, spiky flourishes. Gently dense harmonies define the soft chordal movement in the outer sections of *En vers*, while the central climax typifies Miyoshi's thorniest dissonant outbursts. Of the two most recent pieces, *Mouvement circulaire et croisé* stands out for its short phrases demarcated by pauses, and the way the phrases grow increasingly elaborate and petulant yet never clutter the canvas. Again, Kojima's feeling for nuance and intelligent voicings make a compelling case for a composer who deserves greater renown in the West. The sound is fine but this piano music would benefit further from a more luminous, resonant ambience.

Jed Distler

Myaskovsky

Piano Sonatas – No 2, Op 13; No 3, Op 19; No 4, Op 27

Lydia Jardon *pf*

Ar Re-Se © AR2009-2 (47' • DDD)



Pianist Jardon plays 'music of wrath' on her own label

For Lydia Jardon, a passionately committed advocate, the piano sonatas of Nikolay Myaskovsky (1881-1950), are 'music of wrath', a remark complemented by Georges Hallfa in his accompanying notes when he says that the Second and Third sonatas show 'an absolute, inescapable disarray'. Such an estimate reflects music that mirrors a courageous and contradictory personality, one that tells us of the tragic history of Russia but also captures a 'philosophy of withdrawal'. Myaskovsky was determinedly detached if never unaware of the mayhem of Stalin's Russia and of the humiliations heaped on composers.

The boldly declamatory start of the Second Sonata suggests a parallel with certain works by Szymanowski. Was Graham Hair in his transcendental étude *Wild Cherries and Honeycomb* (composed for the 1998 Scottish International Piano Competition) influenced by the flickering, hallucinatory play of ideas in the Fourth Sonata's finale? Yet such intriguing questions are swept aside when you listen to Lydia Jardon's performances, which are of an exceptional power and musical fervour. She is, indeed, 'precise, supple and profound' as well as a believer that 'music is stronger than violence'. She has taught Bosnian and Serbian students side by side and also formed a remarkable music festival on the island of Ushant off the coast of Brittany. Not surprisingly, her playing reflects her human concerns and she has been finely recorded. **Bryce Morrison**

GRAMOPHONE *Archive*

Liszt's Don Juan Fantasy

Three pianists who came before Christopher O'Riley, and how Gramophone rated them



OCTOBER 1954

Liszt Don Juan Fantasy

Shura Cherkassky *pf*

HMV © ALP1154 (12in' • 36s 5½d)

As an exhibition of keyboard mechanics, Shura Cherkassky's performance is formidable. But as music-making – that is another matter! His performance bears the evidence of careful, painstaking thought about each note, but the tone is often hard and ugly, and for poetry we shall look in vain. The *Don Juan Fantasy* is a rhapsody on 'Là ci darem', with a coda on 'Fin ch'han dal vino' – an ingenious and tricky composition that needs to be played with a good deal more charm than Cherkassky will allow to it. The recorded tone gives a fair representation of what Cherkassky's playing sounds like in the concert hall.

Anthony Pollard



DECEMBER 1990

Liszt Réminiscences de

Don Juan, S418

Leslie Howard *pf*

Hyperion © CDA66371/2 (156' • DDD)

I listened first of all to the *Don Juan Fantasy*, of which I suppose I have heard around a dozen versions on disc. I am afraid that this is not Howard at his best. The runs in double-notes before the 'Là ci darem la mano' theme comes in give him problems and the first variation is rather tired-sounding. However, the champagne aria material is very nicely done and the work is rounded off with much more liveliness. The piano sound is frequently unnecessarily reverberant, the bass especially often sounding ridiculously overblown. In *fortes* the tone lacks some presence.

James Methuen-Campbell



MAY 2004

Liszt Réminiscences de

Don Juan, S418

Lang Lang *pf*

DG © 474 875-2GH (97' • DDD)

Blessed with phenomenal dexterity and an ebullient personality, Lang Lang has attracted an enormous amount of publicity, but this present recital raises the question of whether his musicianship matches his profile. The CD does at least spare us the ecstatic facial expressions which even Dirk Bogarde in *Song Without End* would have considered hammy. The Liszt is simply a vehicle for Lang Lang's astonishing athleticism, and must be among the most vapid and unmusical accounts ever to be heard in Carnegie Hall.

Jeremy Nicholas

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