

## THE ART OF K. N. IGUMNOV

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata No. 7, D major, Op. 10/3 - 2nd movement, Largo e mesto; CHOPIN: Piano Sonata No. 3, B minor, Op. 58 - 2nd movement, Scherzo, molto vivace, and 3rd movement, Largo; SCHUBERT: Moment musical, C sharp minor, Op. 94/4, D. 780, no. 4; LIADOV: Prelude, B minor, Op. 11/1; RUBINSTEIN: Impromptu, F major, Op. 16/1; TCHAIKOVSKY-PABST: Berceuse, A flat minor, Op. 16/1; TCHAIKOVSKY: Aveu passione, E minor, c. 1891; Reverie dussoir, G minor, Op. 19/1; Grande Sonate, G major, Op. 37 - 2nd movement, Andante non troppo quasi moderato. Recorded on tape at a recital in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, December 3, 1947. MELODIYA S10-05519-20.

SCHUMANN: Kreisleriana, Op. 16 (recorded on audiofilm, 1941); CHOPIN: Mazurka, B major, Op. 56/1; SCRIABIN: Poem, F sharp major, Op. 32/2 (restored from metal parts for unissued commercial recordings made in 1935); SCRIABIN: Mazurka, F sharp minor, Op. 25/7; RACHMANINOV: Barcarole, G minor, Op. 10/3; RUBINSTEIN: Prelude, F minor, Op. 75/9; RUBINSTEIN: Melancholy, G minor, Op. 51/1 (recorded on "celluloid" discs at a recital in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Fall 1946). MELODIYA S10-05521-2.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Les Saisons (The Months), 12 morceaux caracteristiques, Op. 37-bix. Recorded on tape for commercial issue, 1947. MELODIYA S10-05523-4.

SCHUMANN: Dichterliebe, Op. 48. Ivan Kozlovsky, tenor; K. N. Igumnov, piano; (recorded on tape for commercial issue, 1946); TCHAIKOVSKY: Trio, A minor, for violin, cello, and piano, Op. 50 - Part 1, Pezzo elegaico. David Oistrakh, violin; Sviatoslav Knushevitzky, cello; K. N. Igumnov, piano. (recorded on audiofilm at a concert in the Moscow Conservatory, 1939). MELODIYA S10-05525-6. Available in the USA only as a boxed set of four discs, c. \$24.00.

Konstantin Nikolayevich Igumnov (May 1, 1873 - March 24, 1948) spent his lifetime pretty much confined within the borders of the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia. Born in Lebediany, he received early music instruction at home, and entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1888. His musical education from that point onward is a near-duplicate of his much-better-known fellow student, Sergei Rachmaninov. Both had preparatory piano studies with Nikolai Zverev, prior to their matriculation at the Conservatory. Both then studied with Aleksandr Siloti and Pavel Pabst, took theory and composition courses from Sergei Taneyev, Anton Arensky, and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, and a chamber music ensemble course with N. Safonov. Igumnov graduated in 1894, and received an honorary diploma for piano performance at the 1895 Rubinstein Competition. In 1899 he became Professor of Piano at the Moscow Conservatory, and occupied that position for the rest of his life. From 1924 to 1929 he was Rector of the Conservatory.

He concertized extensively through late middle age, and later

confined his recitals to the premises of the Conservatory - where at least two were in part recorded. It is to this circumstance that we owe rather more than half of the existing documentation of his playing, for he disliked making records, and his studio recording activities were extremely limited.

To judge from contemporary commentary on Igumnov, he shared something of the personality characteristics of Sergei Taneyev - warmth, honesty, and kindness tempering intensely high musical and intellectual standards. There are few of his students that are well-known outside the Soviet Union, for Igumnov did not preside over a virtuoso-mill. An abbreviated list of the best-known products of his pedagogy is illuminating: Nikolai Orlov, Issay Dobrowen, Lev Oborin, Yakov Flier, Maria Grinberg, Aleksandr Iokheles, Naum Shtarkman, and Bella Davidovich.

It is regrettable that Melodiya found so much of the existing recorded material to be "short of the lowest technical requirements," and so we have isolated movements of Beethoven's Op. 10/3 and Chopin's Op. 58 - in performances that will make the listener wish they were to be had complete. These are primitive tape-recordings, restricted in range and dynamics, distorted and unstable in speed, but what comes through is totally engrossing - a "floating" approach, modest in dynamics, clearly articulated and voiced, and wholly attentive to the shaping of each entire movement. Affectionate attention to detail, and a similar modesty of expression characterizes Igumnov's playing of the smaller works in the set. There is no music here that is not illuminated by this meticulous, tasteful - even "aristocratic" (not a word one finds in Soviet criticism) treatment.

The short pieces recorded in the 1946 recital are the poorest in sound, with lots of acetate noise and blasting; the audiofilm material is surprisingly good, but is afflicted with sharp level drops and some pitch instability.

Best of all, of course, is the commercially-recorded music, including a pair of 1935-78's, miraculously resurrected from metal parts. Ivan Kozlovsky's performance of Schumann's Dichterliebe is surprising in its high musical quality, with only a few lapses in articulation. It does not come off well in Russian, perhaps because the singer's diction is distractingly good. Igumnov's contribution is strong, accurate, and well-balanced.

This set was issued more or less in commemoration of Igumnov's centenary, and would in the ordinary course of events by now be effectively out of print. However, a New York City retail store (which shall be nameless, since they are about as obliging as the proverbial steamroller) failed to display the records upon arrival, and so this reviewer found, at the beginning of this summer, that their stock consisted of some eighty copies. For this benighted nation, that will probably serve the needs of all interested parties.