

THE ART OF DINU LIPATTI

Bach: Partita No. 1 in B flat, BWV 825, Bach-Busoni: Choral Preludes: Nun Komm' der Heiden Heiland, BWV 599; Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 639, Bach-Hess: Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, Bach-Kempff: Siciliana, Mozart: Sonata in A Minor, K. 310, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in C Major, K. 467 (with Herbert von Karajan and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra), Scarlatti: Sonatas in E, KK 380 and D Minor, KK 9, Liszt: Sonetto del Petrarca No. 104, Ravel: Alborado del Gracioso, Chopin: Barcarolle in F sharp Minor, Op. 60, Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58, Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27, No. 2, Mazurka in C sharp Minor, Op. 50, No. 3, Waltz in A flat, Op. 34, No. 1, Concerto No. 1 in E Minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 11 (with unlisted conductor and orchestra), Enesco: Sonata No. 3 in D, Op. 24. Compiled and re-mastered by Keith Hardwick. EMI RLS 749. Imported by German News Company, 218 E. 86th Street, NYC 10028.

These performances are so familiar to most collectors that reviewing them, yet again, seems almost presumptuous. In fact, for most readers the most important concerns are the quality of the transfers and the documentation provided with the set. In comparison with several Electrolas issued a few years ago, the new English pressings provide a brighter, clearer, and less overly resonant sound which is preferable, though the difference is marginal. If one already owns the German series, I really doubt that this new set is worth the outlay, especially since the EMI surfaces are not as quiet as one might wish. However, our thanks is still due to Keith Hardwick for making the live concerto performances quite listenable and to someone at EMI for providing proper documentation such as recording dates, matrix numbers, etc.

Lipatti's playing is simply a joy, a life-enhancing experience. His purity of thought or spirituality is consistently stimulating and rewarding. The smallest details are lovingly worked out, each phrase exquisitely shaped, and all technical hurdles effortlessly met, yet his playing never seems mechanical or dull in the way that one might expect from such a description as the above. Everything is always fresh, vibrant, and wonderfully liquid. There is the impression that the music is not being performed, but instead, one is somehow given a view of the creative process itself, a glimpse directly into the psyche of the composer.

My favorite performance here is the Bach Partita with its beautifully shaded Sarabande and miraculously voiced Minuet. Also, notice the delicate color changes in repeats and the final Gigue, which instead of being rushed through, is given superb clarity and a wonderful lilt. The transcriptions are likewise excellent with Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring being uniquely special. Again in the Scarlatti Sonatas, the music speaks for itself; I cannot imagine a better performance of the one in E Major.

His Mozart is also wonderful, neither inflated nor scrawny, yet somehow profound and sparkling. For once the finale of the A Minor Sonata does seem to be a letdown, and despite the Concerto being marred

by a slightly anachronistic first movement cadenza, it still receives a glorious performance. The Liszt builds to a perfectly sustained climax, and the Ravel is certainly one of the most dazzling examples of piano virtuosity on disc. Enesco's Third Sonata is also most enjoyable. In contrast to most critics, I find much to admire in the piece, as well as in Lipatti's reading of it; it really should be played more.

His Chopin, with its singing lines effortlessly arched with aristocratic restraint and its expansive climaxes, is sublime. The Barcarolle with amazing double trills unfolds naturally and completely avoids the stridency that so often blights so many performances of this work. The First Concerto also receives one of its finest recordings. The passage-work in the development of the first movement is perfectly controlled, but notice how the underlying sense of direction in the harmonic movement is still brought out without the slightest sensation of rushing. Mention must also be made of the un-named conductor, rumored to be Witold Rowicki; the piece is given as a true collaboration and certainly profits from it.

It almost seems churlish to complain about the B Minor Sonata, but I really do not believe that this performance represents Lipatti at his best. Though the last movement is electrifying, many of the lyrical moments seem unprojected, almost flaccid. Compare him with his teacher Cortot on Pathé 2C 153 03090-6, a collection every bit as essential as the one under review, to see what is missing in the second subject of the first movement, much of the third movement, and above all the central section of the second movement. It is not the absence of Cortot's wonderfully idiomatic rubato that I miss, but the melodies simply do not sing. However, by normal standards this is still remarkable pianism.

If one does not own these performances or owns some of the Odyssey issues in electronic stereo, by all means buy this collection. Though it is frustrating in that it makes us long for Lipatti recordings of say the Liszt Sonata, the Chopin F Minor Ballade, or Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit, let us not be depressed but instead treasure what we have, for that playing of Dinu Lipatti is simply one of the highest peaks in twentieth-century performance practice.

VLADIMIR DE PACHMANN: PIANO RECITAL

Chopin: Preludes in F, D Minor, and B flat Minor, Op. 28, Nos. 23, 24, and 16, Impromptu in A flat, Op. 29, Nocturne in E flat, Op. 9, No. 2, Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27, No. 2, Waltz in G flat, Op. Posth, Eccossaise in D flat, Op. Posth., Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58: Scherzo, Etude in F, Op. 25, No. 3 (two performances), Mazurkas in C Minor, B Minor, and A Minor, Op. 33, Nos. 3 and 4, Op. 67, No. 4, Liszt: Liebestraeume No. 3, Polonaise Cadenza in E Major, Rigoletto Paraphrase, Raff-Henselt: La Fileuse in F Sharp, Op. 155, No. 2, Schumann: Fantasie-stuecke, Op. 12, No. 4: Grillen, Brahms: Capriccio in C Sharp Minor, Op. 76, No. 5 (Recorded Dec., 1915 and Jan., 1916) Transfers by Keith Hardwick. Toshiba-EMI GR 2322

Most record collectors and piano buffs know Vladimir de Pachmann as an eccentric phony who used numerous extra-musical shenanigans to cover up his inadequate technique. However, de Pachmann had an enormous following in his day and surely did not build his reputation at the start of his career by acting like a clown. The present record taken from English Columbias made in 1915 and 1916 provides an opportunity to examine his playing before the obvious deterioration that characterizes his later electrical recordings had set in.

What one hears is indeed eccentric, at times dazzling, at others, hopelessly distorted. Often, both qualities exist side by side in the same piece. His technique is for the most part very impressive with wonderful scalework in the right hand and one of the best trills I have ever heard. He was, of course, a Chopin specialist, and most of the repertoire included here is by Chopin.

The F Major Prelude is superb; in this work his rubato is not in the least bit exaggerated, but instead gently shapes the outline of the piece. The D Minor Prelude is rather lacking in drama and contains a completely gratuitous chord at its conclusion. But notice the descending double thirds; Pollini could not do them any better. The B flat Minor Prelude is slightly out of control and points up a noticeably weaker left hand. The outer sections of the Impromptu are charming, but the middle section is mauled by a refusal to keep anything resembling a straight beat. The opposite is true of the G flat Waltz. The middle section is pure poetry, while the opening and closing are so distorted that they sound like two-four time.

The two Nocturnes continue in the same vein. The D flat builds with a perfectly arched melody to a wonderful climax, while the E flat one sounds absolutely seasick with constant breaking of the hands and distortions in the left hand that defy belief. However, that melody itself is very beautifully stated and the closing cadenza is quite lovely. Both readings of the F Major Etude are excellent. Even on these ancient recordings one can tell that his tone must have been most beguiling. All three Mazurkas are superb with the rubato being not at all out of place; he certainly captures the pensive character of these pieces. The Scherzo of the B Minor Sonata provides a by now familiar quandary, wonderfully fleet and limpid outer sections that encase a distorted mess.

The Liszt Polonaise Cadenza shows that he could summon considerable power, while his poetic reading of the Liebestraeume is marred again by excessive distortions in the accompaniment. The trashy Rigoletto Paraphrase receives a technically impressive performance; yet when Liszt's cascading scales are combined with de Pachmann's mushy rubato, the resulting effect is like an incredibly gifted cocktail pianist. Schumann's "Grillen" comes off quite well, while the Brahms Capriccio lacks a sense of line.

Pianophiles owe it to themselves to obtain this record. While de Pachmann can be uneven and eccentric, just like Glenn Gould he can also

be very stimulating. He most assuredly was not a charlatan, at least at this stage of his career anyway. Our appreciation is certainly due to Keith Hardwick for making this material so listenable and to Toshiba for making it available.

Walter Pate