
Sound Recording Reviews

GODOWSKY: The Pianists' Pianist.

Leopold Godowsky, piano. Appian Publications and Recordings. Vol. 1, APR 7010 (2 discs), Vol. 2, APR 7011 (2 discs).

Vol. 1 Disc 1: Beethoven: Sonata No. 26 in E-flat, Op. 81a (Les Adieux), 1929; Grieg: Ballade in G minor, Op. 24 (1929); Schumann: Carnival, Op. 9 (1929); Chopin: Selected Nocturnes (1928).

Disc 2: Chopin: Selected Nocturnes (1928), Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35 (1930).

Vol. 2. Disc 1: U.S. Columbia Recordings, 1913-16; Godowskyana (1920-35/36); Godowsky Rarities (1920-25).

Disc 2: Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Dohnány: (1920-26); Debussy and Chopin (1921-30).

A warm welcome should be accorded to these two valuable releases from Appian Publications and Recordings (APR) and Brian Crimp. As in their two earlier issues devoted to Rosenthal and Moiseiwitsch, the collector is provided with easy access to much rare or previously unavailable material of great historical interest. This is APR's first compact disc release. Hopefully, the earlier productions mentioned above will be issued soon in CD format. Excellent documentation accompanies these transfers which are very listenable, though some may find them a little dull in the treble.

Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938) remains a legendary yet enigmatic figure. Professor of a fabled technique, he apparently suffered from a nerve problem which caused him to tighten up in front of audiences and in the recording studio. According to Harold Schonberg in *The Great Pianists* (New York: 1987), Godowsky was at his best in small, intimate gatherings in his own home. The two collections under review offer his complete British Columbia recordings (1928-30) on APR 7010, as well as the APR 7011 discs containing such works as an anthology of his American performances (1913-1916), the E Major Scherzo of Chopin from the pianist's final session (during which he suffered a stroke), and a private recording from 1935 or 1936 on which he plays his own composition "The Gardens of Buitenzorg." Judging from this brief latter example, the pianist was able to regain a considerable amount of keyboard faculty after his stroke of 1930.

In the accompanying booklet, Brian Crimp makes some rather extravagant claims for these recordings which cannot be endorsed. One hears supremely confident, secure playing of often spectacular technical accomplishment that frequently seems aloof, detached, and uninvolved. The pianist seems to have little or no emotional response to the music he is playing, as if the music is processed rather than felt. At first, in the Chopin Nocturnes, his extreme understatement is refreshing, but it becomes all too predictable after a while. The sense of pathos, color, and drama that others such as Cortot, Rubenstein, Arrau, and Lipatti have in their very different ways found in this music is absent. The result is flippant and bland to the point of awkwardness.

While Godowsky certainly avoids the extreme mannerisms of many of his contemporaries, this is replaced by an equally extreme literalism that seems strangely alien to his nineteenth century repertoire. Much of the *Carnival* is rather odd, as if he plays the notes as unimaginatively as possible. He apparently did not think about this very personal and descriptive work in any sort of responsive manner. His apparent refusal or inability to shape, inflect, or phrase a melodic line is very damaging. The opening of Rubenstein's "Rêve angelique" in this deadpan approach sounds almost like Phillip Glass. Most of the salon pieces similarly are lacking in charm, character, and style. How one would love to hear Rosenthal perform this music.

The recordings also include instances where one can enjoy Godowsky's playing. Most of the Liszt pieces are technically dazzling. He clearly had one of the great techniques of his or any era. One can only marvel at his finger control in "Gnomengereigen" or the thirds in Mendelssohn's "Rondo capriccioso." In all fairness, there are moments when the pianist seems to come alive, as in the Grieg Ballade and the first movement of the Chopin Sonata. One must mention also his own transcription of Schubert's "Morgengruss." This is truly magical playing with wondrous shadings and a sense of musical progression that is missing from most of the other performances on these discs. One suspects that this is the kind of playing that earned Godowsky his reputation.

These reactions may be extreme. Piano buffs and historical collectors should listen for themselves. These two collections are essential acquisitions for libraries. The work of APR is certainly deserving of our support. Josef Hofmann, Harold Bauer, and Ignaz Friedman also need and deserve APR's attention. Let us hope that someone is listening.
Reviewed by Walter Pate

VERDI: Il trovatore.

Montserrat Caballé, soprano (Leonora); Franca Mattiucci, mezzo-soprano (Azucena); Richard Tucker, tenor (Manrico); Mario Zanasi, baritone (Count di Luna); Ivo Vinco, bass (Ferrando); supporting cast; unidentified chorus and orchestra conducted by Thomas Schippers (recorded from live performance, perhaps broadcast, Florence, October 1968). *Un Ballo in maschera*: Excerpts. Richard Tucker, tenor (Riccardo); Montserrat Caballé, soprano (Amelia); unidentified chorus, orchestra, and conductor (recorded live, perhaps from broadcast, December 3, 1971). Legato Classics LCD 123 (AAD), 2 compact discs (timings: 72:19 & 74:48).

Lyric Distribution, in its present and former corporate identities, has striven over the years to provide a far-ranging documentation of Richard Tucker's work and