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# Pianist provides fine 'exploration'

## Habermann was quite astounding

By ELMA MILLER  
Silhouette Staff

A man of slight build strode calmly to the piano and opened the McMaster Exploration concert series with the rarely performed Fantasia Contrappuntistica (1910) by Ferruccio Busoni. This may well have been the first Canadian performance. Michael Habermann is one of a very few pianists capable of handling the diabolically difficult pieces in Sunday night's programme.

Dr. Paul Rapoport, an acknowledged expert on K.S. Sorabji, is to be highly commended in his efforts over the past two years to book such a phenomenal artist!

Busoni considered the Fantasia his most important piano work. It is thought by some writers to be a "weighty collection of contrapuntal techniques and as such has been studied and dissimilated by many 20th century composers, (including myself). Its value lies in this rather than in the beauty or interest as a concert piece." Habermann's performance belies this nearsighted view. The audience in Convocation Hall was left in numb shock over what it had just experienced.

### Velocity

Habermann has a big, strong tone that never became harsh with velocity; his fugue entries were clear, good shaping of individual phrases, clean and distinct pedalling that was never overbearing or muddy; all of which contributed to the clarity in revealing the infrastructure of the piece and the long arcing musical line. The performance left people who thought they knew the Fantasia well, eager to go back to the score again.

Manuel M. Ponce's compositions provided an attractive and pleasant respite. Habermann performed Ponce's Mazurka No. 2, Scherzino Mexicano, Intermezzo, A Pesar de Todo (for left hand

only), and Balada Mexicana.

Ponce's selections might be described as superb salon music, but Habermann's performance held us fascinated in his remarkable facility, compelling personality and what can be called pianistic finesse, (despite the music.)

### Sorabji

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji is a composer now over 90 years old and still composing! His piano works are known or rather notorious for their incredible length, complexity and enormous demands made on the technical prowess and stamina of the performer. Habermann played the entire evening's compositions from memory—a remarkable feat! Even Sorabji said he couldn't memorize his own music to save his life!

Sorabji's Nocturne: Jami, had ethereal qualities I hardly thought possible on the piano.

The Prelude, Interlude, Fugue had Habermann rattling perpetual scales up and down the entire span of the piano as if held in a mad, furious, and fortissimo fit with forceful but subdued bravura, not intended as mere display. We barely caught our breath in the Interlude before he launched into a rather curious fugue. Again, that wonderful clarity of Habermann's introduced the subjects and countersubjects, the various inner contrapuntal lines with economical pedalling and beautifully controlled phrasing.

The Valse-Fantasia (Sorabji's homage to Johann Strauss) was a voluptuously padded, heavily adorned, elaborately ornamented skeleton of a Strauss waltz.

### Deceptive

Habermann's calm bearing was deceptive. Who could have imagined upon first impression that he would command such an overwhelming intensity of sound that almost had the piano rebound with each sforzando.

By KEN GEE  
Special to The Spectator

**SIMPLY INCREDIBLE!**  
Last night's Explorations concert at McMaster's Convocation Hall was even more fun than a Horowitz recital.

Providing this unique and exciting musical experience was young pianist Michael Habermann playing with subtlety, sometimes frightening ferocity and everything in between. Aside from Ferruccio Busoni's Fantasia Contrappuntistica, a lengthy and fiendishly difficult late-Romantic extension of Bach's Art of Fugue, the program was virtually unknown piano repertory.

The second half was made up of works by English-born Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (now 90 years old, creator of seemingly impossible-to-play music). Sorabji banned public performance of his works for about 40 years, recently allowing several pianists (including Habermann) to try their luck.

Of the three Sorabji works performed, the Nocturne: Jami (1928) proved the most

difficult to get a mental grip on. Everything posed tremendous technical problems for Habermann and, to his great credit, he had the mental and physical equipment to handle them. But at least the Prelude, Interlude & Fugue (1924) was framed in recognizable musical form (the incessant rollercoaster of notes in the Prelude reminiscent of the Finale in Chopin's 2nd Sonata).

Even the Waltz-Fantasy (1925) in tribute to Johann Strauss, while streaked with similar chromaticism and harmonic vagueness, and seeming to be Strauss only through a swirling cloud of coloristic piano effects and Ives-like juxtapositions, could be recognized.

At least four levels of texture gradually became apparent: Bass, mid-range melody and chords, and rapid, high-range arpeggio passages to create a sonic haze over everything else. That Habermann could make these levels clear was a remarkable feat.

Let's hope Habermann returns with more.