

President: John McCabe CBE

Editor: Rob Barnett, 24a Alder Avenue, Fairfield, Widnes WA8 6QG

☎: 0151 420 8726 ☎: 01851 705152. e-mail: barnbax@zetnet.co.uk

Issued: March, June, September, December

NOTE ADDRESS CHANGE →→→→→ NEXT DEADLINE: 5 February 1999

**SORABJI Michael Habermann, pianist, at Leakin Hall, Peabody Conservatory (Baltimore, Maryland, USA, 26 June 1998)**

Michael Habermann has for a quarter century now been the world's foremost proponent of the music of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, having performed (always by memory - no mean feat indeed!) and recorded more of Sorabji's important works of "normal" length than anyone else. His recorded performances in this repertoire are textually scrupulous as well: Habermann reveals these difficult works with as perfect a balance between imagination and insight into the composer's written intent as one is likely ever to hear - which can't be said of most others who have explored this potential minefield of music. So the opportunity to hear Habermann play several as yet unrecorded works of Sorabji is a major musical event.

And this concert was a feast: four Sorabji works, three previously unheard in the States. (Habermann had premiered two of the four in Stockholm in March.) Of them, three are derived from other works, the fourth the early *Quasi habanera* (1917), a piece typical of Sorabji's Spanish style, in its torpid mood not unlike *In the Hothouse* (1918). Of the three arrangements, certainly the most important is the "Concert Transcription" of Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, which, on paper, looks rather conservative - not, it seems, as wild or as fruitfully embellished as Sorabji's "pastiche." In performance, though, it proved electrifying. The *Feria* particularly, taken at a fearless pace, was an amazing whirl of sound, which Habermann produced with seemingly little effort. (A great virtue - and mystery - of Sorabji's piano writing is that he seems to have grasped imaginatively the exact layout of the hands at all times: in this complicated and very rapid piece the two hands are constantly tossing great handfuls of material back and forth, yet Sorabji is ever on the correct side of the brink which separates the extremely difficult from the impossible).

The other Sorabji works on the program, the second *Minute Waltz* pastiche (not the one recorded and published), and the arrangement of the *Transcription in the Light of Harpsichord Technique for the Modern Piano* of the Bach *Chromatic Fantasy*, followed by a fugue (but not the one usually connected with it) were no less effective, if not as virtuosically astonishing. The other works on the program, works of Casella and Liszt and the Haydn *Andante Varié* in F minor, showed Habermann to be a pianist with a wide range of sympathies, capable of Brendel-worthy performances in Brendel's own territory. The Haydn especially revealed a player equally sensitive to nuances of both his instrument and of the composer's mind. (In conversation after the concert, Habermann professed to having spent more time on the Haydn than on the Ravel/Sorabji. A deeply relaxed and warm performance was the happy result.)

Habermann, if you have not guessed by now, is in my opinion one of the finest pianists playing today - the equal of two other pianists who are recording a great deal these days, Marc-André Hamelin and Carlo Grante. His devotion to Sorabji has, no doubt, helped to keep his career on the fringe of mainstream musical life. (His commercial recordings are all of Sorabji.) But the strength and beauty of his playing in this program's varied repertoire indicates that he would be more than capable of providing some enterprising company with stupendous recordings. And with repertoire like the Ravel/Sorabji, they might even sell a few copies. © Christopher Berg

President: John McCabe CBE

Vice-Presidents

Dr Richard Arnell · Sir Malcolm Arnold CBE · Dame Janet Baker DBE CH · Richard Baker OBE · Jennifer Bate · Lady Bliss  
 Sir Colin Davis CBE · Giles Easterbrook · Lewis Foreman · Dr Ruth Gipps MBE · Dr Vernon Handley  
 Peter Middleton *Founder Chairman* · Sir Simon Rattle CBE · Malcolm Smith · Basil Tschaikow  
 Dr Malcolm Williamson CBE *AO Master of the Queen's Music* · Dr Thomas Wilson CBE