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### KAIKHOSRU SORABJI

Passaggiata Veneziana; Symphonic Variations for Piano & Orchestra: Variation 56 (solo piano version); Quasi habanera; Rapsodie espagnol (Ravel, trans. Sorabji); Transcription in the Light of Harpsichord Technique for the Modern piano of the Chromatic fantasia of J.S. Bach, followed by a Fugue; Pasticcio capriccioso sopra Op. 64 No. 1 dello Chopin (1933)

Michael Habermann (piano)

BIS- 1306(CD)

Reference Recording - This one

*Artistic Quality* 10/7 *Sound Quality*

Michael Habermann made the first, and in many respects the best commercial recordings devoted to Kaikhosru Sorabji's ridiculously difficult and overwrought piano works. As with Habermann's previous three Sorabji discs, the present recital offers several sides of the composer: variation writer, miniaturist, paraphraser, and transcriber. Sorabji's 1945 transcription of Ravel's Rapsodie espagnol largely stays faithful to the original, save for decorative showers of bitonal arpeggios and runs that are distinctly Sorabjian in style and effect. Sorabji thickens the darting single lines in Bach's Chromatic Fantasy with mealy chords, and provides his own Bach-inspired fugue. The Passaggiata Veneziana redecorates Offenbach's renowned Barcarolle by replacing a leisurely gondola with the Yellow Submarine, dumping vats of LSD into the Venetian canals. Variation 56 uses the enigmatic Finale from Chopin's Funeral March sonata as a jumping-off point for two-and-a-half minutes of remarkable piano writing, as single unison lines gradually shift out of phase while the ensuing textures grow progressively dense, anticipating similar effects in Ligeti's piano etudes.

For sheer polytextural loopiness, look no further than the Minute Waltz paraphrase. It's interesting to compare Fredrik Ullén's earlier BIS recording to Habermann's reading. Ullén's slightly quicker tempos and pastel-tinted shadings create a suaver surface impression. Yet Habermann's gaunter sonority and more sophisticated sense of polyphonic voicing allow Sorabji's labyrinthine counterpoint to emerge with greater distinction and

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Klaus Mertens (bass)  
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Christian Zacharias

rhythmic clarity. My only issue lies with the closely miked and overly dry sonics: Sorabji's necromantic idiom demands more resonance and atmosphere surrounding the gazillions of notes. Still, Habermann not only plays this music with intelligent, transcendent virtuosity, but also has internalized Sorabji's aesthetic to a far greater degree than most pianists, living or dead.

MDG

**--Jed Distler**

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