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SORABJI. PIANO WORKS. Michael Habermann.
Musicmaster/Harold Moores Records
MM20015, MM20019 (two records, oas. £8-50
each).

MM20015—Opus Clavicembalisticum (1929-30)—Introito and Preludio-Corale. In the hothouse (1918). Toccata No. 1 (1920). Fantaisie espagnole (1919). Fragment (1926. rev. 1937). Pastiche, after Bizet (1922). **MM20019**—Djâmi (1928). Two Pastiches, after Rimsky-Korsakov and Chopin (1922). Le jardin parfumé (1923).

Sorabji's well-known—one might say too well known—ban on performances of his music was never complete. He merely insisted that performances should be only with his permission. Now that such permission has been given, to Yonty Solomon here and Michael Habermann in America, the only matter to be settled is whether this famously unknown music is any good. Having attended all Solomon's London Sorabji

performances, which began in December 1976, I have several times in another place answered that question affirmatively. There is nothing on the above LPs comparable in power, weight and intensity with the Sonata No. 3 which Solomon played at the Wigmore Hall in London in June 1977. But Habermann's interpretations, which attain a similar level of musical insight and phenomenal pianistic mastery, confirm one's impression of this music's singularity, and of its beauty.

Like Solomon, Habermann goes chiefly for early pieces, the first of them being *In the hothouse* and the *Fantaisie espagnole*, the latter an engagingly extravagant evocation of Iberian sights and sounds. They are good points at which to make one's entry into the luxuriant tropical forest of Sorabji's musical world. So, too, are the so-called pastiches, because the basic material is familiar. But complication after complication is piled upon the mellifluous *morceaux* of Bizet, Rimsky-Korsakov, etc., to almost hallucinatory effect. However, notwithstanding the furious creative drive evident in, say, the "Introito and Preludio-Corale" from Sorabji's especially notorious three-hour *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, there is great sensuous beauty in such items as *Le jardin parfumé*.

This latter and *In the hothouse* carry a few distant echoes of late Scriabin and middle-period Szymanowski, but there are few other significant links with European musical thought. The essential strangeness arises, I believe, from a primarily oriental mentality expressing itself through western means—a piano with the usual equal-temperament tuning, etc. Some of the force of even a short piece like the *Fragment* seems to be generated by the tension between these two poles. (Incidentally, the sleeve-note of MM20015 correctly refers to this piece as being unpublished, but readers may like to note that the first page of the manuscript is reproduced in *The Musical Times* for April 1960.)

There is such a vast quantity of music by Sorabji that most of it is likely to remain unknown to the majority of us. Yet it can already be seen, on the basis of Yonty Solomon's various premières, that only the extracts from *Opus Clavicembalisticum* and perhaps the *Djâmi* nocturne are properly representative. No praise could be too high, though, for Habermann's vivid performances (which are decently recorded). It is to be hoped that he, Solomon, and eventually other pianists, will introduce us to more of Sorabji's mature works.

MAX HARRISON