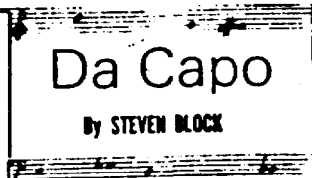


~~Keith~~ Sorabji is a composer, pianist, and music critic who drew early praise from such distinguished musicians as Sir Donald Tovey, Debussy, Szymanowski, and Busoni. His earliest works, from 1918 to 1930, had been published but, due to a ban that Sorabji himself imposed that disallowed any performance of his works from about 1940 on (one assumes because he was dissatisfied with the lack of comprehension of his music), little had been heard of the composer or his ongoing musical output until recently. Pianist Michael Habermann rediscovered Sorabji's music and, in 1975, was given permission by the composer (who now resides in Southern England and is in his ninth decade) to perform his works. Thanks to two recordings, the public has the opportunity to get a taste of the complex but approachable genius of Sorabji's music.



Sorabji, whose mother was Spanish-Sicilian and father of Parsi, was born in England, perhaps it's this tantalizingly mottled background that accounts for the variety in his scores and the comprehensive musical language utilized.

His most famous composition is probably the "Opus Clavicembalisticum," which lasts three hours and is cited in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world's longest non-repetitious piano piece (the composer gave the only complete performance in 1930). The "Introito and Preludio-Corale" from this work is recorded by Haberman on the first album, and one finds an attractiveness in that piece that, oddly enough, is akin to some of Charles Ives' transcendentalism. (*Guinness* is not entirely correct, however, as the piece does utilize subtle sequential repetition.)

Sorabji comes closer, to my mind, than any other composer to Ivesian texture and language, excluding, of course, the Americanisms inherent in Ives' music. That's quite an accomplishment, when one considers that Ives, for all the praise that is belatedly bestowed upon his music, has been considered only as an individual and eccentric force, rarely as a harmonically imitable, influential, or significant one. Sorabji was a profound admirer of Mahler's music, and this may be where the connection lies, for Mahler, too, incorporated many elements like folk tunes and fragments into an almost stream of consciousness fabric, and Mahler recognized Ives as a confrere in this respect. Sorabji's music seems to be one that often has many kinds of music going on simultaneously with the harmonic, rhythmic, and formal goal of achieving spiritual transcendence through complex but accessible utterances.

The two earliest works that were published, "In the Hothouse" and "Toccata," are recorded on the first album and, though not as rich as "Opus Clavicembalisticum," contain interesting elements. "In the Hothouse," for instance, is curiously similar to some of the best free improvisations of quiet temperament by jazz artists Keith Jarrett and Chick Corea on their solo albums, while the "Toccata" has pianist Habermann displayed brilliantly as he flips through devilishly fast passages that are jointed to create irregular phrasing.

There's a great deal of humorous and affectionate mimicry that goes into three pieces Sorabji composed in 1922, all pastiches, "on" Habanera from Bizet's *Carmen*, "Rimsky-Korsakov's "Hindu Merchant's Song (Song of India)," and Chopin's "Minute Waltz." The last pastiche is one that exploits every excess hinted at in the waltz and blows it up into a work of super proportions, utilizing the complete piano keyboard and a gargantuan transformation of romantic statement.

The *Carmen* pastiche at times spiritualizes the tune, distorts the tune grossly, sometimes with peculiar cadential treatment, or accompanies the melody with a counterpoint that is both playful and enriching within a texture that creates a maze-like ambiance about its subject. Poking fun at this popular song is party fare and simple, but transporting it to more sophisticated boundaries, as Sorabji does, begets an indescribably delightful but thoughtful landscape.

Two larger works dominate the second album, "Le Jardin Parfumé" and "Nocturne." The latter piece is based upon the poetry of the Persian mystic Abd ur-Rahman Jami. He was also the inspiration for Sorabji's massive "Jami" Symphony, which is scored for large orchestral forces, fills an entire program, and took Sorabji nine years to write. This "Nocturne" is a darker and more difficult composition both to play and to listen to, requiring a superabundance of concentration to really delve into the varied expression from the skeleton textural use of octaves to the passages of chordal blocks.

"The Perfumed Garden" is written after the famous erotic book, and emulates the sensuality of that 15th century Persian treatise, as the music quietly evokes an intricate and always lingering passion in a score that purposely eschews the loud end of the dynamic spectrum in order to make its point. Here, Habermann's technical facility asserts its breathless nature as he manages both to maintain restraint and to explore different simultaneous musics without breaking the flow or feeling of each individual and distinct musical motion, sometimes in the face of tornado-like swirls of sonorities.

There is much to thank the pianist Habermann for in the performance of Sorabji's work, but one can peer in awe at the 70-year creative span of this composer that still awaits discovery. If these early works on the recordings have their promise fulfilled, Sorabji's name will soon be better known.

[Sorabji, *A Legend in His Own Time* (MM20015) and *Le Jardin Parfumé* (MM20019) may be ordered from Musicmasters, 14 Park Road, Tinton Falls, New Jersey 07724.]

Market Square

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