

KAIKHOSRU SHAPURJI SORABJI: Introito and Preludio-Corale from *Opus Clavicembalisticum*; *In the Hothouse*; *Toccata* (1920); *Fantaisie Espagnole*; *Fragment* (1937 revision); *Pastiche on the Habanera from Bizet's 'Carmen'*. Michael Habermann (piano). Musical Heritage Society MHS 4271.

Paul Rapoport

SORABJI is a Parsi recluse who has lived in Dorset and devoted his life to composition despite near-total neglect. This is the first record of any of his music. However, he may be less a neglected composer than a 'neglecting' one, for he is the one who has caused his music to be so widely unheard. Before the mid-1970's, he either made no attempts to have others play his music or actually discouraged them. His legendary ban against performances of his works, although not highly publicized until it was lifted, certainly helped turn people away. It also gave rise to the unwarranted conclusion that he was a dilettante and a crackpot.

There is probably nothing which will sweep aside such decades-old rumours quickly, but if there is one thing which can do it, it is this record. It shows that Sorabji's music is unquestionably worth hearing and suggests that he is a powerful and original composer who has contributed something absolutely vital to 20th-century piano music. The record does not present any complete works which are the 'essential' Sorabji: the lofty and profound two- or three-hour keyboard experiences like *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, *Opus Archimagicum*, *Sequentia Cyclica*, *Piano Symphony No. 2*, and others. But of course it would have been foolish to try to record one of those before the shorter works. The present record is only an introduction to Sorabji, then, but as such it is ideal.

These works date from 1919 to 1930 and contain music ranging from slow and dreamy to dazzling and energetic to biting and sinister. Throughout there are a splendid command and blend of long lines, harmonic colour, contrapuntal elaboration, and many layers of profuse ornamentation. There are clear relations to music of Liszt, Alkan, Busoni, Skryabin, Reger, Ravel, and, perhaps surprisingly, Schoenberg. But such a list should not suggest that Sorabji is an imitator. His works incorporate the music which preceded him and show not a superficial knowledge of other composers but a thorough, creative response to them which offers something new and uncommonly rich.

Sorabji's music is not dramatic in a Beethovenian or musically dialectical sense. Its inherent drama and force result more from the cumulative procedures of its vast arrays and levels of ornamentation. It is principally this extraordinarily luxuriant ornamentation/orchestration which makes these works playable only by those with the substantial technical ability, stamina, musical sensitivity, and patience to pull apart and reassemble the multiple lines, colours, and textures, while simultaneously interpreting in other ways music with virtually no performing tradition, and even deciphering manuscripts of less than immediate legibility. Michael Habermann has and does all this, with results that are electrifying. His playing could be a little warmer here, a little looser there, but such criticisms pale in view of his overall achievement. Would that all composers could find such dedicated and capable performers as this one.

The volume level of this record is a little low and the top frequencies not forceful enough, but these are also minor imperfections. The record can be obtained at present only from the Musical Heritage Society, 14 Park Road, Tinton Falls, New Jersey 07724, U.S.A. Their mail-order service does not have the best reputation, but persistent efforts to obtain this record, if necessary, are worthwhile. At the time of writing, its cost to non-members of the society was U.S. \$6.95 (about £3.00), plus postage.