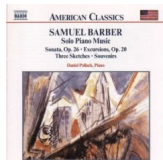


Samuel Barber – Solo Piano Music (1998)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 24 June 2011 12:10 - Last Updated Sunday, 18 August 2013 12:26

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1. Piano Sonata, Op. 26: I. Allegro energico 6:30 2. Piano Sonata, Op. 26: II. Allegro vivace e leggiero 1:51 3. Piano Sonata, Op. 26: III. Adagio mesto 5:20 4. Piano Sonata, Op. 26: IV. Fuga: Allegro con spirito 4:38 5. Excursions, Op. 20: I. Un poco allegro 3:03 6. Excursions, Op. 20: II. In slow blues tempo 5:26 7. Excursions, Op. 20: III. Allegretto 3:35 8. Excursions, Op. 20: IV. Allegro molto 2:49 9. Nocturne (Homage to John Field), Op. 33 4:03 [play](#) 10. 3 Sketches: No. 1. Love Song: Tempo di valse - Allegretto 0:49 11. 3 Sketches: No. 2. To my Steinway (To No. 220601): Adagio 1:01 12. 3 Sketches: No. 3. Minuet: Tempo di minuetto 1:17 13. 2 Interludes: 2 Interludes: No. 1. Adagio, ma non troppo, "Adagio for Jeanne" 6:25 14. Ballade, Op. 46: Restless 6:03 15. Souvenirs, Op. 28: I. Waltz: Tempo do valse - Allegro con brio 4:05 [pl](#)

[ay](#)

16. Souvenirs, Op. 28: II. Scottische: Tempo di Schottische, Allegro ma non troppo 2:24 17. Souvenirs, Op. 28: III. Pas de deux: Adagio 4:00 18. Souvenirs, Op. 28: IV. Two-Step: Allegro molto 1:56 19. Souvenirs, Op. 28: V. Hesitation Tango: Con moto 3:45 20. Souvenirs, Op. 28: VI. Galop: Allegro molto 3:02

Daniel Pollack – piano

Daniel Pollack has a special relationship to this music. He premiered Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata in the Soviet Union, and played it to wildly enthusiastic acclaim during the 1958 Tchaikovsky competition. That was the year Cliburn took the Gold medal, but Pollack was also a winner, and was very well received. I am very familiar with the Sonata. I performed it at my senior piano recital in college. I also had the pleasure of playing most of the Sonata for Daniel Pollack when I competed in a college-based piano competition. It was a special pleasure for me to learn how intimately he knows this piece. Pollack plays the Sonata with tremendous energy, brilliance and passion. The recorded sound of this Naxos CD is bright and a little too resonant for my taste. Still, the performance is thoroughly exciting, sometimes to the point of being overwhelmingly powerful (for example, at the end of the fugue). I own eleven recordings of the Barber Piano Sonata on CD or LP. Although Pollack's is not my first choice, his playing is so exciting and powerful that I regard his performance as special and worth having. My favorites are Cliburn and Horowitz. My other recordings include Garrick Ohlsson, Willis Deloney, two by

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John Browning, Leo McCawley, Earl Wild, Peter Lawson and Ruth Laredo. It would be difficult to rank these performances, as they all have something special to commend them. Pollack's passion and abandon stand out in this group. The other Barber works are less familiar to me, and so I am less able to comment on them. They seem beautifully played and, again, only hampered a little by the overly resonant sound. ---Robert L. Berkowitz

Samuel Barber's(1910 --1981) music is lyrical, romantic, and accessible. But his music still manages to be challenging. As is the case with many American composers, Barber tried to develop an American voice by combining art music with American themes derived from jazz and American popular culture. Again, Barber wrote in an accessible way using sophisticated 20th century compositional techniques. Although he did not compose a great deal of music for solo piano, much of what Barber did write is outstanding. This disc on the budget-priced Naxos label includes all of Barber's published solo piano music performed by Daniel Pollack. Pollack knows and plays this music well indeed. He performed Barber's piano sonata at the First International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in 1958. The CD includes detailed, insightful liner notes by Victor and Marina Ledin. Barber's piano sonata op 26 (1946) is the highlight of this disc and is a work that has become an important part of the piano repertory. The work is in four movements, and in it Barber uses an expansive musical vocabulary which includes serial composition. The work is romantic and virtuosic and immediately appealing. Vladimir Horowitz championed this music and it has been recorded many times. The sonata opens with a two-note falling figure with the second note heavily accented that becomes the basis for the opening allegro movement. Throughout the first movement, loud, virtuosic passages alternate with quieter sections, with feathery piano writing in the instrument's high register. The two-note figure is prominent at the end of the movement with a shift in accent to the first note of the pair. The second movement is a short, light scherzo which picks up on the quieter portions of the first movement. The third movement, an adagio, is spare and minimalist. It rises to a large climax before the music falls away pensively over a walking bass. The last movement is a fugue which begins rapidly and quickly develops to a frenzied, cataclysmic conclusion. The other extended works on this CD are two piano suites. The first suite, "Excursions" Op. 20 (1942-1944) was also championed by Horowitz. It consists of four movements based upon American jazz and popular song. The first movement features a syncopated theme with repeated notes over a boogie-woogie theme in the bass. The second movement develops as a blues, with a slow-drag theme that becomes more prominent as the movement progresses. It reminded me of a Gershwin piano prelude. The third movement consists of a lyrical, rippling theme in a moderate tempo which undergoes brief variations. The final movement is a foot-stomping barn dance. The movement reminded me of a conservative Charles Ives. The other suite in this collection is titled "Souvenirs", op 28 (1951-1952) It consists of six short dance movements. (Barber used it for a ballet.) I loved this piece. It is deliberately anachronistic in character and is a throw-back to a hotel-style elegance just before WW I. In listening to this suite, I tried to think of the tone it intended to convey. Some people find this music light and frivolous while others find

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it ironic. I heard it as loving, but detached and a bit distant. Barber is trying deliberately to recreate a musical experience in an idiom that is no longer his. I think the tone is affectionate, with the music played straight (rather than satirically), but with a distinct feeling of looking back. Thus the title, "Souvenirs". There are a number of short pieces on this CD including three sketches dating from Barber's 13th year. I enjoyed the Nocturne which is highly chromatic (op. 33) and the late Ballade, Op. 46 among these short works. This disc is part of the Naxos "American Classics" series. It will allow the listener to get to know some great works of 20th century American piano music. ---Robin Friedman

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