

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

Scriabin: *Piano Sonatas 1 + 9; 10 Mazurkas op 3;*
Pervez Mody
Thorofon 2579 – 66 minutes

This is Mody's second volume and third CD of Scriabin for Thorofon (Vol. 1—2570—was 2CDs). Based on the exceptionally strong performances here, that first volume is now quite high on my wish list. As with other Thorofon recordings that I have had the pleasure to review, the recorded piano sound is state of the art. The booklet notes are thorough and informative. The musical selections themselves make for a well balanced program. Both the big, stormy Sonata 1 and the Mazurkas are early works that display the strong influence of Chopin. The Sonata 9, *Black Mass*, is one nine-minute movement representative of Scriabin's late period.

Mody tackles the virtuosic Sonata 1 with all the energy and excitement one would expect for a work written by a 21-year-old prize winner at the Moscow Conservatory. It was Scriabin who won the gold medal in piano performance and a silver medal in composition. His classmate, Rachmaninoff, took the gold in composition and silver in piano. Chopin's Sonata 2 was clearly a model for Scriabin, whose first movement has a repeated exposition. II is a calm, chordal intermezzo, III is a *Presto* perpetual movement gallop, and IV is a Funeral March. It is a very difficult work that does not get recorded or performed in public very often. Clocking in at nearly 25 minutes, it may also be relatively neglected because of its fading away, mournful ending. Even with three loud F-sharp minor chords to finish the piece, the prevailing emotion of the last movement is certainly sorrow. Mody gives as good a performance of this work as my favorites, Ashkenazy (London 425579, not reviewed) and Hamelin (Hyperion 67131, Sept/Oct 1996).

Scriabin's Mazurkas, Op. 3 were actually his first published work. Why these are not often performed is a mystery to me. They capture Chopin's dance-lyricism quite well, while

still having the air of Russian compositions. Mody's performances verge on perfection.

In Sonata 9 we encounter the mystical and daemonic side of Scriabin. Its harmonic language all seems to emanate from the mystic, -Prometheus chord—six notes of perfect augmented and diminished fourths. It takes a pianist of exceptional abilities to sort through everything in this work. The performance markings are other-worldly, as in *avec une douceur de plus en plus caressante et empoisonnee*, roughly “with a sweetness increasingly caressing and poisoning”. Here again, Mody stacks up well with Ashkenazy and Hamelin, but doesn't quite reach the unbridled fear that Sofronitsky conjures up (Vista 93, July/Aug 2007). Given his superior sound, I would have to recommend Mody above all.

Mody, Indian-born, got the main part of his training at the Moscow Conservatory and now resides in Germany. He has garnered favorable reviews everywhere he performs, including a wonderful one from Martha Argerich. He is a pianist to watch for, and I cannot wait for the next volume of Scriabin.

HARRINGTON