

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

SCRIABIN: *Piano Pieces 5*

Pervez Mody
Thorofon 2632—66 minutes

This is another great installment in Mody's project to record all of Scriabin's piano music. We have favorably reviewed three of the previous four volumes: Vol. 2, Mazurkas, Piano Sonatas 1 and 9 (Thorofon 2579, Nov/Dec 2011); Vol. 3, Preludes, Etudes, Piano Pieces, Piano Sonatas 2 and 7 (Thorofon 2590, Mar/Apr 2013); and Vol. 4, Preludes, Etudes, Piano Sonatas 3 and 10 (Thorofon 2612, Sept/Oct 2014). Somehow we missed Vol. 1, Preludes, Piano Pieces, Piano Sonata 4 (Thorofon 2570 2CD). There are probably three more volumes to completion and I am enjoying the ride.

The point here, as in the others, is to put together a good program that flows well. One disc with all the etudes or two discs with all the preludes or all the sonatas have been a common way to present Scriabin's music. By putting together actual programs, Mody goes back to the first all-Scriabin recitals given as a memorial to the composer after he died by his long-time colleague and friend, Sergei Rachmaninoff. The two lived together as teenagers under the strict tutelage of piano teacher Nikolai Zverev. They graduated from the Moscow Conservatory together, Rachmaninoff taking the gold medal in composition and silver in piano, Scriabin the reverse. This program includes a number of works that Rachmaninoff performed in 1915 and 16, among them the two big works here: Sonata 5 and the Fantasy in B minor. The other pieces are selected and grouped for best musical effect: Morceaux, Preludes, Etudes, Poems, Danses, Impromptus, and a Scherzo. Some are complete for their opus number, others are a selected group.

The performances are just what I expected, knowing the earlier volumes in this series. Mody was born in India, trained in Moscow, and currently lives in Germany. He has plenty of other music recorded and performed, but the Scriabin project had its roots in his Russian training and has been going for several years. I suspect that he plays Scriabin somewhat like Rachmaninoff did—which did not please everyone at the time. The prevailing feeling about Scriabin then was how mystical and impetuous it should be, with flashes of color and sound. Rachmaninoff brought it solidly to Earth, allowing the compositional abilities of the composer to be heard in his clear and distinct style.

Mody is much the same. His Sonata 5 is balanced and a little slower than I am used to, but I heard more inner voices and thematic development than usual. Same for the Fantasy, which Rachmaninoff noted was a very difficult piece and that it took him nearly a whole day to learn it. Only in my dreams is it playable, and then only with months of work. I will look for future volumes in this series and expect that Mody will be my reference and comparison pianist for any other complete Scriabin piano recordings and many single-disc recitals. Thorofon continues to impress me with excellent piano sound and great booklet notes.

HARRINGTON