

# American Record Guide

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**SORABJI:** *Prelude, Interlude and Fugue; Valse-Fantaisie; Hommage à Johann Strauss; St Bertrand de Comminges: "He was laughing in the tower"*

Michael Habermann, piano - MHS 7530 [CD,LP,CS]

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (b. 1892) is the most enigmatic of living composers. He's better known by reputation (for writing the longest and probably most difficult piano piece ever, the titanic *Opus Clavicembalisticum* of 1929-1930) than by the sound of his music, since he instituted a ban on performances of his music in 1940.

This is Michael Habermann's third disc of Sorabji's music for MHS (or Musicmasters).

The "Prelude" of *Prelude, Interlude and Fugue* (1920-22) is fast and fleet; "Interlude" is lyrical, with lush harmonies; and "Fugue" is stupendous, starting with a craggy subject which becomes virtually unrecognizable by the end, which is huge and crashing. The *Valse-Fantaisie* (1925) contains tonal snippets of a traditional waltz, but is highly embroidered and complex.

*St Bertrand* (1941) is the most recent Sorabji work recorded, also the longest and most complex work on this disc. There are some breathtaking slow, tonal passages which make Sorabji sound almost Ivesian in his juxtapositions of tonal and non-tonal idioms.

Michael Habermann meets the technical and musical challenges of these works head-on. He has a big, robust sound and is remarkably sure-fingered, but he is more than a technician: his sympathy for Sorabji's music comes through.

□ TAYLOR