

MARCH/APRIL 1983 • \$4.00

# Fanfare

THE MAGAZINE FOR SERIOUS RECORD COLLECTORS

257

**SORABJI: Nocturne: Jāmi. Pastiche: Chopin's Valse Op. 64 no. 1 (The "Minute Waltz"). Le Jardin parfumé. Pastiche: Rimsky-Korsakov's Hindu Merchant's Song (from Sadko).** Michael Habermann, piano. MUSICMASTERS MM 20019, produced by Donald Garvelmann, \$8.98.

*The average player cannot possibly hope to play a page of Sorabji with his two hands, and the introduction of other members of his body is not very practicable.*

—Arthur C. Browne, Jan. 1920

In *Fanfare* IV:5 I reviewed the first record ever issued of music by the Parsi recluse, Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji. Since then, important events have taken place involving his music.

On June 11, 1982 in Utrecht, the pianist Geoffrey Douglas Madge played the first performance in over 50 years of Sorabji's *Opus Clavicembalisticum*. He took 3¾ hours for it and played brilliantly, but more about that when his records of it appear. In the meantime, he will give its U.S. premiere in Chicago on April 24. That event is not to be missed.

Nor is the present record by Michael Habermann to be missed either. He has continued to give recitals which include Sorabji's music and has reportedly left listeners shaking their heads in disbelief. This record, of music from 1922–1928, is stunning evidence for that reaction. The playing on the first record I called "stupendous unto the uncanny." These performances go beyond that. The technical and intellectual difficulties in realizing the polymelodic, polyrhythmic, and (if I may be permitted this term) polytextural textures (!) of *Le Jardin parfumé* and *Jāmi* are enormous. Michael Habermann's mastery of them is almost frightening. And one pianist, who shall remain nameless, threw up his hands after playing the Chopin pastiche, and grinning in utter desperation exclaimed, "That piece just has no right to exist!" Doubtless he would agree with Browne's quote above. Well, Habermann plays it with his two hands. Perhaps he has ten fingers on *each* of them.

I won't say anything about Sorabji here. Curious readers are referred to the two reviews in *Fanfare* IV:5, where they will find plenty. As listening experiences, the two nocturnes (*Le Jardin parfumé* and *Jāmi*) are difficult but very rewarding. If they seem vague and aimless, that is only a superficial reaction which will be wiped away by attentive repeated hearings.

They are subtle, sensuous, and scintillating, and well worth the concentration they demand. The Rimsky-Korsakov pastiche is clever, bright, and relatively straightforward. The Chopin leaves you spinning with the mental equivalent of what I can only imagine as having ridden on four roller coasters simultaneously.

To return to Habermann's playing: I might question a phrasing here or there, and I would prefer more color in the pastiches, and more calm in a few spots in the nocturnes. But these things hardly matter. Habermann is extraordinary, both technically and interpretively. If Sorabji had found a performer like this in the 1920s or '30s, his piano music might now be as highly regarded as any from this century—as it deserves to be.

The model liner notes are by the record's producer, who regrettably doesn't do much writing these days. The sound and surfaces are also exemplary.

This record is a spectacular achievement.

P.R.