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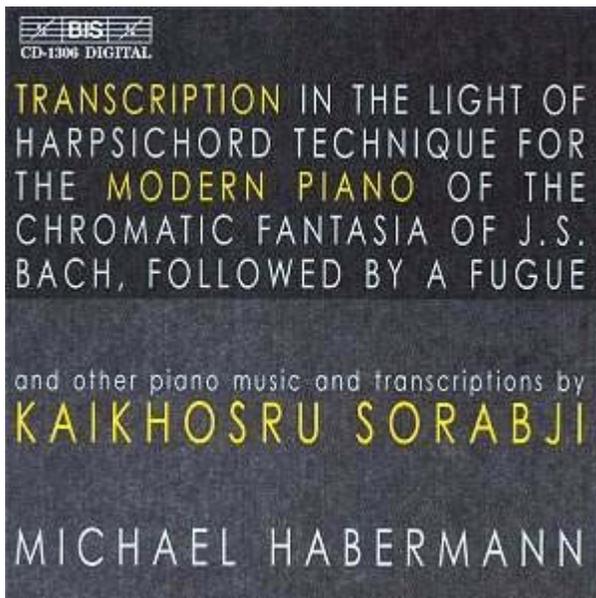
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**Kaikhosru Shapurji SORABJI (1892-1988)**

*Passeggiata Veneziana* (1956) [21'33].  
*Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra – Variation 56* (solo piano version, 1935-37) [2'41]. *Quasi habanera*, Op. 8 (1917) [4'59].

**Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937) /SORABJI**

*Rapsodie espagnole* (1907/08, transc. 1945) [18'05].

**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)/SORABJI**

*Transcription in the light of Harpsichord Technique for the Modern Piano of the Chromatic Fantasia of J. S. Bach, Followed by a Fugue* (1940) [15'23].

**Ludwig van web**  
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**BUY NOW**[Crotchet](#) [AmazonUK](#) [AmazonUS](#)**Frédéric CHOPIN (1810-1849)/SORABJI***Pasticcio capriccioso sopra Op. 64 No. 1 dello Chopin* (1933) [4'13]

● Michael Habermann (piano)

Rec. Studio 4A, National Public Radio, Washington, D.C., USA, 5-6 Jan, 9-10 Mar and 22 June 2001. DDD

● **BIS CD1306** [68'20][Hänssl](#)  
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Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji was one of the great individuals of music. His magnum opus, the *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, still inspires awe and not a little fear in the hearts of all sane pianists, and remains his most (in)famous work (Geoffrey Douglas Madge recorded this on BIS CD1062-4).

On this disc the pianist is Michael Habermann, who specialises in Sorabji's music and has given a number of first performances (he also provides fascinating liner notes). As a labour of love this can hardly be bettered, for the 1 hour 8 minutes playing time is gripping from first note to last.

One would have thought that Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole* was heady enough, but obviously not for Sorabji (Habermann quotes a letter in which Sorabji also refers to a transcription of the Closing Scene of Richard Strauss' *Salome* ... now *that* I would like to hear). The Ravel/Sorabji *Rapsodie espagnole* was premièred by Habermann in Stockholm in 1998 and is required listening. Sorabji takes Ravel's individual sound-world and filters it through his own, so that Ravel's harmonies become more cloudy than veiled, eventually becoming more and more obscure and tending towards clusters. The finale, 'Feria', is tough in the extreme. Habermann responds with breathtaking aplomb. This is such an exhilarating performance, I suggest the listener takes a break after it!

Habermann refers to the *Passeggiata Veneziana* as, 'one of Sorabji's greatest compositions', stating that, 'it is the most challenging of the transcriptions in that the original material serves as a springboard for fantastic escapades'. It certainly is no walk-over of a piece, but complementing the virtuosity of the notes is the virtuosity of the composer, whether in the stellar evocations of the opening or in the emergence of the theme (the 'Barcarolle' from Offenbach's *Contes d'Hoffmann*) from decadently perfumed harmonies. It is typical of this composer in that over-the-top technical complexities (in the 'Tarantella' section) are immediately juxtaposed with extremely decadent passages (the tempo/expression mark in the latter part is, 'Notturnino. Sonnolento, languidamente voluttuoso. Sonorità sempre piena e calorosa').

The solo piano version of Variation 56 from the *Symphonic Variations* is based on the 'graveyard' finale of Chopin's Second Piano Sonata (1839). The same ominous movement is there, but 'opened out'. This is more of a transformation of Chopin than anything else and makes for tremendously exciting listening. Given Sorabji's penchant for extremes, it should come as no surprise that the *Quasi habanera* is

really quite sleazy.

The Bach/Sorabji item shows a firm and confident hand at work (the fugue that follows the *Chromatic Fantasia*, referred to in the title, is the D minor, BWV948). Habermann is particularly successful in projecting the fugue's granite-like sonorities.

Finally, the *Pasticcio capriccioso* on Chopin's Op. 64 No. 1. It is difficult to top Habermann's own commentary: 'Embellishment and added-note harmonies assume mammoth proportions. The ending of the *Pasticcio* is almost catastrophic in nature'. It is an ideal way in which to end the disc, exuding style and humour whilst simultaneously prickling with difficulties.

BIS are to be congratulated on their adventurous programming. This disc may immediately seem to be for pianophiles only, but in fact it offers a fascinating window into Sorabji's unique world.

*Colin Clarke*

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