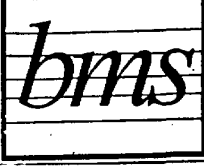


NEWS 73



March
1997

THE BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY

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Issued: March, June, September, December

NEXT DEADLINE: 5th May

SORABJI Michael Habermann (piano) - Legendary Works. Elan Recordings CD 82264 (PO Box 101, Riverdale, MD20738, USA). Price in US: \$14.99 post-paid. U.S. Distribution: Albany Music. ☐

Michael Habermann has been performing Sorabji's piano music publicly since 1973, mainly in the USA, and is long since established as a pre-eminent advocate of this transcendently difficult music. He met the composer for the only time in 1980, on a visit to his home in Dorset, and corresponded with him regularly thereafter. He is one of a handful of distinguished international pianists given unqualified approval by Sorabji to perform his music, and remains among his most faithful disciples: the present recording is his fourth CD, and he is currently at work on a fifth. Most of his performances are prepared from original manuscripts, and recorded live from memory - an astonishing achievement. A selection of pieces from two of his earlier recordings was released by ASV (both cassette and CD) in this country some years ago.

The Elan recording under review contains performances recorded between 1980 and 1995, and is self-recommending in that it includes the world premiere recording of *Gulistan (The Rose Garden)* (1940), a nocturne of ecstatic chromatic intensity inspired by the work of the same name by the Sufi poet Saadi (1213-1291). The other major piece here is also a nocturne, the resplendent *Djāmi* (1928), named after the Persian poet Jāmi (1414-1492). This is Habermann's second recording of a work he clearly loves, which he played for Sorabji in 1980 and which only he has recorded: it is one of Sorabji's most beautiful works.

Quaere reliqua hujus materiei inter secretoria (1940) is one of two pieces inspired by ghost stories of M.R. James - here *Count Magnus* and reminds us in its evocation of evil that there is far more to Sorabji than the luxurious post-impressionism of his nocturne-style. The programme is completed with a performance of the short *Fantasiottina* (1961), written for the seventieth birthday of the composer's friend, the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid. This piece was published by Bardic Edition in 1987 (the only published original work of Sorabji to appear since those published in the twenties, all now out of print) in a performing edition by Ronald Stevenson, who has also recorded it in his edition. For the

present performance, Habermann has gone back to the original pencilled copy of Sorabji's manuscript made by Stevenson with the composer's approval (the original appears to have been lost). Finally, as an added bon-bon, there is short arrangement 'à la manière de Sorabji', by the pianist himself, *Au Claire de la Lune* (1972), a tribute to the composer's formidable powers of transcription, witnessed for instance in the unforgettable arrangement of Chopin's *Minute Waltz* (published in 1969 by Music Treasure Publications, New York City, in a volume of 13 transcriptions of the piece ISBN 0 912028 00 9, 108pp), recorded on an earlier disc by Habermann.

At the time of writing, I know of no UK distributor of this disc, but assure those willing to hunt it out, perhaps by ordering direct from the manufacturers, that their effort will be amply rewarded by performances of staggering technical competence and rare interpretative insight. © John Talbot 1996

Gulistan also recorded by Charles Hopkins on Altarus CD single 9036.