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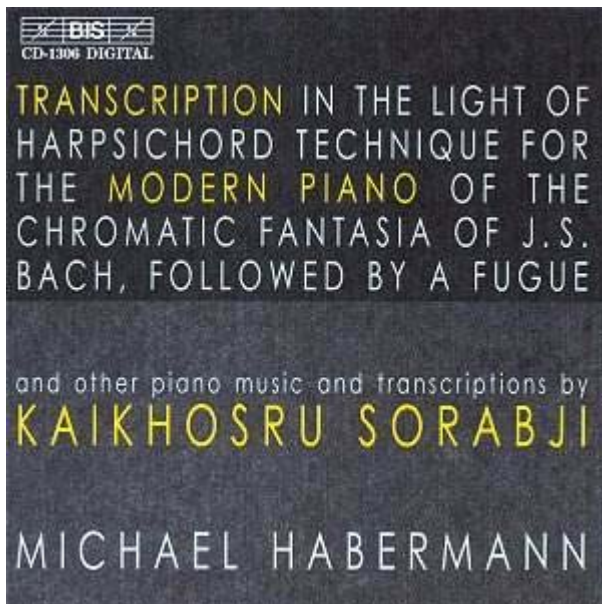
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Kaikhosru Shapurji SORABJI (1892-1988)

Passeggiata Veneziana (1956) [21.33]
Variation 56 from Symphonic Variations for piano and orchestra (1935-37) [2.41]

Quasi Habanera (1917) [4.59]

Maurice RAVEL *Rapsodie Espagnole* transc. Sorabji (1908, 1945) [18.05]

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Fryderyk CHOPIN *Pasticcio Capriccioso sopra Op. 64 No. 1 dello Chopin* (1933) based on the Valse Op.

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64 No. 1 '*Minute Waltz*' by Fryderyk Chopin [4.13]

● Michael Habermann (piano)
rec. Studio 4a, National Public Radio,
Washington DC, USA. 5-6 Jan, 9-10
Mar, 22 June 2001, DDD

● **BIS-CD-1306** [68.20]

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Sorabji is another of those composers whose reputation existed on fable. Audacious pianists - wise or foolish - gradually sketched in the details, sometimes in truth and at others unwittingly misleading. It is difficult to gain a perspective but we know that far far more about this composer's music is unknown than known. Of course we have his books *Mi Contra Fa* (1947) and *Around Music* (1932). From these we can glimpse his praise for two lions of the transcriber's art: Liszt (whose operatic fantasies he held in high regard) and Leopold Godowsky. It is the transcriber's art that forms the centre of gravity for this disc. The Ravel *Rapsodie* is no mere technical exercise. In this performance there are many moments where poetic eloquence is to the fore (e.g. the haunting *Prélude à la Nuit* and in the *Feria* at 3.11 - those smokily languid slurs). At others the 'three-hand' effects and fistfuls of notes leave you in awe and an emotion I cannot quite pin down between tragically frustrated aspiration and magnificent achievement. The *Passeggiata* is based on Offenbach's famous *Barcarolle*. This is dissected and dressed in threads of silvery gold gauze, diaphanous, iridescent. The *Notturmino* section (there are six, each separately tracked) carries a typically sultry expression marking: *Sonnolento, languidamente voluttuoso, sonorita sempre piena e calorosa*. The dedicatee is York Bowen whose Twenty-Four Preludes (praised to the skies by Sorabji) were recorded by Marie-Catherine Girod on a now difficult to source Opès 3D disc. The *Passeggiata* is the only piece here of which Habermann did not give the world premiere. *Variation 56* is a Mephistphelian exercise in ruthlessly motoric energy. The *Quasi Habanera* of 1917, indolently languid as the expression mark indicates, is dedicated to another unknown, Norman Peterkin. Peterkin's oriental suites for solo piano are reputed to be of the highest imaginative accomplishment and should be explored by an aspiring star pianist with the integrity to make their debut recording with music that is a completely closed book. The *Quasi Habanera* is not a transcription and evinces none of the heroic contrivance of the Ravel reworking. We are told in Mr Habermann's notes that the Bach transcription has attracted controversy from purists. This is not surprising for Sorabji builds Gaudi-like romantic excrescences and extravagant ornamentation onto the original. The music can best be appreciated if we approach it as a work in its own right and enjoy it as we would a Stokowski or Elgar orchestral transcription. Simplicity is not alien to Sorabji as the start of the *Fugue* (tr.14) and the *Ripresa* of the *Passeggiata* (tr.10) show. The *Pasticcio capriccioso* is his second reworking of the Chopin piece. Its heaps wild chordal assaults and great awkward screeches of notes never lose site of the shards and shapes of the original.

We must take Habermann's Sorabjian 'truth' on trust and be grateful for these thunderous and whispering intimations of a fantastic composer's struggle to wrest something rich and strange from the rude mechanical device of the keyboard.

The British Music Society propose to issue a three CD set of Habermann's other Sorabji recordings. It is hoped that this will be out early in 2004. See note below.

Rob Barnett

see also review by [Colin Clarke](#)

British Music Society reissues Sorabji Habermann recordings

The BMS is proud to announce the re-release on its own label as a Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Special 3CD Edition of pianist Habermann's famed recordings of piano works of Kaikhosru Sorabji, originally recorded over a period of some fifteen years from 1980-1995. Of the seventeen titles included - newly remastered and reorganised into three discrete programmes (*Early Works*, *Nocturnes*, and *Assertive Works*) - all were originally prepared from the composer's manuscripts and performed from memory, all except two are premiere recordings, five were recorded live, and seven remain the only available recordings. Included in the programme of over three hours' music are the two great sensuously ravishing nocturnes *Djami* and *Gulistan*, the *Introito* and *Preludio-Corale* from *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, the rigorous *Prelude Interlude and Fugue*, *Le Jardin Parfumé*, two pieces inspired by ghost stories of M.R. James, and three of Sorabji's inimitable piano pastiches. The discs will be available as a boxed 3CD set, including a 28-page booklet at a special price (BMS427-429). *John Talbot*, Recordings Manager

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