

Labyrinth

David Greilsammer, p
Naive 7084—70 minutes

From the age of 15, the pianist had a recurring dream of a labyrinth that prompted both terror and excitement. As the dream became more frequent, he decided to “reconstruct it, to make it exist” in the form of a piano recital. After several years of work, “little by little, the dream started disappearing from [his] life...” The program imitates the changes in direction one would take trying to get to the center of the labyrinth: short pieces are grouped in threes; the outer two are by the same composer, and the inner is by a composer who lived a few centuries before or after. Two pieces from Janacek’s *On an Overgrown Path* flank a ‘Les Sourdines’ by Lully; two Beethoven bagatelles go with Crumb’s ‘Magic Circle of Infinity’; Ligeti etudes guard Bach’s ‘Contrapunctus 1’. At the center of the maze is the surreal, ecstatic ‘El Amor y la Muerte’ from Granados’s *Goyescas*. Returning, we have Satie and CPE Bach; two commissions from Ofer Pelz called ‘Repetition Blindness’ comment on the Chaconne from Marin Marais’s own *Labyrinth*. Scriabin’s ‘Nuances’ introduces ‘Le Chaos’ from *Les Elementes* by Jean-Fery Rebel; Scriabin’s ‘Vers la Flamme’ marks the exit.

The conceit is more convincing than expected; the musical whiplash is rarely too jarring. The problem is a lack of vitality in the more raucous pieces, like Beethoven’s Op. 126:4, the Ligeti etudes, or the Ligeti-esque Pelz premieres. The farther Greilsammer gets into Rebel’s ‘Chaos’, the more the gestures sound labored or tired rather than cutting or grand. The tremolos in Janacek and Scriabin lack electricity. Some of these subtleties are of course difficult to realize, but Greilsammer’s technique keeps him from his expressive goal.

ESTEP

Female Composers

Backer Grondahl, Beach, Bon, Price+
Hiroko Ishimoto, p
Grand Piano 844—77 minutes

In order to give the widest possible representation, I think, Ms Ishimoto often includes single movements from character piece sets or multi-movement works in her program. For instance, Clara Schumann is represented only by the first of her three Romances and we hear only the second movement of Florence Price’s sonata. Ms Ishimoto was trained at Juilliard

and plays with infectious spirit and technical elan. She has devoted much of her career to performing music by women.

HASKINS

Alexander Kantorow, piano

Brahms, Bartok, Liszt
BIS 2380 [SACD] 66 minutes

Way back when I thought I had a shot at becoming a concert pianist, I performed (on my freshman recital) Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody 11. I haven’t listened to the piece in all this time, so I was very glad to see it included in this delightful recital. As I compare it to my memory of my own interpretation, it’s almost embarrassing to think how badly I missed the mark in terms of rubato, expressive range, and overall timing. Oh well; at least I know what it really should sound like now.

The idea of Rhapsody emerges as an overarching theme of the release, opening with Brahms’s in B minor and including Bartok’s Op. 1. Bartok’s Rhapsody is a virtuosic, sprawling 20-minute work that reminds me most of Liszt; here and there you hear what Bartok will become, but the glimpses are few. Once more, Kantorow is the ideal guide.

The other major work is Brahms’s Sonata 2. I must confess that I have never warmed up much to his three sonatas, though I have sometimes enjoyed hearing the third in concert. One might think it’s because I dislike the overt virtuosity, but I absolutely adore his Paganini Variations; it might have to do with a feeling that the form is insufficiently clear. Whatever the reason, this time around it all came together for me. Like all the works here, Kantorow plays the Brahms with fire and poetry—nothing sounds dutiful, as it often does when I hear other recordings. Perhaps it’s just because Kantorow, who studied with Pierre-Laurent Aimard, simply boasts superior technique and interpretive skill.

HASKINS

Kristian Ofstad Lindberg

LISZT: *Piano Sonata*; SCHUMANN: *Kinder-szenen*; BEETHOVEN: *Sonata 23*
Lindberg 161 [SACD] 76 minutes

This Norwegian release is titled “Of Innocence and Experience”, after a collection of poems by William Blake, and it is illustrated with some of Blake’s mystical paintings. The program consists of some of the most often performed and recorded works in the repertoire, but the inter-