

The Liszt Society

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26th September 1973.

Dear Sir,

The Contiguglias

I am record reviewer for this Society and write reviews in its Newsletter of records of Liszt's music from all over the world. I have listened to outstanding records of Liszt's music from this country, from the United States, from Russia and from Europe and I have been doing this for about ten years - but I have never heard anything remotely like the record of four hand transcriptions by the Contiguglia twins on CS 2039 and I have just written a review of it for our next Newsletter.

Unfortunately I have not heard them 'live', but that is an omission I shall certainly repair next time they come here. One is used to miracles of pianism nowadays and one no longer thinks of a record being doctored to make a pianist sound finer than he is. I am perfectly sure that the same is true of CS 2039, but, even to my jaded ear, the feats these two brilliant virtuosos bring off are so hair-raising that I would have thought such playing impossible had I not actually heard it on the record.

I knew, of course, that these four hand transcriptions existed, but I had neither seen them nor heard them before. Quite obviously, Liszt's view in arranging the solo transcriptions for four hands was not 'simplify it for the amateurs', but 'two virtuosos are better than one' - and so they are! The familiar 'Don Juan' and 'Norma' paraphrases are familiar enough in the solo versions, but, no matter how magnificently they are played, no single artist can achieve the sheer richness and body of glorious keyboard tone that these two astonishing pianists bring to the four hand versions.

I know of no record of the solo versions of the 'Tscherkessenmarsch' and 'Sonnambula' and there are no other records of any of the four hand transcriptions, so this record is unique in that sense. Even if someone else does follow your lead in recording these works, I imagine the performances will remain unique: it may be that these performances may one day be equalled in quality, though I know of no piano duo anywhere in the world that I have heard either on or off record who could do it with the hair-raising panache of the Contiguglias, but it is utterly inconceivable that such performances ever have been or ever will be sur-

passed.

If, somewhere in the world, there were a music lover with his faculties unimpaired and who had somehow managed to live to be about 130, he might - were he very fortunate - have heard these works played by, say, Liszt and Tausig. Asked to describe the manner in which these two great and legendary virtuosos played, it would not be surprising were he to put this record on his turntable and say - 'They played like that.'

What I have written here is not the same as my review for the Liszt Society's Newsletter as I have several other records to include in that article whereas I am here dealing only with the best of them, but the tenor of my opinion as expressed is the same in both cases. I hope, as a result of what I have written, that this record may sell a few more copies in this country, for I consider it one of the finest keyboard ^{records} ever issued. These two pianists are absolutely unique and bring to mind the whole history of the greatest piano playing. As I have indicated, it is easy to imagine Liszt and Tausig together, or perhaps Rachmaninoff and Lhevinne, or Horowitz and - well, Horowitz playing both parts, which is quite possible on a record! But Richard and John Contiguglia may not react favourably to being compared with other virtuosos, even the greatest: what emerges clearly from the record is that each is a top flight virtuoso in his own right and that each would alone be capable of attaining the highest eminence as a concert soloist had he not chosen rather to perform four hand music with his brother. As it is, I doubt if there is any other piano duo on the international circuit that comes within miles of them.

I am most interested in the catalogue of your releases that accompanied the record, particularly the other records by the Contiguglias and the various records of Chopin's music: the latter must indeed be good if they are to compete successfully on the market with the many other outstanding records of Chopin's music - however, if the pianists who have recorded Chopin for you are half as good as the Contiguglias in Liszt, you have nothing to fear from competition. When I have recovered from the verge of bankruptcy after indulging my collector's mania to an unusual degree - I think we shall have to live on just music and milk for a few months! - I hope to investigate your catalogue further and hope that I may be able to find and hear a few more of the records in those London emporia that import records from the United States.

In the meantime, I am very grateful to the Contiguglia brothers for their superb playing and to you for recording them so well: I sincerely hope that this record, and your other records, are as successful in the market as they obviously deserve to be.

Yours faithfully,


(Keith Fagan).