

tion, giving discreet emphasis to the rising and falling 6ths in the tenor voice.

That Mr Bekhterev saw fit to include the enigmatic Preludes Op. 31 is to his credit. The first of the set, with its oddly displaced opposing meters and hemorrhaging, indecisive major-minor shifts, has long been one of my favorites. It's a curious work that wants desperately to be a waltz but can't make up its mind, resigning itself to the ephemeral status of a prelude, of an entree to some other idea. Boris Bekhterev delivers enthralling performances here, never less than ebullient and always inspired.

Here is a thoroughly mature artist, emotionally connected to himself and the music. He has made himself at home in a pianistic tessitura where melismatic filigree spins out effortlessly, where huge blocks of sound blow across the musical terrain with translucence. In more ways than one, his pianism resembles Rachmaninoff's, while the uncanny sinuousness of his phrasing will likely attract Fiorentino fans, too.

YOUNG

Virtuoso Piano Rareties

WILD: *Porgy & Bess Fantasy*; BACH: *3 Choral Preludes*; CHOPIN: *Piano Concerto 1-II*; INFANTE: *El Vito*; MEDTNER: *Fairy Tale, op 25:1*; LISZT: *Hungarian Rhapsody 19*
Daniel Berman—Danacord 483 (Jem) 75 minutes

Contrary to popular belief, Virgil Thomson, the dean of musical curmudgeons, admired *Porgy and Bess*. "I like its lack of respectability", he wrote (in *Modern Music*, 1935), extolling it as a work of power and importance. And despite his disdain of its bittersweet harmony and plum-pudding orchestrations, he praised it for the way it can be popular and vulgar and go its own way as a real professional piece does without bothering much about the taste boys.

While we have Anthony Tommasini to thank for clearing things up in his recent biography of Thomson, *Composer on the Aisle*, it is Daniel Berman who brings home *Porgy's* endearing qualities with persuasive panache. In Mr Berman Gershwin has an ideal interpreter, a savvy virtuoso with unlimited technical resources, refined musical manners, and a lively imagination. Certainly it's a brave pianist who would undertake Earl Wild's transcription in the shadow of Wild's own recording. While the latter remains incomparable for its idiomatic flair and effervescence, Mr Berman's stylish account, while perhaps not as opulent, gives Mr Wild a run for his money. This is a brilliant, technicolor performance that, in spite of its abstraction from both stage and text, evokes the work's cultural pathos. His command of the material is as suave as it is secure. The harmonies that Virgil Thomson

had so acerbically described as plum pudding are here bathed in a kind of pianistic chiaroscuro. Most impressive is Mr Berman's willingness to indulge the work for its tender lyricism; 'I Love You Porgy' and 'Bess, You is My Woman Now' break into song with irresistible ardor and appeal. The greatest praise must be reserved for the transcription itself. By anyone's standard's, it's a marvel, a thing of real beauty, as good if not better than anything Liszt might have written.

Mr Berman is something of a pianistic gymnast, jumping about the keyboard with consummate ease and grace. But his music-making hardly wants for poetry. In the flashy *El Vito*, a set of variations by Manuel Infante (1883-1958), he delivers its athletic excitement with a twinkle in his eye, capturing easily its scintillating Andalusianisms and balletic broad-strokes (the liner notes reveal the composer may have had cinematic aspirations, in that *El Vito* was written for Jose Iturbi). The Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody is thrilling, if not as edgy and diabolical as Horowitz's is. The once popular Chopin-Balakirev Romanze, a transcription of the Larghetto from the E minor Concerto, is also a welcome addition to this program. But here the performance is too fast—almost perfunctory. Perhaps Chopin is not for him. Even so, he demonstrates considerably greater imagination and rhythmic flexibility than Garrick Ohlsson's straitjacketed account.

Medtner devotees will commend Mr Berman for his inclusion of the *Fairy Tale* Sonata. His reading is detailed, adept, and imaginative; but it lacks something of the audacious mischief, unpredictability, and occasional frenzy that Petri and Gilels bring to Medtner (Melodiya 40017 and Music & Arts 772.) Mr Berman's performance is all the more remarkable in that it was recorded in concert at the Piano Festival at Husum, Germany. The sound is exceptionally clean, if not particularly rich or reverberant.

YOUNG

Claude & Jean Francaix, piano

SCHUBERT: *Andante Varié; Variations, op 82:2*; FRANCAIX: *Scuola di Ballo on themes of Boccherini; 8 Exotic Dances*; CHABRIER: *Romantic Waltzes; Bourrée Fantasque; España*
Erol 96006 (Qualiton) 73 minutes

Oh la-la! If ever there were a musical experience capable of making you want to throw down your champagne glass, kick up your heels, and break into song, this is it. The late Jean Francaix (1912-97) was a star in the French musical firmament but only a vaguely familiar name to the average American music lover. That's a pity, because Francaix wrote