

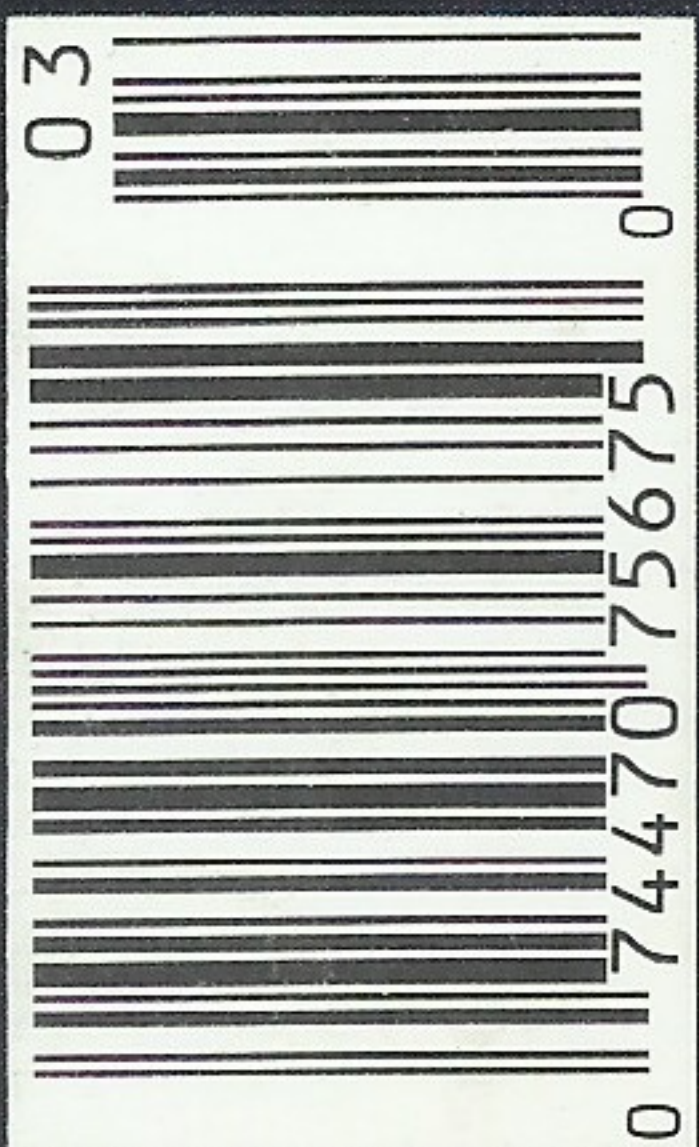
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seems to enjoy quantity above quality. Though one's inner ear can unscramble Backhaus's interpretations, he luckily recorded many of the works present here, and with a benevolent action by EMI, we might again enjoy his finest performances. These piano roll recordings lack the vitality and lyricism present on his 78-rpm discs.

Dr. Latanza possesses an important collection of piano rolls, second in the world only to Dennis Condon of Sydney, Australia. Each CD's notes contain Latanza's insightful fourteen-page essay in Italian on the instrument and its history. Unfortunately it is abridged into an awfully translated two-page English synopsis. The booklets also contain reproductions from ancient Duo-art catalogs of photos and biographical sketches (often inaccurate but in English only) of the performers. One hopes that these guardians will one day be approached by a label willing to assist in maintaining their instruments' intonation and regulation during the recording sessions, and endowed with the patience to wait for those moments in which machine and perforated roll alchemically transcend their limits and yield astonishing results.

Allan Evans

MUSSORGSKY: *Pictures at an Exhibition*. SHOSTAKOVICH: *Three Fantastic Dances*, op. 5. LYATOSHINSKY: *Piano Sonata No. 2*, op. 18 ("Ballade"). PROKOFIEV: *Piano Sonata No. 7 in B \flat* , op. 83. Alexander Slobodyanik, piano. MCA CLASSICS AED 10107 [DDD]; 65:11.

Slobodyanik is well remembered by piano collectors for an impressive set of Chopin's *Études* issued here by Angel/Melodiya some two decades ago. He has toured the U.S. several times, most recently in 1988–89, and has received some impressive reviews. Thus I was particularly disappointed by this generous, interestingly programmed recital which contains so much playing I find unsatisfactory.

The last pianist I remember coupling *Pictures* and the Prokofiev Seventh on one disc was Sviatoslav Richter, whose studio versions of both works appeared in the early 60s on an Artia LP. While other fine performances of both works have appeared since, to these ears only Richter in live performance has surpassed these performances. Slobodyanik's *Pictures*, although it contains some formidable pianism, is put completely out of the running by a host of eccentric details, distortions of Mussorgsky's writing which serve only to call attention to themselves and to diminish the music.

The Prokofiev is somewhat better, until Slobodyanik reaches the last movement, where he sacrifices impact and clarity of detail to sheer speed. This trivializes the music and spoils Prokofiev's grand climax, which can be overwhelming in the right hands (like Richter's) but here sounds merely frantic.

Acoustics alone do not sabotage these performances beyond redemption, but I did feel that confined, close-up sound was hampering the bloom of the piano tone throughout. I was thus astonished to read that the recording was made in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, certainly a large enough space for any kind of music. No producer is credited for this release. My guess is that the recording engineers (who are credited) shoved their microphones down the throat of the piano.

As it happens, the remainder of the recording, what little there is of it, is considerably more successful. Shostakovich's little dances are played with all the wit and fantasy one might want. Boris Lyatoshinsky (1895–1968), a Ukrainian pupil of Glierè, seems to be an interesting composer. Victor Ledin's fine program notes describe Lyatoshinsky's sonata as a combination of "Western late Romanticism, folk elements and a Scriabinesque impressionism." Scriabin is actually the strongest element in the mix, but this is an intriguing piece and, as far as I can tell, Slobodyanik plays it very well. Some diehard collectors may actually invest in this disc just to hear this nine-minute piece. But they are also going to wind up with what I find some very disappointing performances of the better-known works.

Leslie Gerber

GREAT COMPOSERS AT THE KEYBOARD: FERUCCIO BUSONI. Ferruccio Busoni, piano rolls. FONÈ 90 F 13 CD [DDD]; 76:51.

BACH-BUSONI: *Sonata No. 2 in D Minor for Solo Violin: Chaconne*. LISZT: *Études d'exécution transcendante: No. 5, Feux follets*. *Études d'après Paganini: No. 5, La Chasse*. *Polonaise No. 2 in E* (arr. Busoni). CHOPIN: *Preludes*, op. 28.