

A master at play CONCERT

Joseph Banowetz Piano Recital
Lee Foundation Theatre
Nafta June 3, 2007

THERE are piano recitals and there are piano recitals. Many are focused on pyrotechnics and the enviable skill of avoiding mistakes, and often, the art of sound production becomes an incidental feature. so when the presentation of piano music takes on a masterclass in sonorities, something truly special happens.

The secret was in the pedaling, a technique that makes or breaks a performance, but which is often overlooked. A rank amateur would use the sustaining pedal to smudge a multitude of sins, but at the feet of a master, a reading takes on a new glow. There were countless instances where seemingly routine phrases came alive, and that elisive quality called colour issued forth unimpeded.

When the drably titled Allegretto In C Minor by Schubert transforms into a bleak, tragic Lied without words, or the nightingale's song in Liszt's transcription of Chopin's My Joys greets a lover ever so longingly, one could be excused for suspecting the dark arts at work.

In his richly imaginative, free-wheeling encore, the gypsy-inspired Hungarian Rhapsody No. 3, Banowetz clearly showed why he has been hailed as one of "Three Bs" of Liszt-performance.

The Late-lamented Bolet and still-kicking Brendel would certainly have been delighted in his company.

Chang Tou Liang

>classical

TANEYEV PIANO CONCERTO
/PIANO WORKS

Joseph Banowetz, et al Russian
Philharmonic/Thomas Sander-
ling (Tocatta Classics)★★★★★

SERGEI Taneyev (1856-1915) is perhaps better known today as the student of Tchaikovsky who "completed" his unfinished third Piano Concerto.

Ironically, Taneyev's only piano concerto of 1876 is also incomplete, comprising an expansive opening movement bearing many Tchaikovskian hallmarks - slatic melancholy and passionate outpourings - and a brief funeral march.

suppressed because of his teacher's criticisms, it nevertheless deserves a listen not least because of the committed advocacy and virtuosity of American pianist Joseph Banowetz, who presents its first-ever recording.

The shorter pieces have a salon-like quality and are very well-crafted, even looking ahead to those of Rachmaninov's. A surprise item takes the form of the two-minute-long The Composer's Birthday for four hands, specially wirtten for Tchaikovsky's 52nd birthday, where Vladimir Aschkenazy makes a cameo appearance as the narrator.

Chang Tou Liang

> *Don't miss Piano Recital by Joseph Banowetz in conjunction with the 3rd Singapore Piano Pedagogy Symposium at nafa Lee Foundation Theatre this sunday at 7:30 pm.*

JOSEPH BANOWETZ
PIANIST



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REVIEWS

GRAMOPHONE

April 2007

TANEYEV: Piano Concerto C. Andante semplice. Prelude. Lullaby. Theme and Variations. Allegro. Repose Elegy. March. Four Improvisations. The Composer's Birthday. **Joseph Banowetz, Adam Wodnicki pfs, Vladimir Ashkenazy narr. Russian Philharmonic of Moscow/Thomas Sanderling. Toccata Classics TOCC0042.**

Russian heart and soul from the players make this a Taneyev triumph

How can it be that the only piano concerto by a pianist-composer of the standing of Taneyev has never previously been recorded? True, it was left incomplete - Taneyev was a harsh self-critic, and adverse comment from Anton Rubinstein, Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov can hardly have helped. True, there are times in the 25-minute first movement when it's hard not to wish that the 19-year-old recent graduate from Tchaikovsky's class might have drawn the threads of the structure a little tighter. Yet the very opening bars bring a characteristic touch of nobility, gravitas and subdued enthusiasm (plus a strong pre-echo of Tchaikovsky's third Piano Concerto). And while I can't see anyone ranking the two movements beside the finest of Taneyev's mature symphonic or chamber works, the fact that the Concerto remained unfinished and unrevised surely robbed us of a work worthy of a place in the great Russian tradition.

A huge part of the credit for this impression must go to all concerned with this CD. The performance never gives off the whiff of dutiful generality that so often accompanies such ventures. Banowetz plays with a natural eloquence and heart, as well as a fine technical address, qualities which ennoble the frankly less distinguished solo pieces too. The rather rambling Theme and Variations cannot entirely disguise its origins as a composition exercise, and I do not regret that the Allegro never grew into a complete sonata.



But the end of the disc is a delight. The *Four Improvisations* are a cataloguer's nightmare, since they were jointly composed with Arensky, Glazunov and Rachmaninow, passing round sheets of manuscript paper in a game of musical "consequences". Just as quirky is Taneyev's greeting for Tchaikovsky's 52nd birthday, whose whimsical scenario is built around quotations of nine of the latter's major works. The piece is helpfully recorded here once with the accompanying text declaimed (by Vladimir Ashkenazy, no less), once without.

Less than one fifth of the music on the disc has been previously recorded. All of it is excellently recorded, and serious collectors should flock to snap it up.

David Fanning

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REVIEWS

Europe

"Banowetz is a virtuoso in the noblest sense of the word, who seeks a balance between dexterity, technical display, and surface glitter, while always concentrating on unfolding the music's artistic and emotional message and content.....Banowetz is a worthy continuation of his master, Carl Friedberg, who was a pupil of Clara Schumann."

-Ruch Muzyczny, Warsaw, Poland

"In the Christmas concert by the Philharmonic, performed in the Great Hall of the Philharmonic and conducted by Pavel Bubelnikova, we were able to hear the Balakirev First Piano Concerto introduced to us at this concert by the American pianist Joseph Banowetz, who interpreted this work masterfully, precisely, and with the greatest musical finesse and temperament."

*THE NEVA TIMES,
St. Petersburg, Russia*

"Pianism is the essence of these pieces: served by Mr. Banowetz's breathtaking agility and limpid tone, they shed

the tarnish accumulated in too many merely worthy performances and made us gasp anew at their creator's wizardry."

THE TIMES, London

"I am more than grateful to have two such rarely heard concertos on record, powerfully and persuasively performed."

(Review of Rubinstein Concertos Nos. 1 and 2.)

*-Bryce Morrison
GRAMOPHONE, London*

"Joseph Banowetz, a remarkable artist of the keyboard...not only some of the most powerful but for sheer beauty of tone some of the most ravishing Busoni on disc."

*-Callum MacDonald
TEMPO, London*

"This stylish recording is by an American pianist who is clearly an artist." -Desmond Shaw-Taylor. (Reviewing the Marco Polo world premiere recording of the complete Balakirev Scherzos and Mazurkas, which was awarded a West German Music Critics' first prize for the fourth quarter of 1987.)

*THE LONDON TIMES,
London*

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"We listened to piano playing of high international color. That dangerous expression his interpretation was in perfect harmony with the spirit of the work fits well in this case."

TIDNINGEN, Stockholm

"Joseph Banowetz is a brilliant virtuoso, as was witnessed for example by his remarkable execution of the difficult Sonata by Béla Bartók."

JOURNAL DE GENÈVE, Geneva

"Sovereign Performer (headline)...There are no technical difficulties for the American pianist Joseph Banowetz. He has every technical resource at his command, even when making excursions into realms of high virtuosity."

TELEGRAF, West Berlin

"Joseph Banowetz is musical through and through, he plays with a flawless technique in the 'grand manner'...Wild ovations."

KURIER, Vienna

"He is a sensitive, elegant pianist, with a strong virtuoso technique."

TASS NEWS AGENCY, Moscow

"Joseph Banowetz is a magnificent virtuoso, who amazed the public by his deep understanding of the composer's spirit."

(Rubinstein Concerto No. 4 - St. Petersburg (Leningrad) Philharmonic.)

RUSSIA'S NEWS, Moscow

"The Barcelona Concert Society Orchestra offered an immaculate performance of the 23rd Piano Concerto of W. A. Mozart, where Joseph Banowetz showed his great artistry and poetry as soloist, in a sold-out concert full of a very attentive audience."

REVISTA MUSICAL CATALANA, Barcelona

"Joseph Banowetz delighted his audience with the most exquisite artistry and superb musicality....This is one of those piano recitals that will remain in our memory for the rest of our lives."

DIARI DE TARROGONA, Spain

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Banowetz, "A Majestic Pianist" (Headline)... In Liszt's Fountains at the Villa d'Este, Banowetz chiseled piano sonorities of the rarest beauty... Banowetz's performance of Beethoven's 32 Variations displayed his full power over the instrument."

IL GIORNALE DI BRESCIA,
(Festival Armonie sotto la Rocca), Italy

Asia

"The audience was spellbound by a dazzling display of dexterity that made the piano sing"

(Liszt Concerto No. 1 with the Central Philharmonic Orchestra.)

THE CHINA DAILY, Beijing

"Banowetz's performance was filled with deep emotion, flawless and full of magic."

(World premiere of Huang An-Lun's Piano Concerto in G minor with the Guangzhou Philharmonic.)

THE DAILY NEWS,
Guangzhou

"The continuous expressive musicality and virtuosity of this playing in the Chopin Concerto fully captured the enthusiasm of the audience."

(Chopin Concerto No. 1 with the Seoul Philharmonic)

MUSICA DI PIANOFORTE
MAGAZINE, Seoul

"He is equipped with lofty virtuosity, but seems to be on stage to plead the cause of greatness in music...He well deserves the title of today's outstanding interpreter of Liszt."

FRIENDS OF MUSIC
JOURNAL, Tokyo

Flawless Fingers (headline)

"The Beethoven Sonata in F minor was full of fire, drama, and turbulence.....One of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies brought the evening to a toe-tapping close, with the audience wholeheartedly engaging with the gypsy scale of this popular but challenging nineteenth century piece."

HINDUSTAN TIMES, India

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North America

"Banowetz has an uncanny connection to nineteenth-century repertoire....It is difficult for this writer to imagine d'Albert ever turning in better performances of these two concertos than the ones reviewed here. High praise, but absolutely deserved."

(Review of the Eugen d'Albert Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 on Naxos Records with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, Dmitry Yablonsky, conductor) - Maurice Hinson
PIANO AND KEYBOARD MAGAZINE, U.S.A.

"Every dynamic, every accent, every rhythm, every tempo was precisely in place...Balance, taste and sensitive musicality were consistently the order of the day."

LA TIMES, Los Angeles

"Banowetz is a classical, virile player in somewhere along the lines of Rudolph Serkin."

THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, San Francisco

"The Banowetz performances are honestly felt, straightforward, technically solid, lovely in sound...all of these performances are on a high level."

(Review of recording of Liszt's

Transcendental Etudes.)
THE NEW YORK TIMES, New York

"In the remainder of the century the pre-eminent 'three B's' of Liszt playing may well be Barenboim, Bloch and Banowetz - not necessarily in that order."

FANFARE RECORD MAGAZINE, U.S.A.

"Banowetz displayed a romantic fervor, continually seeking the maximum in drama and contrast...Banowetz produced a potent combination of poise, power and concentration allied with a rich tone, brilliant passagework and uncommon command of musical rhetoric."
THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION, Atlanta

"His program Friday was as remarkable for its color and dynamic range as it was for its controlled expressivity."
DESERT NEWS, Salt Lake City, Bachauer International Piano Festival

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“Joseph Banowetz plays with obvious affection for this music and genuine distinction. He brings a good sense of rubato to the *Repose*, and a broad tonal palette to the *Andantino semplice*. Banowetz even injects an element of glamour into the *Piano Concerto*.”

FANFARE,

Review of new Teneyev CD

July/August 2007

Australia and New Zealand

“Banowetz added one more to the many performances of Grieg’s popular piano concerto...It was bold and powerful in the opening, gracious in sound in the lyrical second theme, where the phrase endings were so carefully shaded off, and compelling in the cadenza”

(With the New Zealand Symphony during a thirteen concert tour.)

THE NEW ZEALAND HERALD, Auckland

“Joseph Banowetz is a pianist of uncommon refinement and polish.”

THE SYDNEY MORNING

HERALD, Sydney

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