



THE GODOWSKY SOCIETY

Patrons:

Gregor Benko

Shura Cherkassky

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

Ronald Stevenson

So much for my promises! I do apologise for the long silence, but I can assure Subscribers that the Godowsky Society is not dead: just temporarily moribund. It is now easy to see that it was all psychological - my subconscious has felt that the work of the Society to be redundant with the advent of a book on the Master. I have now come to the realisation that no one book could begin to have the last word on such a major figure.

First of all though, a word about Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji: his music will continue to be with us (and thanks to the efforts of Alistair Hinton, it is now available to an unprecedented extent) but it is the man of whom I now write, who I found, during my all-too-brief contact to be courteous, kind generous and charming. His modesty is nowhere more evident than in his disarmingly opinionated books of essays where he champions composers as diverse as Rachmaninoff, Mahler, Medtner, Alkan, Meyerbeer and Godowsky, but never himself: but then, his character came out in his writing. It is difficult to feel a tragic sense of loss when someone of Sorabji's great age dies, but there is, for me at any rate, a genuine sense of loss in that his presence is no longer there. My wife and I were in the Queen Elizabeth Hall for John Ogdon's performance of the Opus Clavicembalisticum - it was not intended as a memorial concert, but I couldn't think of anything more appropriate. It was more than a concert, it was an Occasion.

But to Godowsky. Much has been happening on the Godowsky front over the past two years or so. There is the epoch-making recording of Marc-Andre Hamelin which is reviewed in this Newsletter by Harold Taylor (author of The Pianist's Talent and editor of a marvellous book on Louis Kentner, both published by Kahn & Averill). I cannot resist saying that I think this to be the most significant recording of Godowsky's music yet made, and I urge all members to badger their record dealers to obtain for themselves copies of the album and/or CD: it is not only significant, it is splendid playing of great music. An unusual thing about Hamelin is that not only does he record Godowsky, but he actually plays the music in concert and his attitude towards it simply splendid. Whilst he was preparing for the recording, he wrote to me "It is astonishing music to work on and I feel privileged to be able to present first recordings of some of these pieces". A refreshing attitude in this ego dominated age and this is reflected in the freshness of his repertoire which includes the Busoni Concerto, the Concorde Sonata of Ives and the Sorabji Sonata which he is preparing for performance. Marc-Andre Hamelin: a name to watch out for and a pianist to listen to.

And here I must mention again Ian Hobson's recording of 18 of the Studies on Chopin Etudes (Arabesque 6537). I personally find some of the playing uneven, even lumpy in places, but there is also much to admire and one or two things that are very good - there is some poetic playing. A bit of the

Curate's egg, but on the whole well worth the investment.

We must now come to the two double albums of Godowsky the pianist, published by APR (for details see below). These will be reviewed in the next issue by Ronald Stevenson but I must mention that all of the English Columbia issues are reproduced from the original masters and that the Grieg Ballade and the Beethoven Adieux (Op. 81a) both benefit greatly from this. There are many unpublished items including a couple of the Master's Miniatures and his arrangement of Home Sweet Home. I would be a blinkered fanatic if I were to say that it is all marvellous, but I can honestly say, that for any piano buff, these albums are a must. They are beautifully presented with comprehensive and informative sleeve notes by Bryan Crimp, well illustrated and happily free from superlatives.

From the same Stable (again, see below), comes the first long-awaited biography. Now, I have not had time to digest this book, so you must accept these first impressions. Jeremy Nicholas, composer of songs and of music for brass band, broadcaster and actor wears an author's hat to bring us the biography. This is a biography, so do not expect a detailed examination of the music, of the pedagogic activities, the innovations in musical notation, or of the fingering and pianism. Not that these subjects are ignored, but Mr. Nicholas seems more and more to have been fascinated by the man himself and rightly given himself into this fascination. This is what makes the book so readable, and what a pleasure to find a biographer so tactful, for he does give the man, warts and all, but in as balanced a manner as his subject's pianism. The time scale of Godowsky's life comes over beautifully as Nicholas quotes copiously from letters and from contemporary writings to highlight his commentary, and there are characterful vignettes of contemporaries. There is more than one - or two - books to be written on Godowsky, and this is an excellent start. There are copious appendices listing Godowsky's published music, records made, published and unpublished and of piano rolls made, although it would have been helpful had Mr. Nicholas indicated which were known to exist and which were missing. I for one would like to know of the availability of the piano rolls. From a first reading I can pick up the author on two points only: the Sonata in E minor may have been begun in Switzerland in 1910, but copious sketches for it were dated August 30, 1936: these sketches are in the Library of Congress as noted in Newsletter Vol.V, no. 1. The second point has nothing to do with music but is worth noting! "On 22 September, 1926.....Godowsky once more left New York for Europe. "Denying himself the pleasure of a trans-Atlantic flight, he went by boat..." This was one year prior to Lindberg's historic trans Atlantic flight!! I'll have to wait until I've had an opportunity to digest the book and to discuss it with others, but nothing can take away from the pleasure of reading a biography of the musician I've admired for so long. One final little carp: the title: "Godowsky - the Pianists' pianist", he was so much more than that. There will be a full review (no doubt with further comments by me) in the next issue of the Newsletter - and by the way, why does Jeremy give credit to the Newsletters to 1987 only? There was one issue in 1988, and Jeremy himself contributed to it. Perhaps it was modesty!!

Now, it should have been mentioned that Mr. Nicholas had his finger in the Godowsky Double albums mentioned above, for it was through his contact with Leopold Godowsky III that much of the unpublished material was released. Which reminds me that the biography is very well illustrated, with much of the material being courtesy of Godowsky's grandson.

This brings me to yet another item of note, which is the imminent re-publication of all of Godowsky's Schubert-related compositions, including

the great Passacaglia and the song transcriptions. Details of this will be forthcoming in the next issue of the Newsletter. Rumour has it that the ubiquitous Jeremy has something to do with this.

Rumour also has it that the July edition of the Musical Times will have extensive coverage of the Godowsky double albums, the biography and of the republication of the Schubert-related music. And just for the heck of it, the next Newsletter will review this edition of the Musical Times. Or is the whole thing getting just a little in-bred?

There was also, on British BBC Television, a programme on Godowsky by Jorge Bolet. He had little new to say of his subject, and his playing may have become a little more deliberate over recent years, but he still has a beautiful tone and a magisterial authority in his playing which is compelling. The highlight of this programme was a brief clip of the Master (in colour, but silent) playing the piano. Mr Bolet has done great service in the Godowsky cause, but his playing of the Elegie for left hand alone persuades me that he would do more by programming other original works rather than transcriptions.

Another event, so small as to register a minus on the Richter Scale, was the performance of a selection of the Miniatures on March 11 by Martyn Strachan and Harry Winstanley in which the latter gave his partner some anxiety by his arbitrary observance of repeat markings. However, the audience (which included Mr. Winstanley's wife, daughter, son and two sisters) were most forgiving and most appreciative. This Scottish premiere took place at the Edinburgh Society of Musicians.

Performing the Miniatures brought to me the importance of piano in the playing of Godowsky and of the necessity of a singing tone (not that I managed either to the extent I would have wished) and made me appreciate just why Pachmann in his wisdom took to Godowsky and why the Master had an affinity with the "pianissamist", and also why Godowsky was himself so highly regarded for his playing of Chopin. I hasten to add that I do not think that either Chopin's or Godowsky's music should be restricted to levels of mezzo-forte or below, but merely that perhaps greater emphasis should be given to quiet playing. This makes sense when it is remembered that Chopin was seldom heard in the concert hall but made his greatest effects in the Salon where he could give full rein to the subtleties of his art. Similarly, Godowsky was in his element in his studio.

Godowsky was heard again in Edinburgh on May 11 when duo-pianists Stephen Coombs and Christopher Scott played the two-piano version of the Weber Invitation to the Dance. Alas, I could not attend that night or on the previous evening when they appeared in Haddington. Jorge Bolet played the solo version of this work some five years ago at the Edinburgh Festival; which all goes to show something or other.

There have, of course, been many albums released of late which contain Godowsky transcriptions, the best probably being Jorge Bolet's recording of encores which includes the Elegie for left hand alone. It is a splendid album which is more representative of Bolet's art than some of his more recent albums. There is also a good performance of the Bizet Adagietto and two stunning Moszkowski items. I've heard some of this album, but not possessing it, can't come with the publication details - see your local record store, as they say.

I understand that the publication of Charles Hopkin's book on Godowsky can be expected in the not too distant future: given the ways of publishers, this could mean anything, but it is nice to know it is on the way.

Yet another thing we have to look forward to is an issue of an album containing the ultimate in Godowsky transcriptions, Godowsky/Godowsky, in other words, the Twelve Impressions for Violin and Piano - the first all Godowsky album. The artists are Gottfried Schneider and Cord Garben and the album will be released on the Etcetra label. Once again, full details and a review will appear in the next Newsletter.

Now a question. Do any of you people out there ever read these epistles? The reason I ask is that I was looking through past issues the other day and I noticed that Vol.IV no. 1 repeated an item which had been published in the previous issue, an extract from Gdal Saleski's Famous Musicians of a Wandering Race. It is, I admit, but why on earth did you all let me get off with it? Are you too diffident or did the ink run out?

See you all soon.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Harry Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heathery Ha!,
West Linton
Peeblesshire
SCOTLAND EH46 7DS

Godowsky
The Pianists' Pianist

CD APR 7011

APR 7011 An anthology of his American Recordings 1913-26
(plus a private recording and his last commercial recording)

RECORD ONE

1. MENDELSSOHN Songs without words: No.25 in G, Op.62/1
No.34 in C, Op.67/4 (Bee's Wedding)
r. 10.4.1913 US Col matrix 36693 UK D 17713 (also L 1088)
2. CHOPIN: Waltz No.7 in C sharp minor, Op.64/2
r. 10.4.1913 US Col matrix: 36699 UK: D 17722 (also L 1095)
3. LISZT: Gnomenreigen (Etude de concert No.2, G.145)
r. 4.3.1914 US Col matrix: 36890 UK: L 1150/USA: A 5550
4. HENSELT: Wiegenlied in G flat, Op.45 (Chanson de Berceuse)*
r. 25.1.1916 from US Col matrix: 48549 /USA A 5896
5. RUBINSTEIN: Melody in F, Op.3/1
r. 5.6.1916 US Col matrix 48810 unpublished
6. GODOWSKY: Miniatures - Humoresque (piano duet with Leopold Godowsky II)
r. 2.6.1920 matrix 3877 unpublished
7. GODOWSKY: Miniatures - The Hunter's Call & March Militaire
r. 7.4.1921 matrix 5240 unpublished
8. SMITH-GODOWSKY: The Star-Spangled Banner*
r. 7.12.1920 matrix 4653 unpublished
9. BISHOP-GODOWSKY: Home, sweet home
r. 24.5.1921 matrix 5667 unpublished
10. SCHUBERT-GODOWSKY: Morgengrüss
r. 11.9.1926 matrix XE20093 /USA 50133
11. GODOWSKY: Java Suite - The Gardens of Buitenzorg*
r.1935/6 private recording
12. ALBENIZ: Tango in D, Op.165/2
SCHUTT: Etude mignonne, Op.16/1
r. 24.12.1920 matrix X4725 unpublished
13. SCHUTT: A la bien-aimée, valse Op.59/2
r. 2.6.1920 matrix 3879 unpublished
14. RUBINSTEIN: Romance in E flat, Op.44/1
r. May 1920 matrix 3857 unpublished
15. RUBINSTEIN: Rêve angélique (Kammenoi-Ostrov, Op.10/22)
r. 25.3.1924 matrix X12736 unpublished
16. SCHUBERT-TAUSIG: Marche militaire
r. 14.5.1924 matrix X13103 unpublished
17. HENSELT: Weigenlied in G flat, Op.45 (Chanson de Berceuse)
r. 9.1.1924 matrix 12247 unpublished
18. SINDING: Rustle of Spring, Op.32/3
r. 5/6.2.1924 matrix 12459 unpublished
19. ZECKWER: In a boat
r. unknown matrix unknown /Fr A 7195
20. LANE: The Crap Shooters
r. unknown matrix unknown /Fr A 7195
21. MacDOWELL: Witches' Dance, Op.17/2
r.25.3.1924 matrix 12729 unpublished

2/.

RECORD TWO

22. LISZT-CHOPIN: Chant polonaise, Op.74/1 (Maiden's Wish)
r. 28.7.1920 matrix 4051 unpublished
23. LISZT-CHOPIN: Chant polonaise, Op.74/5 (My Joys)
r. Dec 1923 matrix X11860 unpublished
24. LISZT: Gnomenreigen (Etude de concert No.2, G.145)
r. 1923? matrix 01103 unpublished
25. LISZT: La leggierezza (Concert Study No.2, G.144)
r. 9.1.1924 matrix X12244 unpublished
26. LISZT: Liebestraum No.3 in A flat
r. Aug 1925 matrix E16168 UK & USA: 50070
27. LISZT-VERDI: Rigoletto paraphrase
r. Sept 1926 matrix XE20048 UK: 50116/USA: 50131
28. MENDELSSOHN: Andante & Rondo capriccioso, Op.14
r. Sept 1926 matrix XE20046 UK: 50116/USA 50131
29. DOHNANYI: Concert Study in F minor, Op.28/6 (Capriccio)
r. 3.10.1922 matrix 8789 UK & USA: 15049
30. DEBUSSY: Children's Corner No.6 - Galliwog's Cakewalk
r. 12.8.1925 matrix E16099 /USA 15105
31. DEBUSSY: Préludes, Book One No.12 - Minstrels
r. 12.8.1925 matrix E16102 /USA 15105
32. CHOPIN: Fantaisie-Improptu in C sharp minor, Op.66
r. 24.5.1921 matrix X5671 unpublished
33. CHOPIN: Etudes, Op.25 - No.1 in A flat & No.3 in F
r.5/6.2.1924 matrix X12469 unpublished
34. CHOPIN: Waltz No.2 in A flat, Op.34/1
r. 18.1.1924 matrix X12302 unpublished
35. CHOPIN: Waltz No.5 in A flat, Op.42
r. 18.1.1924 matrix X12329 unpublished
36. CHOPIN: Scherzo No.4 in E, Op.54*
r. 17.6.1930 UK Col matrix WAX 5624-?)unpublished
WAX 5625-1

NB: All matrices are Brunswick recordings except where indicated otherwise. Only the titles asterisked have appeared before on LP/CD. Earlier LPs from various sources (Veritas, IPL etc.) have contained some of the above unpublished titles though they were of different 'takes' to those on the above album.

This album spans Godowsky's first and last commercial recordings and a rare private recording. It also contains a huge amount of material new to LP/CD including more than 20 previously unpublished items which have been made available exclusively to APR by Leopold Godowsky III. Significantly, this anthology also presents Godowsky in many titles in which he has not been heard before and, it should be mentioned, many of the acoustic titles have a tremendous immediacy thanks to the latest transfer techniques.

The recording of the Chopin *Fourth Ballade* is, by the way, the very title Godowsky was recording when he suffered a severe stroke. Although never published in his lifetime it is a revelatory performance.

Godowsky
The Pianists' Pianist

(DARR 7010

APR 7010 The complete UK Columbia Recordings 1928-30

BEETHOVEN: Sonata No.26 in B flat, Op.81a (Les Adieux)

r. 31st May 1929 (WAX 4985-2; WAX 4986-1; WAX 4987-1; WAX 4988-2)

GRIGI: Ballade in G minor, Op.24

r. 27th May 1929 (WAX 4963-2; WAX 4964-3; WAX 4965-3; WAX 4966-1)

SCHUMANN: Carnaval, Op.9

r. 28th May 1929 (WAX 4967-3; WAX 4968-2; WAX 4969-2; WAX 4970-2)

& 29th May 1929 (WAX 4975-2; WAX 4976-2)

CHOPIN: Nocturnes

No.19 in E minor, Op.72

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3828-3)

No.1 in B flat minor, Op.9/1

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3807-4)

No.2 in E flat, Op.9/2

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3808-6)

No.4 in F, Op.15/1

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3811-4)

No.5 in F sharp, Op.15/2

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3812-4)

No.7 in C sharp minor, Op.27/1

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3813-4)

No.8 in D flat, Op.27/2

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3830-3)

& 26th June 1928 (WAX 3831-4)

No.9 in B, Op.32/1

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3814-6)

No.11 in G minor, Op.37/1

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3815-6)

No.12 in G, Op.37/2

r. 20th June 1928 (WAX 3809-1)

& 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3810-6)

No.14 in F sharp minor, Op.48/2

r. 22nd June 1928 (WAX 3827-4)

No.15 in F minor, Op.55/1

r. 23rd June 1928 (WAX 3829-2)

Sonata No.2 in B flat minor, Op.35

r. 25th April 1930 (WAX 5549-2; WAX 5550-1; WAX 5551-2; WAX 5552-2;
WAX 5553-3; WAX 5554-2)

This album contains every published recording Godowsky made in the three years before his enforced retirement due to illness, with the best recorded sound ever granted him - very evident in these transfers from the original masters - we hear Godowsky in some of his favourite pieces, not least the celebrated Grieg *Ballade*, considered by many to be one of the greatest piano records of all time. Also of great significance is some radiantly poised Beethoven and a vastly under-rated recording of the Chopin *Second Sonata*, a performance full of blazing drama and conviction.

Current prices are as follows:

LP albums £13.00 each
£24.00 per pair

CD albums £20.00 each
£38.00 per pair

Biography - "Godowsky - The Pianists' Pianist", £26.50

All prices are inclusive of packing and postage.

HOW THE GREAT PIANISTS PLAYED

II : GODOWSKY

by Ronald Stevenson

BBC Radio 3 Producer : Denys Gueroult

Pre-recording : 16-17 February 1971

In the first programme in this series, we investigated the pianism of Busoni and found that, under his hands, the piano became transformed into a kind of idealised organ or even into a new kind of orchestra. Our second programme deals with Godowsky - an entirely different pianist. Godowsky was a purist for whom the piano always remained itself. In those terms, he probably extracted more from it than anybody else has ever done. He shared this approach to the piano with his compatriot Chopin. I mean, if you hear Chopin's piano music, you will almost never hear in it imitations of other instruments. You know how Beethoven imitates French horns in his Les Adieux Sonata:

PLAY PIANO LES ADIEUX

- or how Liszt imitates trumpets in his Polonaise in E

PLAY PIANO POLONAISE IN E

Well, with both Chopin and Godowsky you don't do that sort of thing. Instead, you have the piano in terms of itself. Chopin's first Etude for instance, couldn't be played on any other instrument :

PLAY PIANO CHOPIN ETUDE No.1

Even in Godowsky's Studies after the Chopin Etudes, you always have piano sonority on its own terms. Take the Chopin Etude no 9: its figuration is dictated by the hand in relation to the keyboard:

PLAY PIANO CHOPIN ETUDE No. 9.

Godowsky creates an entirely new piece out of that and makes it a Study for the left hand alone, extending the idea of Chopin's left hand figuration:

PLAY PIANO GODOWSKY STUDY 18a

It is surely symptomatic of the purist nature of both Chopin's and Godowsky's pianism that they both wrote exclusively for their instrument and, apart from a very few exceptions in the case of Chopin, they both wrote no orchestral or chamber music.

Godowsky's published compositions and transcriptions are an even better index to his pianism than his recordings are; for no other piano composer has notated such complexity of ideas with such fastidiousness of detail. He is the only composer who notated variorum interpretations of his music - sometimes one piece exists in three or four different versions - with all the fingering (sometimes as many as four alternative sets of fingering),

each dynamic nuance and every change of pedal set down clearly on the page. When you realise that Godowsky's corpus amounts to over 500 piano pieces, you see that his achievement is unparalleled.

Listen to his fastidious interpretation of Chopin's Nocturne in G Major, recorded for Columbia about 1930:

PLAY RECORD CHOPIN NOCTURNE IN G

Thirty years after his death, Godowsky is an almost unknown master of the keyboard. The reason for that is that he was a single-minded unsensationalist in an age of sensationalism. But the work remains on paper and on disc as a testimony to his development of the great line of the masters.

Leopold Godowsky was born in Wilna, Russian Poland in 1870; was largely self-taught, apart from consultations with Saint-Saens; took Berlin by storm in 1900; emigrated to America; suffered a stroke in the 'Thirties which terminated his concert activity; gave masterclasses in the Soviet Union; and died in New York in 1938.

He always worked, whether at piano practice or at composition, with a houseful of friends. One of them said Godowsky's house made Sanger's Circus seem like a rest home! It was one long party. He was a born host. There was always a midnight running buffet in his New York apartment with a huge samovar in the middle of the table. And round the table would be Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Gide, Rachmaninoff, Ravel, Gershwin, Kreisler, Heifetz - and many more. Mark Hambourg wrote in his autobiography of how he admired "the way in which Godowsky would go on imperturbably practising every day for at least eight hours, while his countless family ran in and out of his room all the time, appealing to him, talking incessantly, yet never seeming to disturb his equanimity, or stop his scales and exercises."

The results of such prodigious application may be heard in Godowsky's piano roll of Liszt's Leggerezza Study:

PLAY RECORDING LISZT LEGGEREZZA

Recently I talked to a pupil of Godowsky, Douglas Miller who, now in his eighties, still teaches in Liverpool. I asked him when he first met Godowsky:

Miller: It was the second of January, 1907, in Berlin, when I was accepted by him as a pupil. He moved to Vienna in 1909 and I continued with him until May, 1910. I used to come home for August each year.

Stevenson: What was your impression of his character?

Miller: He was rather a small man, but one felt there was something big about him. He was quickly sensitive to small things. He was a happy man, completely at ease, very alert. His expression didn't vary much but his eyes were very alive. In spite of his legendary technique, he seemed the exact opposite of the emotional virtuoso. He sat almost motionless at the piano, very concentrated, a little reserved. The characteristic sound of his playing was, I think, due to a sense of unusual control, apart from a few items at the ends of his programmes he didn't display his technique.

Stevenson: Can you describe a lesson with him?

Miller: He didn't sit down beside you at the piano, or play himself as a rule. He strolled about the room, and perhaps he'd shout something and he'd stop and do a passage over and over, then he'd come up to the piano, and watch your fingers, and think of your technique. He was great on independence of the fingers, one finger not doing anything to its neighbour, all that sort of thing. The atmosphere was comfortable, and concentrated. If you'd been nervous beforehand you forgot about it.

Stevenson: What was his repertoire like?

Miller: At that time his concertos were the fourth and fifth Beethoven, I heard him play both these at a concert in Berlin. The two Brahms, I didn't hear him play the B flat, but I know he did play it, and the Liszt E flat. Later I heard him play the Tchaikovsky Number one at the Albert Hall. I've no doubt he played lots of other concertos, I don't know about them. His solo repertoire was endless. I was at a recital in the - Southport, this was later, and noticed that he had a programme on the piano, and kept looking at it between items. I asked a member of the local music firm about this, he had to do with arrangements for the concert: he told me that when asked to send his programme, Godowsky sent a booklet of his repertoire and asked that the items should be chosen for him. He wouldn't have done this in Berlin or Vienna or London. I think my informant may have been exaggerating but he said the booklet contained, among other things, practically the whole of Chopin, including the four Ballades and the four Scherzi.

Stevenson: Which performances - performance, one single performance, if you had to choose one work, which would it be that impressed you most in Godowsky's playing?

Miller: Oh I think the Liszt Sonata. He played it in Chester once.

Stevenson: Yes, and what can you remember about it?

Miller: Well, one might have thought that such a controlled player as Godowsky wouldn't be the best one to play such an impassioned, almost uncontrolled work. But it didn't turn out that way at all. One can hear an impassioned performance and it carries one away at the time, and when it's over there may be a feeling of deflation. With Godowsky's performance, the passionate feeling was a real experience, a very moving one. And there wasn't any disappointing afterthought. It just seemed one of the greatest works ever written for the piano. He did one curious thing. The Sonata commences with a slow descending scale in the bass with both hands. Now he was always very scrupulous with the pedal but in this passage he deliberately held each note over into the next as though the concert-hall had an echo. The final climax near the end of the piece was very powerful, and then at the very end this scale passage comes again, very gently.

Stevenson: The scale that comes at the start -

Miller: At the very start, it's a minor scale. He did the same thing with the pedal and it sounded like a - a voice from some echoing cavern.

Stevenson: Yes. What can you tell us about his technique?

Miller: One hears a lot of fine technique today. Godowsky had everything, he could flutter about in octaves as well as doing expert fingerwork etcetera.

The direction in which he was perhaps supreme was in double note passages. And double note scales. He played these as fast and evenly as if they were in single notes. Ernest Newman once said in a criticism that he thought no other pianist could match his playing of the Chopin Double Third Study. I've heard him play this and I can believe it was true. To some extent his technique was the kind that concealed this technique. In many passages the audience got no idea of the difficulty involved. He did everything apparently with such ease. One couldn't miss the impression that he was able to think of more things at once than was usual. With his ease and concentration he could give an exceptional amount of attention, not only to the detail but to the general effect of the piece, the pedalling and all the rest of it, in a sense one might say that was his technique. It wasn't just his hands, it was his mind also. And his great love for the piano.

Stevenson: You said it wasn't just his hands, but the hands, of course, are very important in piano-playing, obviously, to hold eternity in the palm of your hand, to quote Blake, and a great pianist, I think does this. Edwin Fischer, in his little book of reminiscences writes about pianists' hands, and how pianists' hands determine the kind of piano-playing. What were Godowsky's like?

Miller: Well, pianists have all kinds of hands, they manage well with what they've got. His hands were smallish but his stretch was good. He could play tenths with ease, that's white-note tenths. I doubt if he could have gone from D to the upper F sharp. He might have done. The fingers were very strong and had muscle on them, but they weren't thick fingers. He could get between the black notes easily and had a way of passing one finger over another very dexterously. Once when I had the opportunity to watching his hands at close quarters, the thought occurred to me that Nature had really provided him with hands that were ideal for a pianist.

Douglas Miller was present at Godowsky's flat when there was the historical meeting between Godowsky and Grieg.

Miller: It was actually 1907 - in the Summer, July, yes, I was having a lesson and Godowsky suddenly said to me "Do you know who's in the next room?" And he didn't mean the waiting-room, he meant in the room beyond that - so I said no, and he said "Grieg". Well, then he went on to say that Grieg was stopping with him in the flat and that he'd come over to record on the gramophone his Ballade in G minor. And he, Grieg, thought that the Ballade was his finest piano work. Godowsky said that he didn't know whether he included the Concerto in that

Stevenson: Probably his finest solo piano work?

Miller: Yes. I didn't see see Grieg but when I was going out I saw what I believed was his hat and coat in the hall of the flat.

Stevenson: So the Godowsky performance of the Grieg Ballade which he also recorded later on 78 would be definitive in the sense that he collaborated with Grieg and they discussed the work and would no doubt incorporate ideas of Grieg?

Miller: Yes.

PLAY RECORD OF GRIEG BALLADE

In an interview that Godowsky gave to the American critic Harriet Brower

in 1915, the sweep of his knowledge of piano literature is manifest. He refers to books on the subject which few pianists have even heard about, never mind read: Christiani's book on phrasing, for instance, and another on the same subject by Mathias Lussy. In Godowsky's opinion, the best book on music he ever read was the one by Adolph Kullak, brother of the better-known Theodor Kullak. Godowsky also had the evolution of fingering in perspective, from Couperin's use of only the middle three fingers - to Dussek's innovation of the modern standard fingering for the C major scale. Godowsky's view of the history of culture persuaded him that the general public - even the majority of the cognoscenti - has not yet advanced far enough for the perfectionist in the arts to win popularity. He added: "Men who have made the greatest scientific discoveries are generally unknown to the world." He himself was a perfectionist and he also applied the science of anatomy to pianism. His view certainly seems to be borne out by his own relative obscurity. The public prefers an artist whose personality reveals everything. Godowsky and Busoni were icebergs: however brilliant and refulgent they were, their hidden depths exceeded their apparent grandeur; and these depths can only be fathomed by study. For Godowsky the piano was a source of constant wonder. For him the word pianism included the entire subject - touch, technique, tone, interpretation, performance. He added that the word pianism is the only one that can be applied to an instrument apart from the human voice. You can say vocalism, but not violinism.

Godowsky's method of work put intuition first, logic afterwards. In studying a new work, he first played it intuitively, then analysed his intuition to see if it was logical and if each point could be proved according to what he had established for himself as the laws of interpretation.

There are signs - particularly from America and from Australia - that Godowsky, both as pianist and as composer is being re-assessed. The International Piano Library of New York has released previously unissued recordings of Godowsky and also a recording of his music. Dr. Andrew Cockburn, an Australian Godowsky enthusiast now resident in London, is the only musician I have met who has the complete collection of Godowsky's works and recordings.

When I asked Dr. Cockburn which Godowsky recording he would choose as the ~~exxential~~ one, he had no hesitation - despite the fact that it was a very poor private recording - in singling out the pianist's performance of one of his own compositions, The Gardens of Buitenzorg from his Java Suite.

PLAY RECORDING GARDENS OF BUITENZORG

That performance - despite the recording - shows how Godowsky inherited the poetry of his native Poland as Chopin's heir, the stylishness of Viennese pianism (as exemplified by Sauer) and the elegance of the French school of playing which he probably absorbed from Saint-Saens. As Goethe said, "The genius is the most indebted person." But beyond all that, there is a quality which is indefinable, unless we call it Godowskian.

1. Chopin-Godowsky: Study no. 2 (Op.10, no. 1) in D flat Major
 2. Study no. 7 (Op.10, no. 5) in G flat Major
 3. Study no. 8 (Op.10, no. 5) in C major
 4. Study no. 19 (Op.10, no. 10) in D major
 5. Study no. 31 (Op.25, no. 4) in A minor
 6. Schubert-Godowsky: Gute Nacht
 7. Loellet-Godowsky: Gigue (Renaissance, no.12)
 8. R. Strauss-Godowsky: Standchen
 9. Albeniz-Godowsky: Tango
 10. Godowsky: Passacaglia
 11. Etude Macabre
 12. Prelude and Fugue (B.A.C.H.)
- Marc-Andre Hamelin (Piano) Musica Viva MV1026 (LP) MVCL026 (Cassette)

A CD is also available but differs from the LP in the following respects:
Omitted is: Chopin-Godowsky Study no. 2.

Added are:

- Chopin-Godowsky: Study no. 45 (Op.post. no. 2) in E major
Schubert-Godowsky: Litanai
Schubert-Godowsky: Rosamunde
Godowsky: Wayang Purwa (Java Suite)
Godowsky: The Gardens of Buitenzorg (Java Suite)

The CD number is MVCD1026.

The Musica Viva series is part of CBC Enterprises (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) and are distributed by Vertrieb durch.

NB: This review is of the CD.

This is a well-designed sequence of pieces which shows many different facets of Godowsky's art, whether in transcription or original composition. Marc-Andre Hamelin rises to the technical and musical challenges involved with such splendid results as to almost disarm criticism. He has no idiosyncracies to attack or defend, the playing is sensitive and lucid throughout and there is great attention to detail.

In short, Hamelin presents us with an example of modern pianism at its best, and such criticisms as I dare venture are on the grounds of purely personal feeling. The first part of the album contains transcriptions, but I have chosen to begin this review with the second part, the original compositions:

PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN B MINOR

The theme of both Passacaglia and Fugue is that of the first eight bars of Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony, to which Godowsky adds a preparatory upbeat crotchet on the dominant which prevents it from halting between each repetition and also releases greater possibilities for his added parts. In a footnote, Godowsky directs that the theme "should stand out in all variations, sufficiently to be noticed, but not too prominently when it is not the leading voice." Hamelin obeys this injunction conscientiously throughout his performance, even in the most complicated textures. He is adept at conveying the changes of mood with which the work abounds and takes the great final climax of the Passacaglia with great brio and aplomb. The Fugue is also eloquently played, again with scrupulous attention to Godowsky's expression marks. The album is worth having for this rarely-heard masterpiece alone.

PRELUDE AND FUGUE FOR THE LEFT HAND ALONE

This is a tour de force on the part of both composer and pianist. The Prelude exudes Schubertian charm and the Fugue is equally captivating. It must be the only cheerful Fugue ever written which begins with the notes B.A.C.H.! In this performance, we are conscious only of Hamelin's enjoyment of the music, not that his left hand is doing the work of three. I wonder if he is, like Godowsky, a sinistral?

ETUDE MACABRE

I find this disappointing. I have the impression that Godowsky wanted to write a perpetuum mobile after the manner of Chopin's ghostly 'Funeral March' Sonata finale, but in his own polyphonic, polyrhythmic style. He has overreached himself, I fear, for the texture is so dense that even the agile M. Hamelin is unable to invest it with the necessary impetus. I wonder who could? Perhaps it would be best reproduced on an electronic 'keyboard', now that the pianola is no longer with us.

WAYANG-PURWA and THE GARDENS OF BUITENZORG

These are nos. 2 and 8 of Godowsky's Java Suite of twelve pieces inspired by his travels in the country which we now call Indonesia. Wayang-Purwa is gamelan-based and gently rhythmic; The Gardens of Buitenzorg is more lyrical and impressionistic. Both are beautiful pieces in Godowsky's most poetic vein, given performances of matching quality. There is no more to be said!!

STUDIES ON THE ETUDES OF CHOPIN

Nos. 7 and 8.

These are two of Godowsky's seven versions of the Black Keys etude. The first is a straightforward inversion, giving the figuration to the left hand. In the secine version, the figuration remains in the left hand, but is transposed to the white keys whilst Godowsky adds a 'white keys' study of his own for the right hand. He suggests a speed of 116 crotchets per minute for no. 7, relaxing to 96 for the more difficult no. 8. Hamelin takes Godowsky's tempo for the first study, then in a remarkable demonstration of virtuosity, retains the same speed for the second. Unfortunately, there is not enough music in either performance, with a particular lack of the indicated 'expressivo' in the second study. It is perhaps worth noting that another recording of study no. 7, made by Jorge Bolet, who studied these works with Godowsky, observes the indication 'grazioso beautifully throughout, but falls several beats per minute short of crotchet 116. Was this slower tempo sanctioned by the composer? I suspect that the mellowing effect of age has more to do with it and that Hamelin is a young man, or at any rate he has not yet lost the impetuosity of youth.

No. 19

This is one of Godowsky's "free variation" studies, with the original figuration of Chopin's Op. 10 no. 10 arranged for the left hand and new material added for the right hand. No complaints here. It does seem that Hamelin is more at home with the lyrical studies, where the "expression" is more obvious.

No. 31

Once again, Hamelin displays his superb left hand technique in this

arrangement of Chopin's Op. 25 no. 4 for the left hand alone. A flawless performance.

No. 45

This is one of the most musically satisfying of all the Godowsky transcriptions. It is a set of free variations on the second of Chopin's three posthumously published studies, full of rhythmic and contrapuntal complexities which appear to hold no terrors for Hamelin. He meets the challenge with some of his finest lyrical playing, a splendid conclusion to the group.

GUTE NACHT

Schubert-Godowsky

This is a fine performance of one of the master's finest song transcriptions, capturing the true "Winterreise" atmosphere, marred only by the fact that (for once) Hamelin does not choose a quick enough tempo. Godowsky's own faster recording allows him to create a more cantabile line without any loss of atmosphere. But then, Godowsky ignores his own metronome marking!

LIPENET

Schubert-Godowsky

Another slowish performance, but well-suited to the static character of this song. An elegant and eloquent account.

'ROSAMONDE' BALLET MUSIC

Schubert-Godowsky

Godowsky's delicious harmonic 'asides' are underlined to just the right extent in this charming performance.

STANDCHEN

Strauss-Godowsky

This performance might have sounded more graceful had a slightly slower tempo been adopted. To my ear, Hamelin also misses the ecstatic quality of the middle section.

TANGO

Albeniz-Godowsky

The old favourite, played with suitable languor and seductiveness of tone.

GIGUE

Loeillet-Godowsky

Godowsky made many transcriptions of pre-classical pieces under the optimistic title of Renaissance. **It is ironic that the long-awaited resurgence of popular interest** in this music has led to the virtual abandonment of its performance on the pianoforte, which used to be the chief means of keeping it alive. A valuable feature of these transcriptions is that they allow us to peep into the workshop of a great creative interpreter. The Loeillet Gigue, for example, is an innocent enough piece in its original form and is without any expression marks. Under Godowsky's pen it becomes an excitingly dramatic affair which builds to a splendid climax. Hamelin plays it with great panache, bringing his splendid programme of transcriptions to a fitting conclusion.

I hope that we may look forward to more recordings from this enterprising artist.

(c) Harold Taylor 1989

TWO EXTRACTS

1. Re: Vladimir Khrennikov
From: Russia's Great Pianists
by Dr. Mark Zilberquit
T.F.H. Publications, Inc. Ltd.
pp. 86-87

TK: Neuhaus supported me as long as I worked on the Concerto, expressing his positive attitude to the work on many subsequent occasions as well.

MZ: How was your first Concerto received by other pianists?

TK: Before I performed it in Leningrad, I had played my Concerto in Moscow with the remarkable conductor Georg Sebastian, who was then working in the Soviet Union and later in France. The Moscow concert was also attended by Neuhaus's teacher, Leopold Godowski, who was then also staying in our country. Neuhaus, not without pride, invited Godowski to listen to his pupil's work. (Incidentally, Godowski heard it again in the Leningrad Festival). This Polish pianist had very warm words to say about my Concerto and me. Back in Europe, he also spoke highly of my work and even made appropriate press statements. I scarcely have to say that it was a great honour for me to receive the high high appreciation of one of the foremost performers of all times.

- 2: More Letters of Amy Fay: The American Years, 1879-1916
Selected and edited by S. Margaret William McCarthy:
Information Coordinators, Detroit, 1986.
p. 137

.....I would have gone but I was going to a magnificent concert given by Isaye (sic) and Godowsky at Carnagie Hall and had already bought my ticket.

Godowsky has given two wonderful piano recitals here and his is on the topmost pinnacle of art, but as he is playing the Knabe piano he has had a hard time with the critics, most of whom are affiliated with the Steinway Firm. The consequence is they have written very mean notices about Godowsky, with the result that people were kept away from his concerts. This was a cause of grief to Godowsky and he said he would be very glad if I would write something about his playing and put it in the Musical Courier. I assured him I would be only too glad to help him, but I was sure they would not put the notice in if I did write one, as everything I said would be in direct contradiction to what the critics had said! I was too busy anyhow to attempt it as I was practicing for my own recital at our club.
