

CD Piano Music Volume One First Recording

Adalberto Maria Riva, piano

**Émile JAQUES-DALCROZE Skizzen, op. 10.
Trois morceaux, opp. 44/46.
Polka enharmonique
Adalberto Maria Riva (pn)
TOCCATA 0473 (64:17)**

The Swiss composer Émile Jaques-Dalcroze is best remembered as the inventor of eurhythmics, an experimental method for teaching musical appreciation kinetically rather than by study. In his day, though, he was also a composer of repute, with a string of large-scale compositions to his name as well as a good many works for solo piano. The present disc, Volume One of what appears likely to become a chronological survey, comprises music from a five-year period, 1891/96. Alas, that time frame is too narrow to reveal much about the development of a musician who would still be writing for piano 50 years later; but on this showing it's an obvious encouragement to wait in line for subsequent volumes. This disc is a gem.

The musical language, very much his own, shares familial characteristics with Fauré and Robert Schumann (names that came to my own mind on first hearing, only to discover that both comparisons are echoed by the writer of the liner notes). Adalberto Maria Riva is a stylish, sensitive advocate and an ideal guide across its undiscovered yet recognizable landscape, so much so that by the end the listener thirsts to hear more.

Skizzen (Sketches) is the least substantial item here, but even this varied group of six attractive miniatures grabs the attention thanks to fine craftsmanship and instant communication. They are a satisfying amuse-bouche before the three sets of Trois morceaux that form the bulk of the program. The op. 44 set is confident, elaborate music that is attractive with immediate appeal and yet never feels shallow. Good composers know how to avoid banality en route to achieving a direct form of expression, and Jaques-Dalcroze does precisely that. He was obviously fearful of being predictable, to judge by his habit of dropping distant single notes into (or against) even the simplest melody, yet his virtuosity allowed him



to unleash a jack-in-the-box of pianistic flourishes and tricks in the final "Impromptu-Caprice," their entertainment value a guarantee of smiles

The op. 45 set of Trois morceaux is even more characterful, and ravishingly played by the virtuosic Riva. The opening "Eglogue" is urbane yet colorful, very French in mood with some startling bell effects. When Jaques-Dalcroze drips single high notes into his texture like cubes of ice in summer wine, the flavor is irresistible. The fussy central Humoresque has less charm but the closing Nocturne, a nod to Fauré as its name suggests, is delightful.

Another Fauré title opens the op. 46 set, but the language of this six-minute Ballade is further removed from its model and is not far removed from sonata form. A lyrical opening passage intertwines with a restless second theme, and together they evolve through a broad, confident development towards a hushed finale. The ensuing Capriccio appassionato lives up to both words of its title: neither brash nor vulgar, it progresses with vigorous élan before giving way to a final Aria whose harmonic melodies are glued together by big, discreet pianism. It's a captivating piece, busy yet serene, and Riva executes it with bravura excellence.

The most curious item is the last, a strangely titled Polka enharmonique of shifting keys and tempos. It is too changeable to warrant its cheeky title, for this is a polka that no one is likely to dance to. It is, rather, a joyous moment of show business that earns its place as the coda to a stimulating hour of worthwhile music. Mark Valencia

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