

GRAMOPHONE

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INSTRUMENTAL REVIEWS

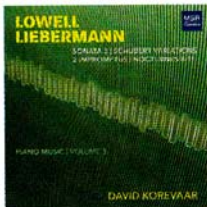
Liebermann

'Piano Music, Vol 3'

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 82. Two Impromptus, Op 131. Nocturnes – No 8, Op 85; No 9, Op 97; No 10, Op 99; No 11, Op 112. Variations on a Theme of Schubert, Op 100

David Korevaar *pf*

MSR © MS1688 (68' • DDD)



A teacher/broadcaster colleague once claimed Lowell Liebermann to be the most frequently

performed contemporary composer among piano students at the Juilliard School. Factual or not, it's certainly a plausible statement. Liebermann's music is primarily tonal, brilliantly if conventionally idiomatic for the instrument and cannily proportioned; no piece seems overly rooted in 20th-century conservative American Romanticism in the tradition of Samuel Barber, Ned Rorem, Norman Dello Joio and others of their ilk. You won't find Copland's craggy edges, any Ivesian petulance or Rzewski-esque confrontation. Not one trace of the fashionable Post-

Minimalist of the Month Club. And this is all to the good, because Liebermann has been cultivating and refining his distinctive compositional voice for decades. In other words, he's his own man.

Yet, for all of Liebermann's innate lyrical gifts, there are enough engaging turbulent sequences barbed with dissonance, such as midway through Nocturne No 12, Nocturne No 9's surging scales and fiery tremolos, the chordal build-up in the Third Sonata's finale and the First Impromptu's climax. Nocturne No 8 is particularly epic, intense and markedly contrasted, and so is No 11, where the opening section's delicate and leisurely contrapuntal intricacy soon accelerates into a virtuoso forest fire that gradually settles into flickering filigree. At the same time, Liebermann's penchant for spinning out sparse and desolate episodes hauntingly manifests itself throughout the Sonata's two interior slow movements.

Some of Liebermann's freshest, wittiest and most unpredictable writing occurs in the 'Schubert' Variations, a piece originally for concert band and brilliantly reworked for 10 busy fingers. The composer takes Schubert's rather insipid setting of Goethe's 'Heidenröslein' on a stylistic joyride that features rapid bitonal embroidering, statuesque chords supported by left-hand octaves, Busoni-like pontification and discontinuous cut-ups.

Needless to say, one needs boundless resources of technique, tone, colour and musical imagination to do Liebermann's keyboard aesthetic justice. David Korevaar possesses these qualities in spades and manages to create an individual character with each selection. Both the present disc and Korevaar's two earlier Liebermann volumes brilliantly reflect this pianist's probing individuality and firm commitment to the material. **Jed Distler**

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