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RICORDI Carnaval Vénitien

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Most readers of Gramophone will have heard the name Ricordi, the great Italian music publisher. How many though, I wonder, will have heard any music by Ricordi, specifically Giulio Ricordi (1840–1912), grandson of the founder, the man who tempted the ageing Verdi out of retirement and who nurtured, among others, the young Puccini? More to the point, how many would be interested in hearing his music? And would your preconceptions be altered in any way if you were told the music was by Jules Burgmein, the curious pseudonym Ricordi adopted as a composer?

Well, cast all cynicism aside and surrender to this delightful selection of his piano duets. Ricordi was, as Verdi himself and the ageing Liszt acknowledged, 'a master musician' whose music was 'beautiful and distinctive'. If you like playing and/or listening to Bizet's Jeux d'enfants or Moszkowski's Spanish Dances you'll find these hard to resist, some of the titles alone indicating that Ricordi wrote with a similar musical twinkle in his eye: the five tiny pieces that make up The Indestructible Babies' Barn Dance, for example, Mr Loulou's Mazurka or the catchy Galop abracadabrant.

The enterprising Gabriella Morelli and Giancarlo Simonacci convey in a natural acoustic and with expert ease exactly the right atmosphere required of high-end domestic music-making (though they can certainly put a foot on the gas when they need to), while also cannily presenting three premiere recordings: the four short movements of Carnaval vénitien (1881), Le bal de la Poupée (1885) and, most significantly, Le livre des sérénades (1883, dedicated to Liszt), 15 miniatures descriptive of geographical areas from Arabia to England (very jolly) and Havana to India, fresh, curious and often surprising – the last, 'Sérénade chinoise', incorporating a timbric effect not encountered again until the first of Schonberg's Op 11 pieces. Intriguing?



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Carnaval vénitien

La bal de la Poupée

Le quadrille des bébés Incassables

Le lanciers de Mademoiselle Ninette

La mazurka de Monsieur Loulou

Sir Roger de Coverley

Galop abracadabrant

Bonne nuit, Poupée! (Petite berceuse)

Le livre des sérénades