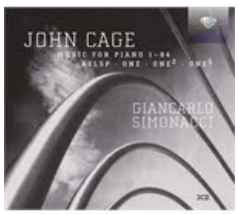
Gapplegate Classical-Modern Music Review

Modern classical and avant garde concert music of the 20th and 21st centuries forms the primary focus of this blog. It is hoped that through the discussions a picture will emerge of modern music, its heritage, and what it means for us.

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Thursday, August 30, 2012

John Cage, Music for Piano Volume 4, Giancarlo Simonacci



I said something like this yesterday but it bears repeating and expanding. There are artists of such importance that it takes years to grasp fully what they are about. John Cage is one of them. If you listen to and begin to understand his music over time, you hear differently. And not just music. You hear the world in a more meaningful way.

I can remember my first encounter with his music. The early electronic mixes I grasped immediately, in part because it was a era where these sorts of collaged sounds had become already a part of musical counter-culture. But the instrumental music. I'd get to the long silences and automatically get up off my chair to flip the record. It exasperated me. Was the music over or what? And the sounds themselves. Were they just a random hodgepodge? No and even if they were (they weren't) you started to hear that differently. Performers too over the years have become much more fully cognizant, I think, of the meaning of it all, the sensuality of it, the cosmic quality if you will.

So here we are celebrating Cage's Centennial. He'd be 100 this year had he lived. There is a release that celebrates it quietly and profoundly, in ways John would have liked. I refer to Giancarlo Simonacci's *Piano Music Volume 4* (Brilliant Classics 9263), a three-CD set.

About the Blog

Grego Applegate Edwards's Classical-Modern Music Review blogsite covers recent releases or re-issues of recordings that feature classical and concert music, primarily of the 20th and 21st Centuries, but earlier music as well when warranted. All styles of relevance will be addressed from Late-Romantic and Neo-Romantic through High-Modern, Avant Garde and Post-Modern styles. Chamber music, orchestral, choral, operatic, and electronic forms will be considered as well as music that combines a classical element with one or more other stylistic elements. Earlier periods will get coverage when a release has something to say to us. Both established and unfamiliar composers will get attention. All content copyright 2007-13 by Grego Applegate Edwards.

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There are works of importance to be had here, played with intelligence and sensitivity. The "Music for Piano", all 84 pieces from 1952-53, are included, as are some prime later works: ASLSP from 1985, and several versions of ONE (1987-90).

These are works of high abstraction, endlessly listenable because extraordinarily counterintuitive. There is no satiation point with this music because there is no point where you fully internalize it. That also means that a first hearing for the uninitiated may be confusing, incomprehensible. That's a given and it takes time to understand Cage, perhaps a lifetime. It doesn't take that long to enter John's musical world however. If you don't force your expectations on this music and let it go its way, it is very contemplative, rather rapidly so.

These are works that demand an extraordinary sensibility on the part of the performer. There's no one way to do the music. But then there are versions that may not come across well nevertheless. Giancarlo Simonacci does not give us such versions here. He does the opposite. These are versions as spirited and simultaneously as detached (in a Zen sort of way) as I've heard. They are beautiful, if Cage would accept that as a valid categorization. Beautiful Cage. Music to live with a lifetime. Music that changed music. Essential, in other words.

Posted by Grego Applegate Edwards at 6:36 AM

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