

DEBUSSY: *Preludes I; L'Isle Joyeuse;*
STRAVINSKY: *Petrouchka Movements;*
Piano Rag Music;
NEWMAN: *Prelude; Antipodal Rag*
Andrew Von Oeyen, p
Delos 3454—71 minutes

For me, the best known set of Debussy piano pieces are the Preludes, Book 1. Unlike the other sets, there are some Preludes that can be handled quite well by competent pianists of less than virtuoso caliber. I say some because the most difficult of this set, *Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest* requires technical skill on the order of *L'Isle Joyeuse*.

Von Oeyen handles all not only with an abundance of technical skill, but a musicality that makes his choices seem inevitable. At the end of the 'West Wind' Prelude, his slower tempo makes the syncopated figure in the bass clearer than I've ever heard it. Then his tempo increases along with volume, making for a very exciting ending. His 'Sunken Cathedral' follows the tempo changes in Debussy's own piano roll recording (1913) that are not present in the published score (half note=quarter note in measures 7-12 and 22-83). The score as published has created difficulties for generations of pianists, and most now choose to follow the recording. Even the publisher made the change in their 1985 score. All would be for naught if this weren't an exceptional performance. Von Oeyen has as wide a dynamic range as one could hope for. All through the 12 Preludes I heard just enough originality of interpretation to keep my ears perked up, but never anything that could be termed too much.

In *L'Isle Joyeuse* Von Oeyen is faster than Goerner (above) by 42 seconds, has more snap and accents in the accompaniment figures and is a bit more exciting. Goerner has the more subtle phrasing and dynamic inflections. I am fortunate to have both, but if forced to pick only one, it would be Von Oeyen. I am also

waiting for Marc-Andre Hamelin to record it ever since I heard him play it in New York last year.

Stravinsky's music makes a good companion to Debussy's. The two knew each other and actually gave the first known performance of *The Rite of Spring* in a piano 4-hand arrangement. The music here balances nicely between Debussy's piano without hammers and Stravinsky's much more percussive writing. The *Three Movements from Petrouchka* were done (along with 'Piano Rag Music') for Arthur Rubinstein in hopes that the pianist would perform more modern music (and Stravinsky's in particular). The work was not a transcription, but designed as a virtuoso show-piece with enough technical and musical challenges to appeal to the best pianists. It was one of the most often performed pieces at the last Van Cliburn competition. I hear it often on debut discs, as it seems to be a clear indication of what a young pianist can do. Von Oeyen is in a different league altogether. He is beyond the technical challenges and deep into the music, and can even be mentioned in the same sentence as Pollini's legendary recording (DG 447431, July/Aug 1996, also DG 471360).

The addition of 'Piano Rag Music' to the program is inspired, and this little three minute piece should be heard more often. Von Oeyen handles all of the mercurial shifts and rhythms just right.

The final two pieces were written for him by film composer David Newman (b.1954). The Prelude is a world premiere recording and is intended as a short introductory piece for the 'Antipodal Rag'. The latter is stylistically influenced by Debussy and Poulenc and, of course, ties in very well with the Stravinsky here. Von Oeyen is a young pianist to watch. His Liszt recording (Delos 3412, May/June 2011) has been a favorite of mine, and this one has all of the ingredients to join it.

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