

The absolute music

Excellent debut CD witnessing great artistic ambitions

Joachim Carr



Schumann-Brahms-Berg

Claves 50-1416

He seems like the absolute opposite of a competition pianist, and yet he wins all the time competitions, writes the Swiss label Claves about Joachim Carr. They have a point.

The young, gentle bergenpianist constantly is fetching home new victories.

In October he won all prizes at the International Grieg-competition in Bergen. Only a few months after winning competitions in France and Switzerland.

The first-prize in Switzerland was a CD-recording for Claves. The disc is his debut recording, based on the program he played in the competition.

It is a terrifying program, opening with Schumanns «Davidsbündlertänze» (op.6,1837), continuing with Brahms «Variationen» (op.21:1, 1857) and ending up with Alban Bergs «Sonate» (op.1) from beginning of the 20th Century.

«Davidsbündlertänze» is a musical cycle, eighteen dances interconnected by repeats of motives, themes and rows of chords. Founded on a personal story. Schumann built the work around a small theme from Clara Wieck, his coming wife.

In the score he marked with citations and initials that the dances should be understood as a dialogue between the two sides of his personality.

When the second edition appeared in 1850 however, he (had) removed all these private, written references. He had recognized that «Davidsbündlertänze» was a bulky, musical construction living a life of its own and developing according own, inherent rules.

Carr use the 1850-edition. And he is just performing the eighteen dances as one consecutive piece of «absolute» music. He concentrates on the subtle, inner balances in the dances, on the overlying formal and tonal structure, on the musical elements emerging in ever changing costumes and manage to get the work hanging together.

And in the two following works he in a way demonstrate why «Davidsbündlertänze» became a milestone in the music-history. At least he is drawing forward some important foot-prints of Schumanns «pure» program-free music - first with «Variationen» where Brahms creates a near symphonic, «abstract» piano composition by exposing a single theme to a number of formal thorough elaborations.

Last on the disc comes two Schumann-songs in a colour sparkling, nearly kitschy arrangement for piano by Franz Liszt. In all these works Carr present himself as a strong, technical wellfounded pianist.

His way of performing is sober, analytic, reflectant. But never dry and theoretic. He is playing listening, with the ear directed to the musics own, inner movements.

If you have other interpretations of the same works in your ears, some of Carrs choices might be surprising. For instance he is tuning down the lyric, meditative aspects of Brahms' «Variationen». Despite such details, this is an excellent debut disc, a disc transmitting a strong signal of great artistic ambitions. And of a great pianistic talent.

Peter Larsen - Music reviewer / Bergens Tidende 27.03.2015

(Translation by Kjell Wernøe)