
NEWS & INFORMATION

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STICK AROUND FOR THE ENCORES; REVELATORY PIANIST MAGNIFIES MINIATURES

When the French say "Encore!" they actually mean "Not again!" And that's how jaded record collectors might feel toward another CD of piano encores. (The French yell "bis" to demand an extra piece at the end of a recital.)

Yet Uncommon Encores, Dmitry Paperno's third release on Cedille Records, the enterprising Chicago label, explodes the notion that an encores album means showy musical chestnuts, roasted too many times over.

Russian-born Paperno delivers deep, powerful performances of 16 lesser-recorded piano miniatures. He magnifies and reveals these rich musical microcosms with a three-dimensional pianism that takes advantage of the instrument's full sonorities.

A rarity is the Cancion y Danza No. 5 by Federico Mompou, the Spanish (Catalan) composer who specialized in small-scale piano pieces. "Many of his pastels are of an extraordinary haunting ... elegance," wrote Lionel Salter in the New Grove Dictionary (1980). Mompou's "fondness of ostinato figures and bell sounds often lends an incantatory quality to his poetic evocations."

Even the one Rachmaninoff piece, the Polichinelle, Op. 3, No. 4, is seldom heard.

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A beguiling, spiritual performance of Siloti's transcription of Bach's Prelude in B minor opens the program. Scarlatti's Sonata in B minor is beautiful and dramatic, with a sunny radiance and eternally fresh-sounding melodies. Sgambati's transcription of Gluck's Melodie d'Orfee is achingly lovely and seems perfect for a tenderly romantic movie scene. Particularly interesting is Shchedrin's suspenseful yet jazzy Basso Ostinato.

Russian pianist and teacher Leah Levinson's transcription of Schumann's song "Der Nussbaum" (The Nut Tree) receives its first-ever recording. "An amazing achievement for a one-piece composer," Paperno writes in the liner notes. "She gave me the piece as soon as she finally wrote it down in the early 1960s."

Paperno's liner notes, like the recording, are uncommon, informative and quite touching. A mature artist, Paperno offers stimulating first-person accounts of his relationships with the pieces and their performance challenges. Paperno tells of his first visit with Shchedrin, "my closest friend from my years in what used to be the USSR." Unable to find a copy of the popular Basso Ostinato score, Paperno went to the composer's Moscow apartment and came away with a personally inscribed copy.

Paperno, a prize-winner at the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw, had a distinguished concert career in the former Soviet Union. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1977 and now teaches at Chicago's De Paul University. He recorded for Melodiya and Musical Heritage Society -- Uncommon Encores marks his third recording of Scriabin's Waltz, Op. 38 -- but it's mainly through his recent Cedille recordings that he's finally reaching a wide audience. Reviewing Paperno's first Cedille recording, Stereo Review's Richard Freed explained what makes the pianist's approach so satisfying: "It gains a touch of poetry. That quality makes itself felt throughout the program, in fact, in the least aggressive way: You feel the pianist is really finding it in the music rather than imposing it from the outside."

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Uncommon Encores

Works by Albeniz, Bach-Siloti, Chopin, Glinka-Balakirev,
Gluck-Sgambati, Hummel, Khachaturian, Liszt,
Mendelssohn, Mompou, Mozart, Rachmaninov,
Scarlatti, Schumann-Levinson, Scriabin, Shchedrin
Dmitry Paperno, piano
Cedille CDR 90000 007

Note to Broadcasters: These short pieces can come in handy when you're looking for satisfying fillers; these are miniatures of musical substance. Consider Uncommon Encores as extra membership premiums for generous listeners who deserve an encore -- 16 of them.