

Johan Helmich Roman - 12 Keyboard Suites (2012)

Written by bluesever
Thursday, 19 July 2018 08:20 -

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CD 1 [74:42] Suite I in E flat Major, BeRI 225 1. *Allegro* [3:11] 2. *Adagio* [0:55] 3. *Non tanto* [0:46] 4. *Vivace* [3:26] Suite II in D Major, BeRI 226 5. * [3:35] 6. *Lento non troppo* [1:44] 7. *Allegro moderato* [4:00] 8. *Non troppo allegro* [2:09] 9. *Presto* [0:53] Suite III in G Major, BeRI 227 10. *Largo* [4:30] 11. * [2:31] 12. *Allegretto* [1:14] 13. *Allegro assai* [1:51] 14. *Menuet* [2:18] Suite IV in D Major, BeRI 228 15. *Lento* [2:57] 16. *Carillon Allegro* [3:23] 17. *Non troppo adagio* [2:45] 18. * [1:52] 19. *Allegretto* [1:17] 20. *Presto* [1:10] 21. *Villanella* [3:27] Suite V in G minor, BeRI 229 22. *Con spirito* [1:58] 23. * [2:46] 24. *Lento* [2:40] 25. *Vivace* [0:41] 26. *Lento* [2:15] 27. *Andante* [3:48] Suite VI in B flat Major, BeRI 230 28. * [3:30] 29. *Andante* [3:20] 30. *Vivace* [1:27] CD 2 [54:06] Suite VII in F Major, BeRI 231 1. *Moderato* [3:22] 2. *Vivace* [1:25] 3. *Allegro* [2:31] Suite VIII in A Major, BeRI 232 4. *Commodo* [3:57] 5. *Lento* [3:19] 6. *Vivace* [2:03] 7. *Scozzese Vivace* [0:16] Suite IX in D Minor, BeRI 233 8. * [2:34] 9. *Adagio* [1:47] 10. * [2:35] 11. *Lento* [1:45] Suite X in B Minor, BeRI 234 12. *Adagio* [3:30] 13. *Come Alla breve* [2:56] 14. * [0:47] 15. * [2:01] 16. *Tempo di Minuetto* [2:31] Suite XI in F Minor, BeRI 235 17. * [1:19] 18. * [2:58] 19. *Lento poco* [1:55] 20. * [2:26] Suite XII in E Minor, BeRI 236 21. *Allegro* [2:50] 22. * [1:31] 23. * [3:19] * *No tempo marking* Oskar Ekberg (piano) Recorded at the Kulturhuset, Ytterjärna, Sweden, 1-2 February, 13-14 November, 11-12 December 2011.

In his exhaustive liner-notes Oskar Ekberg touches upon several aspects of Roman's keyboard

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suites. Are they keyboard compositions or not? When were they written? Are they suites or sonatas? Should they be played on a modern piano? What about repeats, tempi and other expression marks - in manuscript 14 of the 53 movements have no tempo indications at all. To go into all these details in this review would, I believe, be of little interest, unless one wants to buy the discs and then one gets the full comments anyway. What I want to do is to convey some impressions from my listening.

Roman is known as 'the father of Swedish music' and even though there had been some fairly important composers in Sweden before his time they were all foreigners, mostly from German-speaking countries. Roman was born in Stockholm as son of a member of the Royal Orchestra. He learnt to play the violin very early, became a member of the orchestra when he was 17 and at the age of 22 was granted a scholarship to study in London, where he played in the King's Theatre Orchestra under Handel. When he returned to Sweden he was the first to arrange public concerts. First and foremost he was a composer and though every music-lover in Sweden knows his Drottningholm Music he wrote so much else that gradually has been unearthed. Scholars still don't have a full overview of his total oeuvre.

The keyboard suites have not been possible to date accurately but they must be from the later part of his life. Probably written for his own pleasure he had no obligation to adjust them to current taste, which he had to do when he had commissions. Technically these suites are no virtuoso pieces - Roman was primarily a violinist - and most of the movements are fairly brief. They are both rhythmically thrilling and melodically attractive. The opening Allegro of the first suite is nicely syncopated and is followed by a meditative Adagio, while the concluding Vivace is elegant. Among my notes I find comments like: 'The presto finale [of suite II] should win many a cheer at a live performance'; 'Wholly delightful!' [Suite III]; 'The Andante [suite VI] is a relaxed promenade through an autumnal landscape with water dripping from wet leaves' and 'The vivace finale is 'a rollicking, rushing calf, tail in the air'.

Suite V in G Minor is possibly the bravest. The short vivace sounds to be from a much later period, and it is followed by a lento that is decidedly romantic in its melody. The concluding andante, on the other hand, is as noble as anything from Das wohltemperierte Klavier.

The longest of the twelve suites is the fourth with seven movements. It opens with a meditative Lento, followed by an explosive Carillon. This is a real showpiece! A calm and beautiful adagio cools down the temperature before the fourth movement - with no tempo marking - enlivens the atmosphere in what the next generation might have labelled a scherzo. An allegretto and an energetic presto take us to the beautiful and rather melancholy Villanella, with a short recurring phrase reminiscent of Don't Cry for me, Argentina.

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I could go on with similar comments on all the remaining suites but it's fully enough to summarize my listening experience in three words: 'full of surprises'. I wonder though what they would have sounded like when played on a harpsichord. A couple of decades ago pianos were almost banned in baroque repertoire, but today we tend to be much more liberal. I often prefer Bach on a concert grand. Played with such lightness of touch as Oskar Ekberg plays them on a Steinway D, these twelve suites become luminous little gems. The recording is spotless.
---Göran Forsling, musicweb-international.com

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