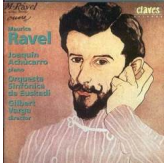


Maurice Ravel – Piano Concertos (2001)

Written by bluesever

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Piano Concerto in G major 1. *Allegro* 2. *Adagio assai* 3. *Presto* 4. *Alborada del Gracioso*
5. *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* Joaquín Achucarro – piano
Euskadi Symphony Orchestra (Basque National Orchestra) Gilbert Varga – conductor
Recorded San Sebastian, Miramon September 2000, June 2001

There is no shortage of recommendable recordings of the Ravel Concertos. In the G major whether the approach is of lambent understanding or of exotic filigree, of neo-classicism explored or the artificial exposed there's a performance to suit every taste. Joaquín Achucarro joined forces with Gilbert Varga and the Euskadi Symphony Orchestra for a South American tour and this recording is the result of their sympathetic collaboration; perhaps the more so as this, the Basque National Orchestra, – Euskera is the name of the Basque language - and Ravel were born in the French Basque town of Ciboure.

There's nothing gestural about the playing and the orchestra is especially attentive to some of Ravel's more flagrant orchestration. Achucarro neither overplays nor underplays the jazz element in the work and remains essentially true to Ravel's stated dictum that the concerto was light-hearted and brilliant without the aim of profundity of utterance. This is especially true in the *adagio assai* where there is no hint of a smooth cantabile from the pianist; the music never congeals to mere gorgeousness and the playing is alive to harmonic potential; what is undeniably missing is the feeling of limpid lyricism that this movement often draws out of pianists, the sense of an evolving song, a suspension or rapture that moves inexorably toward orchestral interjection. There is some notably fine and blowsy-bluesy woodwind playing in the finale – generous, evocative but not vulgarly over personalized.

Many of these characteristics apply equally to the Concerto for the Left Hand where Achucarro meets the considerable virtuoso demands with no little skill; he catches the fragmentary,

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refractory quality of the music its fusion and reconciliation of popular and jazz elements with nostalgia as he does the final disturbing cadences which are more properly reflective of man's experience in war (the concerto of course having been written for Paul Wittgenstein who had lost his right arm in the War). There is also Ravel's 1919 orchestration of Alborada del Gracioso, originally written for piano in 1905. Colourful, charged, beautifully orchestrated it is a welcome interludium before the Left Hand Concerto's darker impulse. A nice touch – orchestral players are mentioned by name in the notes for their particular contributions. --- Jonathan Woolf, musicweb-international.com

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