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For the last few years there has been an artist, whose recordings regularly receive the highest ratings in FONOFORUM: Jerome Rose is his name, student of Rudolf Serkin, and one of the most important American pianists. On August 12th, he will celebrate his 75th Birthday – one more reason to present him. Mario-Felix Vogt met the artist in Paris.

If one wants to describe Jerome Rose's artistic personality, one should start with his Liszt-recordings. These works have the unfortunate fate of being rarely performed well in technical and musical aspects. Those musicians that have only mediocre pianistic skills lack the right tools, individualistic virtuosos lack text understanding and discipline and Competition pianists, who unspool his etudes often soulless like sowing machines, lack sensibility. Amongst the few pianists that can master Liszt's manual demands and approach them with sense of structure and without sentimentality, are Svatoslav Richter, Clifford Curzon – and Jerome Rose. His literally thundering recording of the piano piece "Orange" from the "Annees de pelerinage", Suisse, shows that there is a true virtuoso within him. He plays it more powerful and brilliantly than his famous colleagues Daniel Barenboim and Alfred Brendel. Also his Transcendental Etudes are masterful: the etude "Feux follets", much feared for its eminent difficulty, flickers under his hands and is full of lightness.

Yet, the exceptional about his playing is not his virtuosity – Russian key-acrobats like Lazar Berman and Boris Berezovsky know how to present these etudes even a tad more brilliantly and precisely – but the demeanor in which he approaches Liszt. He cares about the much-admired big line and a logical and rhythmically precise playing in his performance of the B minor sonata. Piano expert Ingo Harden puts it in a nutshell, when he writes that Rose constantly seeks to "demonstrate yet the smallest form among the many viewpoints of the whole composition". He does so with a full, sometimes symphonic tone, which distinguishes considerably from the cool, slim sound aesthetic of his older American colleagues like Leon Fleisher or Gary Graffman.

Another composer that is very dear to Jerome Rose is Brahms. He shapes the beginning of the F minor sonata with orchestral weight and wonderfully sonorous basses and profiles the characters of the main theme very contrastingly, without ever losing the overview. For the popular G minor Rhapsody Op. 79 he chose a flowing tempo and thus counteracts any unnecessary sentimentality. His DVD with Schubert's late Sonatas sets standards in terms of successful synthesis of structural awareness and well-dosed poetry.

It seems obvious that an artist with an interpretative profile like Jerome Rose must be an extraordinary Beethoven-player. In fact, in 1978 he recorded the three most popular Sonatas "Pathétique", "Moonlight" and "Appassionata", as well as the last three sonatas and the Sonata Op. 101, the latter actually twice, in 2001 as CD and 2008 as DVD. Rose takes the final movements of the "Moonlight" and the "Appassionata" very tempestuously, powerful and with a rounder, more orchestral sound than, let's say, Friedrich Gulda, whose Fortissimo arrives in a rather steely vestment. The slow movements he mostly plays song-

like and simple, yet accompanying figures don't disappear in a marsh of sound, Rose leaves them their melodic value and shapes the soprano line as "primus inter pares". In recent years he has been dealing with Beethoven very intensely: in June he recorded a DVD with the five most famous sonatas ("Pathétique", "Moonlight", "Waldstein", "Appassionata", and "Les Adieux"), that will soon be released, and when I met him this March in Paris, he was working on a Masterclass Video, in which he gives advice on interpretation and practicing technical details in Beethoven-Sonatas. In-between the recordings he took the time for an interview...

Jerome, how did you find this music?

My favorite expression for that is prenatal predestination (laughs). Already before my birth, my mother had decided: if she gave birth to a girl it would become a dancer, if it was a boy, he would become a pianist. In the year that I was born she went to concerts at the Hollywood Bowl to musically inspire the embryo. She had a great passion for music and wished so passionately that her son would become a musician. In America we call these kinds of mothers "Piano Mums", in principle they don't differ from "Tennis Mums" or "Figure Skating Mums". My path was therefore already paved. With three and a half years I began to play the piano, and at four years old, I was able to read music. Then I started lessons with Marvin Maazel, a concert pianist that was very reputable in Los Angeles. He was the uncle of the conductor Lorin Maazel and had had a great career in Europe before the Second World War, however had to stop playing concerts during the war. Because he had to make a living, he started teaching children. Besides the famous music conservatories like the Juilliard School in New York and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, there was little else in the United States, even in Los Angeles there was no real music conservatory.

In the Seventies you recorded for Vox a series of Liszt's works. How did that come about? What do you like about Liszt?

Well, I had recorded some Schumann at the time and the founder of Vox George Mendelssohn wanted to make more recordings with me. He gave me the choice: either Liszt's "Annees de pelerinage" or all Clementi sonatas. Naturally, I chose Liszt. At the time I was already in my thirties and had to now learn the whole Liszt repertoire, because during my college years I wasn't really introduced to it. Suddenly I became known as a Liszt-performer and received for those recordings the Grand Prix du Disque, which I am very thankful for.

Do you think that his music is still underestimated?

Oh yes. His works are also often played badly. He was a big classicist, who studied the complete Schubert, Beethoven and Mozart, the most important repertoire of Classical Vienna. A performer should approach his works with the same sanctity than a Beethoven-Sonata. I don't approve of the many distortions and liberties pianists take when playing Liszt. Musical freedom and musical expression develop from true knowledge of the text. To me, undisciplined music making sounds chaotic, and I especially dislike it when pianists don't count. The most basic organization of music is through rhythm. Many pianists today want to be individualistic. To me though, really great playing is shown when one doesn't consciously perceive the individual of the performer over the music. After all, a really excellent Boeuf Bourguignon is based on good meat and not spices that are added later.

If you care about the music above all else, why have you produced predominantly Live-Recordings on DVD and Blu-ray for the last six years?

I believe that the visual aspect of a performance is also very important. It is so great to watch Gyorgy Cziffra play or Benno Moiseiwitsch, all these extraordinary artists that are unfortunately no longer amongst us. These films are important historical documents. What wouldn't I have given to experience Schnabel or Rachmaninoff at the piano. With my own concert films I am also trying to keep a tradition alive: the piano playing of the Serkin-Schnabel era, the old German-Viennese tradition. Because I want to leave behind something of importance.