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Dear Madam,

I could hardly believe my eyes, nor could many of my pianist friends, whilst reading the review by Benjamin Ivry on Schubert's Piano Sonata No. 21 in B flat major D960 in the March/April 2007 edition of your magazine.

A few years ago, I held a seminar in Switzerland on Schubert for pianists, singers and string players. One entire afternoon and evening was devoted to the above-mentioned sonata. During the afternoon I played several recordings, including Schnabel, Annie Fischer, Richter, Rubinstein, Kempff and Curzon and, of course, Clara Haskil, who was dismissed by Mr Ivry with demeaning remarks such as, amongst other things, '...drab and wobbly at times...', with '...leaden touch and over-heavy stresses..', '...resulting in a performance that sounds drab and superficial..', '...dogged and humdrum..' '...at times the playing [seeming] to wander around the keyboard..' '...heavy and stressed as though the performer is late for a bus..' '...blinkered and lacking in charm..', '...stately, even a bit pompous..', '...the quicker passages taken faster than she can comfortably play..' '...vague and scatty..' and '...a sad legacy..'

After playing substantial excerpts from the sonata from the above mentioned artists, without revealing to anyone who the pianists were, I asked the listeners to write down their first choice, and give reasons why. Without exception, everyone unanimously chose Haskil's 1951 studio recording, re-released in the Philips Recordings. Not for nothing was this particular performance awarded the Grand Prix du Disque. After listening in the morning to Aksel Schiotz's 1939 recording of Die Schone Mullerin, (not the later recording of the same work which was recorded after he had a stroke), and comparing his unique performance to some famous but ghastly interpretations of latter-day artists, people realised that Haskil's performance was in the same mould. According to Schubert's friend Sonnleitner, Schubert abhorred any extremes in expression and said that his songs should be performed lyrically, and, (of course, with some exceptions), *not* dramatically.

What Clara Haskil expresses in her performance, and which comes even closer to the surface in her 1956 live performance of the A minor Sonata D. 845, Op. 42, from the Besancon festival, is the terror and despair which overshadowed and coloured the music of the last years of Schubert's life. No other artist but Haskil expressed in their playing this terror, in what Mr Ivry thought as rushing at a speed 'faster than she can comfortably play'. (With Haskil's stupendous technique, she could play anything and nothing was ever too fast for her!)

In Schubert's music and Haskil's playing, one can sense that time is running out. Whoever was fortunate enough to be present at one of her recitals could repeatedly experience this dark sense of terror emanating throughout her playing.

Moreover, some of the musicians who took part in the seminar commented on her wonderful sense of structure, her complete lack of sentimentality and her inborn sense for motivic connections. Listen, for instance, bar 117 and bar 391 in the last movement of this sonata, where she allows the music to linger sadly in order to bring out the left hand inversion of the main theme of the first movement, as if both she and Schubert together are remembering the past. No other artist in the recordings played that afternoon grasped the tragic implications of these motivic connections.

As one person said about Haskil's playing, 'in the blink of an eyelid, you can miss the essence of her great art.'

Yours sincerely,

Peter Feuchtwanger