



BACH: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 903; MENDELSSOHN: Rondo capriccioso, Op. 14; LISZT: Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude; On Wings of Song; GINASTERA: Danzas Argentinas; GERSHWIN: Rhapsody in Blue - Alpin Hong, piano - MSR Classics MS 1195, 67:54 (Distrib, Albany)

Alpin Hong is a pupil of Jerome Lowenthal at Juilliard, so his credentials are well spoken for. He chooses the title "Friend, Taskmaster, Teacher" as the rubric for this disc, which pays homage as well to pedagogues Mark Richman and Emilio del Rosario. Mr. Hong takes the opening of the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue as slowly and deliberately as ever I have heard anyone play it--so he caught my attention immediately. He spins the entire work out for twelve minutes, which must be among the broadest of conceptions. That Hong can play the brisk staccati at breakneck speed when he wants to only certifies the highly improvisational concept he has of the piece. The Fugue is a creamy broth, articulate and sensual, multilayered as an organ diapason as the texture gains an implacable momentum.

The E Major/E Minor Rondo capriccioso of Mendelssohn gives full vent to Hong's color capacities in bravura style. The wicked fioritura and broad spans deter Hong not at all, and the coda comes off in a style reminiscent of Jorge Bolet. Liszt's lovely, extended nocturne after Lamartine, his Benediction of God in His Solitude, finds in Hong a natural exponent for its liquid brush-strokes, ascents into the empyrean realms where dwell thoughts of communions transcendent. Passionately sensuous and piously devotional at once, the piece has the same musical effect as seeing Gaudi's Cathedral of the Sacred Family, where all things of heaven and earth aspire to the stars. Liszt's arrangement of Mendelssohn's On Wings of Song, the poem by Heinrich Heine, extends the oceanic metaphor of the limpid dream of bliss, the melody that embraces lovers' possibilities through the piano, now become an Aeolian harp.

The three Danzas Argentinas of Alberto Ginastera engage Hong in another form of nationalistic virtuosity, as the music depicts aspects of the South American pampas. In the opening Dance of the Shepherd, Hong's left hand plays black keys against the right hand's white keys. The ensuing Dance of the Lovely

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Maiden likens the Argentine landscape to a flowing lullaby in 6/8. The concluding Dance of the Proudful Gaucho allows Hong to indulge his capacities for percussive savagery, touches of Copland cross-fertilized by Bartok. A toccata, really, the piece ranks alongside equally pungent concepts by Prokofiev and Menotti for sheer volatility and motor convulsions, quite sweeping us away! A long elastic riff in lieu of the clarinet does not diminish our easy familiarity with Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, Hong's ten fingers having to suffice for a wah-wah jazz band. He manages to punch and to coax enough multifarious colors from his instrument to engage and to seduce our feet to tapping and our heads nodding in sympathetic, stride rhythm. An auspicious CD debut, Mr. Hong.

--Gary Lemco