

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1343

The PUPILS of LISZT

JOSÉ VIANNA DA MOTTA & ARTHUR FRIEDHEIM

Alexander Siloti, who *was* a great pianist, complained that more or less anyone who wished could sit in at Liszt's classes at Weimar, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, 4 till 6, without paying a Pfennig, and then go home proclaiming him- or herself a pupil of The Master. This album is of two who were truly major pupils of Liszt.

JOSÉ VIANNA DA MOTTA was born on the island of São Tomé, off the coast of Africa on 22nd April 1868, but was taken to Lisbon the next year. His first public appearance was at the age of 5 and he appeared in Lisbon at the age of 13. On this occasion not only did he play a Chopin Scherzo, Mendelssohn's 'Capriccio Brillante' and works of his own, but he played the piano part in a Mendelssohn trio and conducted a piece of his own. He was indeed an infant prodigy. In Lisbon in 1882, by which time he had completed a course at the Conservatório Nacional, he was heard by Sophie Menter, one of the finest of Liszt's female students, who recommended that he study in Berlin. Thus, and with a grant from King Fernando II, he was able to study piano under Sophie Menter and Xaver Scharwenka, and composition with Philipp Scharwenka. In 1885 he moved on to Weimar to join Liszt's master class, but on Liszt's death in 1886 he returned to Berlin to study with Karl Schäffer and in 1887 he went to Frankfurt to study with Hans von Bülow. From 1885 until the Great War he lived in Berlin. He made his name initially as a soloist and also as accompanist of Amalie Joachim in Lieder recitals, and eventually he was appointed Court Pianist. He and Ferruccio Busoni became close friends, Busoni dedicating to him a volume of his piano transcriptions of Bach's organ music. They were both members of a circle of leading Berlin pianists which included Eugen D'Albert, Moriz Rosenthal and Arthur Schnabel. He played also in other European countries and in both Americas. In 1914, he became an enemy alien and left Germany. In 1915 he succeeded Stavenhagen at the Geneva Conservatoire and then returned to Portugal to become Director of his alma mater, the Conservatório Nacional at Lisbon, living in its building until he reached the age of mandatory retirement in 1938. Musical education in Portugal improved greatly through the many reforms which he implemented.

With the passing of Frederic Lamond on 21st February 1948 and José Vianna da Motta on 1st June, we must now rely on the gramophone for the sound of the school of Liszt.

His abiding interest in chamber music led him later to play with such artists as Pablo de Sarasate and Eugène Ysaÿe. His playing rested on profound musical insight and a technique to be expected of a leading pupil of Liszt; his outlook was forward towards the leaner concepts of modern playing rather than back to

nineteenth century notions, especially those now regarded as excessive. da Motta's repertoire centred around the works of Bach, Beethoven, Schubert and Liszt. (It will be recalled that around 1900 Theodor Leschetizky was pointing out to his student Arthur Schnabel that the piano works of Schubert were badly neglected and were well worth attention; advice from which Schnabel benefited.) However, da Motta's repertoire was also diverse, including music by Alkan, Field and de Falla.

He was well acquainted with Brahms, but seems seldom to have played his music. In the late '20s not only did da Motta, like Frederic Lamond and Arthur Schnabel, play Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas as a series, but he also played in a series of Beethoven's complete piano chamber music. Da Motta's own compositions are in the main stream of Portuguese music, making frequent use of folk melodies of his country as Haydn, for example, did of his. He was also well known as a writer on musical matters, and for his editions of well known and less well known composers. Amongst the latter are his transcriptions for piano of Alkan's works for pedaller.

ARTHUR FRIEDHEIM was born in St. Petersburg on 26 October 1859. He first played in public at the age of 9. He went to Anton Rubinstein in 1879, but, finding him unmethodical, he left St. Petersburg for Weimar next year. Liszt, perhaps influenced by his distaste for Rubinstein, had him play several audition pieces before admitting him. Initially not much smitten with Friedheim, he nevertheless admired his individuality. In the course of becoming one of the finest pupils of Liszt's final years a warm relationship developed between them and Friedheim became Liszt's private secretary.

His superiority as a pianist was unquestionable, but his slavish worship of Der Meister led to mirth as it spilled over into imitation of Der Meister's mannerisms. Friedheim conducted, though he preferred playing, and he taught and composed. He was in the United States from 1891 to 1895 and then moved to London. For some years up to 1904 he was Professor of Pianoforte at Manchester's Royal College of Music. He conducted in Munich from 1908 to 1910 and was much involved in the Liszt celebrations of 1911. In 1912 he received a decoration from President Taft at the White House and in 1915 he settled in New York. For a while he taught in Chicago and New York City. From 1921 he was Professor of Piano at the Canadian Academy of Music in Toronto.

Music of the 19th century was his main interest; he had little sympathy with more modern works. With his awesome technique and his long sojourn in Weimar, he was held to be a Liszt specialist. His edition of Chopin's works was well received. His compositions include two piano concertos and an opera, *Die Tänzerin*, given in Cologne under Carl Lohse in 1904 and in Leipzig under Arthur Nikisch in 1907. Arthur Friedheim died in New York on 19th October 1932.

George Bernard Shaw wrote little about Friedheim, but significantly, “Arthur Friedheim, himself a pianist of exceptional ability, conducted with a knowledge of the works in hand sufficient to enable him to dispense with a score throughout; and the band was of the best.” [Concert at which Bernhard Stavenhagen played and Agnes Stavenhagen sang, Crystal Palace, 28th January 1891] However, comments on Friedheim’s records have been generally dismissive, perhaps because they have not been heard previously to advantage. It is hoped that this edition, produced with the benefits of modern technology, will effect a revision of such opinions.

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