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CYPRIEN KATSARIS, PIANIST

by Lisa Marum

The young French pianist Cyprien Katsaris, through his recordings and live appearances, has prompted listeners to speculate on the nature of piano performances during the Romantic era. Of his playing *Le Figaro* said, "It was, as far as one could imagine, a concert by Liszt, himself." Other reviewers have noted his technical prowess (so awesome that *Stereo Review* deemed it "scary") and his penetrating musical intellect — both qualities that were hallmarks of Liszt's style.

As befits one with a Lisztian technique, Katsaris frequently performs works by that composer, including what has been dubbed his "lost" Concerto in the Hungarian Style. In 1979 experts concluded that the work, originally thought to have been written by Liszt's pupil Sofie Menter and orchestrated by Tchaikovsky, was actually composed by Liszt himself. Now Katsaris has championed the concerto, with a June 17 U.S. premiere at Philadelphia's Mann Music Center with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy, and an Angel digital recording — its world premiere on disc — with the same forces (DS-37888, scheduled for June '82 release). Another Liszt recording by Katsaris includes the *Mephisto* Waltzes (Telefunken 6.42829).

Also in Katsaris' discography is Stravinsky's *Les Noces* with the English Bach Orchestra under Leonard Bernstein (Deutsche Grammophon 2530 880). On import there is an album of Mozart's Viennese sonatinas (EMI 4C 061 95136) and a Schubert album (EMI 2C 069 14074). The Mozart sonatinas are scheduled to be released this fall on Pavane, a new U.S. label specializing in piano music.

This past May, Telefunken released three Katsaris recordings — a "live" album of virtuoso piano music including compositions by Schumann and Gottschalk, as well as an improvisation by Katsaris himself (6.42479), the complete Chopin Waltzes (6.42706) and the piano version, arranged by Liszt, of Beethoven's *Pastorale* Symphony (6.42781). Katsaris has also recorded for Telefunken a "variation" album — Liszt's variations on Bach, Schumann on Beethoven, Rachmaninoff on Chopin — with an anticipated fall release date.

Lisa Marum is an Associate Editor of Ovation.



Courtesy: Telefunken Records

Record buyers who notice the distinctive piano sound on Katsaris' recent recordings (e.g., the *Pastorale* and the Liszt concerto) should not be surprised to learn that it comes from a handbuilt piano. Its builder, Mark Allen, is based in Portland, Oregon, and is following the tradition of such a 19th-century craftsman as Sebastian Erard, whose pianos Chopin played. Impressed with what the Mark Allen piano could do, Katsaris bought the second one Allen created (Chick Corea has the first). Indeed its singing tone (said to be inspired by the voice of Kathleen Ferrier), along with its power and brilliance, seems to ideally match Katsaris' repertoire and style of playing.

Katsaris' pianistic style evolved from years of musical experience. Born in Marseille in 1951, he began his musical studies in Cameroun at the age of four and in 1964 entered the National Conservatory of Paris. There he won First Prize in Piano, starting a prize-winning streak that included earning the Diploma of Honor at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, a prize in the International Queen Elisabeth Competition of Belgium and Grand First Prize in the International Cziffra Competition. In the '78-'79 season he was appointed Music Director of the International Festival of Echternach, Luxembourg, and that

same year he made his American debut with the Detroit Symphony under Antal Dorati, followed by appearances in Washington, D.C.

While audiences and critics throughout the world have been "bewitched" by Katsaris' performances, film-makers have also responded to his charisma *a la* the 19th-century piano virtuoso. Katsaris has been the subject of a film produced by Claude Chabrol against the background of the Echternach Festival and has also appeared in the film *France Panorama* that was shown in 70 countries. In addition, he was featured in a film about Franz Liszt directed by Oscar-winner Francois Reichenbach.

As for future performances of this latter-day Liszt, there are several to watch for. His June appearance with the Philadelphia Orchestra has been taped for probable telecast on PBS during the winter holiday season. On August 13 he will again join the Philadelphia Orchestra under Ormandy to play Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto at Saratoga, and he will record the work with them in October.

Meanwhile Cyprien Katsaris will continue his recorded series on Telefunken of piano transcriptions of all the Beethoven symphonies. When the project is completed, it will be a pianistic first. □