

César Cui 25 Preludes op.64

Jouni Somero piano



César Cui (18.1.1835 - 26.3.1918) is the least known of the "Mighty Five", the group of Russian nationalistic composers, which apart from Cui consisted of Mily Balakirev, Modest Moussorgsky, Alexander Borodin, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Cui was a largely self-taught amateur composer. Like Rimsky-Korsakov, who was a naval officer, Cui made a successful military career. As an instructor in military fortifications, he counted Tsar Nicholas II under his pupils, and he eventually gained the title of professor and the rank of general.

Cui's many compositions have not gained significant foothold in the repertoire. he did not have the pianistic prowess of Balakirev, or the striking originality of Moussorgsky. Also, his attitude as a critic has not helped his reputation. In his often sarcastic reviews he lambasted works by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, and did not spare even his close colleagues and friends. While initially progressive (at least in name), in later years Cui became an arch-conservative, showing open hostility against the newer trends in music such as composed by Richard Strauss and Vincent d'Indy. A year before his death he became blind and could only compose small pieces via dictation.

The Twenty Five Preludes op.64 of 1903, published by Jurgeson of Moscow, belong to the period of Rachmaninov's 10 Preludes op.23. Among the dedicatees Josef Slivinski (Nos. 17-91), Ossip Gabrilovich (Nos.23-25) and Ignasy Paderewski (Nos.20-22) deserve mention.

While Cui was not a good pianist he seemed to have a natural flair for the piano, like almost all Russian composers, and he knew just how to create a full-bodied piano sound.

Jouni Somero (b. 1963) is one of the most active Finnish musicians on the scene today. So far he has given over 3,000 concerts all over the world, including Australia, Japan, Ukraine, Spain, Suisse, France, Germany, Sweden, Estonia, Kosovo, Russia, Brazil, Canada and Finland. He began studying the organ when he was eight years old but switched to the piano at the age of 12, studying the latter in Switzerland and at the Music Academy in Cologne under Professor Herbert Drechsel. Under the legendary Hungarian pianist Georges Cziffra he gained a deeper insight into the music of Liszt. Michael Ponti, the American virtuoso, has also acted as Somero's musical advisor. From 1981 to 1989 Somero lived in Germany, working as an assistant at the Music Academy of Düsseldorf and in other capacities. Since 1990 he has pursued his career solely as a concert pianist. He was awarded a diploma at the International Music Competition in Rio de Janeiro.

Jouni Somero's recording career began in 1989 (with Liszt's 12 Transcendental Etudes), since when he has made about 100 discs for different labels (Naxos, BMG, MILS, Jubal, FC-Records etc). These include Bach's Das Wohltemperierte Klavier and Die Kunst der Fuge, Liszt's Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses, Liszt's transcriptions of Beethoven's Symphonies 1 and 5, Rebikov's Piano Works, Henselt's Concert Etudes Op. 2, Schubert's Wanderer Fantasy, Sonata B and Impromptu op.90, Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, Rachmaninov's Piano Works (Vol.1-4), An Anthology of Finnish Piano Music (Vol. 1-5) and the world premiere recording of several piano works by Felix Blumenfeld, Benjamin Godard, Hans Seeling and Hugo Reinhold. He also recorded the complete piano music of Sergei Bortkiewicz (Vol.1-9) Pjotr Tchaikovsky (Vol.1-6) Toivo Kuula and Erkki Salmenhaara.

Somero's wide repertoire includes all the solo piano works of Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, Bortkiewicz, Salmenhaara and Kuula as well as seldom heard music by such composers as Alkan, Godard, Arensky, Godowsky, Henselt, Thalberg, Glinka, Blumenfeld, Rebikov, Reinhold, Seeling, Rubinstein and Gottschalk. He has also made many piano arrangements of orchestral, operatic and pop music.

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