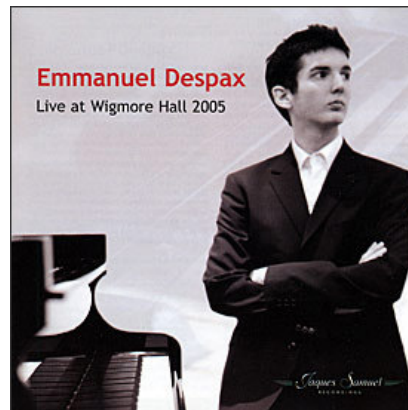


June 2006

Emmanuel Despax Wigmore Hall Recital CD

**J. S. Bach Partita in D minor, BWV1004
- Chaconne (arr. Busoni).
Beethoven Piano Sonata No. 31
in A flat Op. 110.
Haydn Keyboard Sonata No. 47
in B minor, Hob. XVI/32.
Liszt Piano Sonata in B minor, S178.**

**Emmanuel Despax (piano).
Jaques Samuel Recordings JSR007
(full price, 1 hour 19 minutes).
Website www.jspianos.com.
Producer James Shannon. Date 2005.**



The mellower timbre characteristic of a Fazioli piano, Frenchman Emmanuel Despax's choice of make, has to be considered when commenting on the sound quality of this live recording. The somewhat desiccated tone may well be representative of the instrument, but the slight distancing of perspective is not quite true of the Wigmore Hall's immediacy and focus, something fully experienced even at the back of the Hall.

The recording - once the volume has been significantly gained to acquire the required immediacy (preferable to having to turn it down because of too loud a transfer) - is certainly good enough to convey an impressive opening. Busoni's tumultuous arrangement of the Chaconne that closes Bach's D minor Partita for unaccompanied violin is played by Despax with a wide dynamic range (well captured) and also power, poise and incision, the pianist bringing a wide-eyed enthusiasm to Busoni's transcendental re-creation.

Despax, currently studying at the Royal College of Music in London following five years at the Yehudi Menuhin School (and, before that, from the age of nine, four years at Conservatoire Darius Milhaud), continues this challenging recital with an honest, luminous account of Beethoven's penultimate sonata. Despax, while considered, is seemingly content at present to let the music speak for itself, which it does, of course, with depth and eloquence. He has the measure of the notes and is well able to convey serenity and loftiness, but the tension needed to justify the summit-reaching conclusion isn't always apparent. (A curious 'extra' note is heard in echo to the final chord.)

The Haydn is delightfully done in Despax's choice of unhurried tempos, lightness of touch and in his moving seamlessly and convincingly between the three movements. As ever, Haydn is full of surprises, and it's good to find Despax appreciating his whimsy and giving this particular sonata its full due.

Understandably, given its magnificence and import, Liszt's Sonata in B minor attracts almost every pianist of promise. This release's annotation omits movement timings (but includes concise background on the pieces by Gerald Larner - and a succinct biography of Despax). This is a 31-minute B minor Sonata, somewhat on the bountiful side in terms of duration and sustained by Despax's command of structure and his being consistently expressive and modulated, if sometimes a little curt and too glittering. There are numerous thrilling and heart-touching moments that, if not quite adding to an inevitable whole, testify to this being a young man's performance, one mixing devilish abandon with stimulating maturity. (By now, the piano seems a little more fulsome-sounding and immediate.) Four tracks are provided; Alfred Brendel, in his deep analysis of this astonishing; masterpiece, would argue that there should be six.

This filled-to-capacity CD, which includes minimal applause and well-tailored 'silence' between each work, is a release that seems to preserve the recital as it happened (that is, no editing is apparent during the renditions themselves, which means coughs and noise — hardly any and 'wrong' notes remarkably few are allowed to remain). Given the calling-card nature of this issue, a record of but one night in Despax's career, the summoning of comparisons seems superfluous.

This disc is about Despax - he impresses -and he is all about the music. That's very encouraging.

Colin Anderson

<http://www.emmanueldespax.com> - review from: UK Press page