

celestial harmonies

AUSTRALIA'S DOYEN OF CLASSICAL MUSIC RETURNS TRIUMPHANTLY TO THE RECORDING STUDIO

Roger Woodward's first recording of the complete Chopin Nocturnes released by Celestial Harmonies

After a five-year creative sabbatical, the grey eminence of Australian classical piano returns to the recording studio with his first complete recording of Chopin's Nocturnes. A life-long search for the 'sacred cantilena' (Woodward) has found its fulfillment in a passionate interpretation of the music at the heart of European romanticism.

A recording made with infinite care, on a hand-picked Hamburg Steinway D with ivory keys, by one of Germany's leading producer/engineers, Ulrich Kraus of Munich, it takes the music back to near where it came from more than 150 years ago; it also makes a convincing case for the timelessness of these 21 pieces which had been part of Woodward's life for some decades now. Going back to his early studies at Sydney University, then in Poland and the U.K., then turning from student into teacher at San Francisco's renowned School of Music at State University, the Chopin Nocturnes had been a core element of Woodward's repertoire, and Woodward's ever-intense reflection on music and life.

At the age of 63, at the height of his creative powers, this recording captures him in an introspective, inward-looking, mature mood. This is not just steel-fingered virtuosity, it is looking deeply into the hidden layers of these remarkable works, trying to sound out what it all means, reading between the lines, listening to the silence between the notes, playing it all in the most thoughtful way; it avoids the obvious, it looks for insight rather than outward effect. If it is poetry in a larger sense, it sees Chopin above all as poet, his expression as universal, reaching beyond music; Chopin's contemporary, the German poet Heinrich Heine, thus saw Chopin as someone from the 'dream realm of poetry' where all the arts converge.

Why did it take this long to record all the Nocturnes? 'It takes that long', is Woodward's clear and convincing reaction, and: 'Chopin gives us the questions but he doesn't give us the answers'.

After days of intense concentration, producer/engineer Ulrich Kraus comments: 'One hears in every note he plays how much thought he had given it'. As for Woodward himself, he says: 'Somehow I'm not playing them anymore; they are now playing me.'

Fryderyk Chopin
The Complete Nocturnes
Roger Woodward, piano
Celestial Harmonies 14260-2 (2CD)

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