

Evva Mizerska: MEYER Cello Sonatas... on TOCCATA

Contributed by William Zagorski
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Composer and pianist Krzysztof Meyer (b. 1943), one of the many excellent younger Polish composers who came to light in the 1960s through the Warsaw Autumn...

MEYER

Cello Sonatas: No. 1; No. 2.

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Canzona,

op. 56

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Evva Mizerska (vc); Emma Abbate (pn); Katarzyna Glensk (pn)

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TOCCATA 98 (64:34)

Krzysztof Meyer: Complete Works for Cello and Piano Audio CD Tocata Buy now from Amazon

Composer and pianist Krzysztof Meyer (b. 1943), one of the many excellent younger Polish composers who came to light in the 1960s through the Warsaw Autumn concerts, was a student of Krzysztof Penderecki, Witold Lutosławski, and Nadia Boulanger. Like his Polish teachers and Warsaw School brethren, Meyer exults in experimentation—variously composing in 12-tone and aleatoric techniques, among others—and like the best of his Polish contemporaries, which include Andrzej Panufnik, Michał Spisak, and Tadeusz Baird, he has striven to embed his experimentations in contexts that make them eminently accessible to the listeners at hand. That he is a great admirer of Dmitri Shostakovich (the admiration was mutual) goes a long way toward describing and understanding the three works presented on this release. Meyer's music, like Shostakovich's, is rhetorically clear, has an inexorable sense of direction, and a satisfying sense of finality.

Meyer has produced a great deal of music for the cello, and chalks it up to his experience of accompanying such luminaries as David Geringas, Heinrich Schiff, and Lynn Harrell, each of whom has given him insights into the instrument's possibilities. Meyer's well-tutored pianism (he studied the instrument with Nadia Boulanger, among others) provides an insight into the three pieces on this release. Though Meyer states in the notes that the singing voice of the cello was his main inspiration, it is the piano that more often than not defines and governs the direction of the music in the first two of these three works. In the Cello Sonata No. 1, composed in 1983 and inspired by the artistry of David Geringas, the piano, accompanied by a pizzicato note on the cello, gives the thematic essence of the entire sonata—a figure that becomes its backbone much as the four-note figure stated at the outset of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony becomes, in its ongoing permutations, the prime mover of that piece. Like Beethoven, Meyer subjects his motive to repetition, contrapuntal imitation, augmentation, and diminution in a context that strives compellingly forward. This is a fine piece—alternately fiery and introspective—that plays to the cello's inherent power. In it, the instrument becomes a surrogate human voice that, in its ongoing dialogues with the piano, projects pathos, longing, and an ever-deepening sense of tragedy.

The Canzona of 1981 was also composed for Geringas who had lamented to Meyer that Mozart never wrote a solo piece for the cello. Meyer selected for his theme, the four-note motto (C-D-F-E) that forms the motive of the last movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 41. Incidentally, that theme was cribbed from an ancient primer on counterpoint studied by both Mozart and Haydn. Haydn used it in the last movement of his Third and 15th Symphonies, and Mozart used it as the backbone of one of his Salzburg Mass settings—No. 6 in F Major, K 192. It is an infinitely elastic motive that can be made to express anything whatsoever in the hands of a skilled composer. Meyer makes it a cosmic question that, after numerous discourses between the cello and piano, remains unanswered. As with so many "modern" composers, Meyer's techniques can be brought back to J. S. Bach's contrapuntal language. Here one hears, once again, augmentation and diminution being exploited in a largely fugal texture.

The Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano, composed in 2004, is far more integrated in its two instrumental parts than one finds in Sonata No. 1. Everything is more reflective, while pure instrumental virtuosity is less a factor. Here the underlying

essence prevails, and that, as in the case of Canzona, is the evermore quiet and ruminative positing of an unanswered question. This is, despite its sonically far less thrilling demeanor, the most transcendent piece on this release.

The cellist, Evva Mizerska, seems to me, in my dotage, a mere child. She is, however, in possession of a fine, large-scaled, and infinitely plastic sound, able to encompass the challenging demands of Krzysztof Meyer's thoughts with ease. Her two accompanists, Emma Abbate and Katarzyna Glensk, also quite young, navigate this difficult music with both utter commitment and facility. The sound is spotlessly clean in all registers, dynamically vast, and satisfying.

William Zagorski