

Translation of original review by Luca Chierici in *Classic Voice*, Italy, May 18, 2017

<http://www.classicvoice.com/rivista/recensioni-cd/rachmaninov-sonata-n-1-op-28-variazioni-sul-tema-di-corelli-op-42-etudes-tableaux/#.WR5nE6W6GHM.facebook>

**“RUSSO SHOWS HERE THAT HE POSSESSES AN INSTRUMENTAL
COMMAND GRANTED TO FEW PERFORMERS”**

The first Rachmaninoff Sonata, once practically unknown to disc and live performances, was then brought back to light by several valuable pianists, from Ciccolini (who probably opened the path to its rediscovery as far back as 1958) to Askhenazy, Weissenberg and Biret (in recording), to the younger Mustonen, Berezovsky, Trifonov, Lugansky, Romanowsky, not by chance almost all interpreters of Russian-Slavic matrix. In his brief program notes Russo reminds us of the Faustian program at the base of the sonata and the *Dies Irae* roots, often cited by Rachmaninoff in his numerous compositions. As we remembered in a past issue of "Classic Voice," the program – analogous to the one that characterizes the Liszt Sonata – was also cited by the composer in a letter to Morozov, as well as in a recollection by Kostantin Igumnov, the first interpreter of the work."

Russo's account of the first sonata is of noteworthy value, as immediately noticed from the solemnity of the attack and the subsequent virtuoso passage that leads to the appearance of the *cantabile* theme. Everything is shaped to properly emphasize the drama of the plot with considerable insights that can only be born out of a profound knowledge of the composer's style. Thus, the Sonata is brought to its completion with an irresistible crescendo of emotions and high-level pianism. The virtuoso approach combined with stylistic attributes are also well evident in the rest of the program of this precious album that includes the Variations on a theme of Corelli, a selection of Etudes-tableaux and three songs transcribed by that keyboard wizard Earl Wild. In the latter case, it is by no means easy to reproduce on the keyboard the fascination of a composition that amplifies – always within an absolute respect of style – the already complex composer's language. But Russo shows here that he possesses an instrumental command granted to few performers. Of equal level is the rendition of the Variations Op. 42, Rachmaninoff's last great work that already has seen the highest levels of recording and performance by the competition.

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