

## REVIEW - JULIAN FONTANA CD. (APO160)

The name Julius Fontana, if known at all, is chiefly remembered as the editor of some of Chopin's posthumously published compositions. These are mostly early works which Chopin did not publish and some are in fairly sketchy form. Fontana elaborated them for publication sometimes making the harmonic progressions more proficient. Some musicians are not convinced of the changes whilst others consider them improvements.

Fontana was a close friend of Chopin who knew him from childhood and who studied with the same teacher. They also played two pianos together. In Paris 'he was an almost daily guest of Chopin's and knew exactly what compositions were published at the time' (Moritz Karasowski). He undoubtedly heard Chopin play often in private and his posthumous editions could well be based on this aural experience. It is interesting that Fontana's handwriting was so similar to Chopin's that it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart.

So much for Fontana's relationship to Chopin. Few are aware that he was also a composer. Perhaps not great but competent. As with food, it is not only five star restaurants which provide enjoyable culinary experience and so it is also with music. Fontana's music can be very enjoyable, especially when it is played with such musical flair and technical finesse as does Hubert Rutkowski on his latest CD devoted to this composer. The pieces are reminiscent of other minor composers of that era. One is reminded of Gottschalk in such pieces as 'La Havanne' and others are reminiscent of many salon pieces of the period. The more extended pieces such as the Ballade op. 17 are not so inspired (perhaps we expect too much in the shadow of the great Chopin Ballades) and the Fantasia on Bellini's *Somnambula* is far from the imaginative heights of the Liszt or even Tausig's paraphrases. Nevertheless this CD publication has historical interest and all who appreciate fine piano playing will derive enjoyment. Rutkowski is a remarkable pianist and has what is nowadays all too rare; a natural sense of rubato and a genuinely singing style combined with scintillating brilliance whenever the music requires it.

The CD is beautifully produced with valuable text in three languages. There is also a special note as well as a reproduction of a painting by the Polish artist Julius Kossak. The project is published by the publishing House Acte Préalable under the auspices of Jan A. Jarnicki, whose object is to publish hitherto unpublished Polish music and art. He and pianist Hubert Rutkowski are certainly to be congratulated on this excellent accomplishment. Hopefully the project will continue with further interesting and lesser known Polish music, such as for example compositions by Leschetizky and other pupils of Chopin. Hubert Rutkowski would be an ideal interpreter.



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