

Selected CD Reviews: 22 Chopin Studies by Leopold Godowsky

"Ivan Ilić devotes himself to an incredibly painstaking task....he makes us forget the pianistic tricks, and the musical athletics: he gives us music. The warm tone, velvety touch and the intimate, deliberately dreamlike atmosphere he creates are admirable. The lyrical studies are the best - especially the Opus 25 no. 1 and the Nouvelles Etudes. And the Opus 25 no. 12 is absolutely epic!"

Diapason, France

"All these studies, conceived as they are for the configuration of the left hand, sound markedly different from their Chopin originals. They are of terrifying difficulty, and it is to the credit of the American pianist Ivan Ilić that he manages to bring expressive finesse to them as well as negotiating the technical hurdles. His is certainly a labour of love."

CD of the Week

The Daily Telegraph, United Kingdom

"In addition to his expert technique, Ivan Ilić succeeds in transforming the necessary acrobatics to open jubilation and poetic tenderness, or as he says himself, 'aesthetic ecstasy'. The result is a tribute characterized not by paralysis but by boldness. As an interpreter, the American pianist knows how to convey the ebullient fantasy and limitless invention. He carries Godowsky's message forward to the present day."

Top 5 CD of the Month

Classique News, France

"Godowsky's works for the left hand alone are a benchmark for any pianist. 34-year-old Ivan Ilić, an American with Yugoslav roots, masters these touchstones seemingly effortlessly!"

Top 5 CD of the Week

MDR Figaro, Germany

"[In the Study no. 41] Ilić delivers the music's essential dramatic message with aplomb. Ilić pulls off [Study number 18a] superbly, threading through it a consistently clear melodic line while carefully subduing the inner parts... [No. 43 in C# minor] is brilliantly fulfilled; he stitches together all the sweeping shifts in register consummately. I can't help wanting to award Ivan Ilić a medal for his purposeful, intelligent grasp of this taxing music, not to mention his feat of endurance. The recording quality is excellent, too, allowing all the strands to ease forward with brilliance and warmth."

International Record Review, United Kingdom

Among the studies on Chopin's Etudes, 22 of them are for the left hand alone, recorded breathtakingly by Ivan Ilić. These works exceed the limits of what is possible; yet they are recorded here in such an imaginative, sensitive and delicate manner, as if nothing was easier. Ilić stands out so much from the technical viewpoint, that he is able to devote himself intensely to the composition, so that these studies are not only virtuoso showpieces, but tasteful reflections on Chopin's work.

Oberösterreichische Nachrichten, Austria

"Ilić is not only a virtuoso capable of brilliantly interpreting Chopin's *Etudes*, known to all piano enthusiasts, with only one hand, but he is also capable of giving them a depth that is not always present when pianists play the originals with both hands...his playing is brilliant and luminous, and he conjures an almost gentle timbre, which is unusual in Chopin. This is a fine, impressive recording by an outstanding pianist."

Piano News, Germany



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"Few pianists dare to perform Godowsky's Chopin Studies, let alone record them. Therefore it is all the more welcome that the contemporary young Serbian Ivan Ilić had the courage to do just that. What is truly remarkable is that Chopin's stylistic finesses do not disappear from these transcriptions for the left hand. Ivan Ilić [is] remarkably disposed for this recording. I had a strong emotional experience to Ilić's version of Study No. 41 B minor, primarily thanks to his freely flowing melodious middle section."

Hudební Rozhledy, Czech Republic

"The hard work has paid dividends, especially in the more lyrical Studies where Ilić projects a nice sense of line and finely judged pedalling."

BBC Music Magazine, United Kingdom

"Recording all 22 Chopin Studies for the left hand by Leopold Godowsky brings even super talented technicians to their limits. From a purely pianistic viewpoint, Ivan Ilić, a 33-year-old American in Paris, overcomes the trying tour-de-force most honorably. The legato and polish of his playing are exemplary."

Fono Forum, Germany

"...beautifully recorded, these studies emerge in his hands as immaculately crafted jewels on which he has lavished care and obvious affection. Though there is undoubted novelty value in hearing such gems as the 'Revolutionary' played a semitone up and by one hand, the experience is as musically rewarding as it is intriguing. I salute Ilić's playing and ambition."

International Piano Magazine, United Kingdom

"These 22 *Chopin Studies* are a work written in Godowsky's youth; they are considered to be unplayable. Ivan Ilić offers us a superb interpretation of finesse and fluidity. His use of the pedal gives certain studies a mysterious charm, enshrouding them in a light mist. What could have become a purely mechanical exercise becomes music teeming with emotion and images in Ivan Ilić's expert and virtuosic hands. An essential disc."

L'Éducation Musicale, France

"Looking at the score blackened with notes will make you dizzy. But Ilić's interpretation is pure poetry. He does not call attention to the score's difficulties, he does not want to dazzle with virtuosity, rather he enjoys the sound, color and layered polyphony...a charismatic young interpreter." **Vltava maximum (5* rating)**

Czech Radio 3 – Vltava, Czech Republic

"To tackle Godowsky's études for the left hand alone is a monumental task for any pianist. And to perform the entire oeuvre with interpretive awareness to color, clarity of texture and musically expressive melodic lines sets Ivan Ilić apart from other pianists who could only hope to perform these works...Ilić focuses on and effectively manipulates the plethora of Godowsky's subtle variants, making the listening experience a truly rewarding one. Bravo!"

Clavier Companion, USA

"The most challenging of Leopold Godowsky's *Chopin Studies* are for the left hand alone. American pianist Ivan Ilić does not only take the challenge, he plays the transcriptions as if it costs him no trouble at all."

Mania klassiek, The Netherlands

"Ivan Ilić largely succeeds in making all that is tricky and sophisticated in Godowsky's Studies appear to be natural. Everything seems to be absolutely simple, and this is, of course, the most effective of tricks. Even more: Ilić is able to capture and give shape to the poetry of this music - composed by Chopin and preserved by Godowsky - over long periods (the effort required is very rarely felt). The virtuoso attitude, although it is present, remains always imperceptible, but at the same time it is brought to our ears to be relished as something romantically precious. **9/10 stars**

Klassik Heute, Germany

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"A major achievement" (CD Review)

"Breathtaking" (In Tune)

BBC Radio 3, United Kingdom

"Ilić is witty, captivating and elegant: his performances are full of musical charm and emotional depth."

Hudobný život, Slovakia

"When listening to Ilić's new CD with 22 (out of the total of 53) Chopin studies, you might well add: And Ivan Ilić is currently Godowsky's most worthy and committed advocate. Very rarely is Godowsky heard in such a devoted, serious, precise, but also warm and easy manner. Ilić's velvety, romantic (not romanticizing) sound refines Godowsky's recreations, defined by Ilić as "ingenious commentary" on the original studies. The care and intensity with which Ilić plays the studies surpasses mere technical mastery. Ilić's recording is permeated by Godowsky's soul in the same way that Godowsky's Studies are imbued by Chopin's soul.

"The pristine sound of the recording contributes to the consistently positive overall impression in no small measure: this is the only way to experience the "Ilić miracle", which leads you to listen spellbound to the good 70 minutes of the CD without having to remember even once that it was recorded exclusively with the left hand were, without having to remember even once that these are some of the most technically demanding works of the entire piano literature.

"The bottom line is technical brilliance and expressiveness: Ivan Ilić embodies the virtues of a complete pianist in an impressive manner. Moreover, he does it with a technically extremely demanding program with almost incredible ease, and only with the left hand. However: What is spectacular about this CD, is not the fact that it was recorded with the left hand alone, but Ilić's intelligent and at the same time poetic playing."

5* review

Codaex Blog, Germany

Other notable articles:

- *an interview with **Pianobleu** (France)
- *an interview in **Clavier Companion** (USA)
- *an hour-long interview on **Radio France** (France)
- *an interview by musicologist **Sylviane Falcinelli** (France)
- *a feature in **Ilustrovana Politika** magazine (Serbia)
- *a feature story in **Sud Ouest** (France)
- *an interview/review by **Earbits** (USA)

The recording was broadcast on:

Radio France (France Inter, France Musique), BBC Radio 3, German Deutschlandradio Kultur, Italian Radio Classica, German Westdeutscher Rundfunk 3, German Nordwestradio/Radio Bremen, the United Kingdom's Classic FM, Belgian VRT Radio Klara, Dutch Radio 4, Norwegian NRK Klassisk, Dutch Concertzender, Irish RTÉ Lyric FM, Belgian RTBF, Spanish Catalunya Ràdio, Venice Classic Radio, French Fréquence Protestante, Slovakian National Radio (Rádio Devín), Croatian National Radio (HRT1 and HRT3), Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), Serbian RTS2, Polish National Radio (PR2), Polish RMF Classic, Ukrainian UR3 Radio Kultura, Czech National Radio 3 – Vltava, Peruvian Radio Filarmonia, Estonian Klassika Raadio, and American Public Radio including: WFMT Chicago, Delmarva Public Radio, Mississippi Public Broadcasting, WSHU Connecticut/Long Island, WMRA Virginia, Troy University Public Radio in Alabama/Georgia/Florida, WHQR North Carolina, Indiana Public Radio, Georgia Public Broadcasting.