

CD Review: "I'll Be Good"

Reviewed by Kathy Parsons, Solo Piano Publications

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Frank Horvat's debut CD, "I'll Be Good," is wildly original, often chaotic, eclectic as all get-out, and quite a ride. From the cover art that shows a young girl in a pink dress and white gloves with a big sledge hammer over her shoulder approaching an elegant grand piano in a seedy warehouse to the fascinating song titles and liner notes to the final deep bass notes that trail off into nothingness, this CD will intrigue, challenge, and often puzzle even the most seasoned listener - intentionally, I'm sure. The Toronto-based composer/pianist classifies his music as classical, but one of the quotes on his website says, "My piano wants to kill your mama." He also compares his music to "Franz Liszt and Metallica in a cage match." Another quotation from Horvat's site says: "Aggressive and virtuosic pianist whose original compositions and improvisations demonstrate an unpredictable meld of musical styles. Groove-oriented, instrumental pieces without words that tell deeply personal stories." As you can probably tell, this is not an easy-listening CD or one to go to sleep to. This is mostly high-energy, often very discordant, experimental music that requires your full attention. One of the key words when approaching Horvat's music is "eclectic." He draws from an astonishing array of musical styles, and often within the same piece. There are heavy rock elements, as well as modern classical, jazz, and pop influences, and some of the pieces are dark and heavy while others are more playful.

"I'll Be Good" begins with the high-energy antics of "Starsky and Hutch," obviously a favorite TV show from Horvat's youth. Frantic and frenetic, with a quiet interlude between the car chases, this piece is a lot of fun. "Dirty" is funky blues with a deep, heavy beat on the left hand and a right hand that's all over the piano - fun. "In the Name of Ignorance" is more serious. The liner notes say: "The consequences of only using religious dogmas to raise children." Very agitated and uneasy, the results aren't pretty! "Alexis" gets even darker, telling of "the loss of innocence, the rage, the sadness." Despite the painful subject, this is one of the more melodic and accessible pieces - a deep emotional exploration. "ZeeZoo Snaps" is also very dark, telling of regret in a very personal and evocative way. "Great House of Riffs" is a head-on collision between blues riffs and atonal classicism. "Speedy McBlues" is about "taking the conventional and making it unconventional." Horvat takes some rather traditional blues idioms and stretches them in all kinds of ways - interesting! The first half of "Smokers" is very dark and sultry with a strong sense of mystery. In the middle, it explodes into a rage. "The Resolve" is a very interesting study in repetitive rhythm and movement. I don't think I've ever heard a piano sound so much like a guitar or guitars being strummed - a powerful closing track.

"I'll Be Good" is a fascinating album, but not an easy one to "get" right away. If you're up to the challenge, give it a shot. It's available from www.frankhorvat.com, cdbaby.com, and iTunes.

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cdbaby.com
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