

Opus Klassiek, The Netherlands  
CD Review – The Transcendentalist

The title of this newest CD by Ivan Ilić (1978), a Serbian-American living in Paris, looks a bit peculiar at first: *The Transcendentalist* by Ivan Ilić. The familiar Van Dale [Dictionary of the Dutch Language] offers multiple explanations for “transcendent”: otherworldly, exceeding all categories (scholastic), outside of all experience, super or outer sensory (Kant), but also meditating about supersensory affairs which are unknowable, ungraspable, unearthly or otherworldly. Where do we place the 'transcendental' pianist Ivan Ilić?

We find the answer in the elucidating text written by Eric Fraad: "Liszt used the word to allude to the extreme technical difficulty of the music [twelve notorious *Transcendental Etudes* for solo piano]. The implication is that the musician who masters these works will transcend his or her technique, while stretching the physical, and by extension, expressive limits of the instrument". So one might think that we will be treated to virtuoso pianistic displays of power...

But this 'test' of the instrument and the listener is (fortunately?) not present. What we are treated to is the most varying sound juxtapositions, interpretive finesse and a fairy tale-like interplay between dream and zest. Aren't there any brushes with extreme contrasts? Certainly, but only in a purely expressive sense, a poetic path which shows that each detail has been contemplated, in conjunction with an astounding spontaneity. Overwhelming theatricality is absent, contemplation dominates.

And what about a show of pianistic prowess? To my feeling a true interpreter can't do a better job proving himself than in this rich juxtaposition of miniatures, in which a barely perceptible rubato, or the slightest dynamic gradation, can make the difference between night and day. This fits the recording quality which is equally richly graded. Kudos to engineer Judith Carpentier-Dupont, who created a true sound paradise in the Parisian *Salle Cortot*, not in the least due to the perfectly tuned, formidable sounding Steinway D. And the pianist did the editing himself!