Legacy: A lavish box set from the relatively unknown Dinorah Varsi

DINORAH VARSI
Legacy
GENIUN Classics GEN 15353 **(**35 discs, 5 DVDs)

It is sad as to how quickly concert pianists can vanish from the memory. I doubt even hard-core piano lovers reading these pages will remember Dinorah Varsi, who was born in Uruguay and lived her life in Germany. She gave numerous concerts and had a busy time in the recording studio – this beautifully presented box does not feature all of her output. Some of her chamber music recordings are missing, and so are many of her live concerts, even if those presented here from various German festivals are the jewels in the crown.

The lavishly illustrated book in the big LP-size format gives details about Varsi's concert career and her sincere interest in teaching the younger generation of pianists. It reveals little of her private life and we only get a faint idea of the struggle she went through having to change her technique at a late stage and coping with doubts about a performing career. Most important are the studio performances that reveal a pianist with a colossal technique, a big strong piano tone and a firm grip of the musical structure in everything she played. Her interaction with the orchestras is never domineering and she always pays close attention to the score, never letting idiosyncrasies get in the way. She avoids sentimentality and prefers generally faster tempos, the slower Chopin études being a good example; however she is no racehorse, and one can hear she is not interested in flashy, empty virtuosity in the faster études.

On some of the DVDs we can follow her masterclasses where she is generous and helpful to the young students, always giving original ideas about touch, voicing and how to produce the best tone on the piano. As a document of a pianist who undoubtedly influenced a whole generation of German pianists, this box is invaluable, but it should also be strongly considered by those interested in the lesser-known masters of the keyboard.

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