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How Simon Ghraichy brings the classical recital into the 21st century

English translation of the complete available article text, prepared with local machine translation and checked against the source. The original PDF remains the reference.

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He was already known to be daring, inside, impertinent, with his irresistible clasps and the exuberant costumes he used to wear on stage. Not content with being a virtuoso and endearing pianist, with his eminently personal musical choices, 33-year-old Simon Ghraichy (hence the title of his latest album released by Deutsche Grammophon), seems firmly determined to mark the spirits on stage - and not only by his fiery game.

Secret falsities

To mark the release of 33, the pianist, who is of Lebanese and Mexican descent, offered an unconventional performance called Humoresken in place of a traditional instrumental recital. Its title comes from Robert Schumann’s Humoreske. The unusual score, perhaps haunted by the first signs of the madness that would overwhelm the German composer, shook Simon Ghraichy. Its unexpected effect on him brought back the pain of a personal tragedy from years before. He built the album’s repertoire around it and placed the piece at the centre of 33, a project conceived from the outset to reveal his private vulnerabilities.

Inner voice

The score of Robert Schumann's "Humoreske" includes a curiosity: a third voice supposed to be sung internally by the performer, and which the composer called "The Inner Voice". On stage, Ghrachy made it both a sort of alter ego and, not without malice, a subterfuge to divert the protocol from classical recitals where the artist is not supposed to speak.

Let it not hold, without opening its mouth, Simon Ghraichy expressed himself! His interventions, one in the first part, and the other at the end of the concert, were pre-recorded in a magic box in the shape of a cube placed next to the piano... The "Inner Voice" dreamed by Schumann was well present in the room! On the one hand, thanks to this box with effects, but also because it was incarnated by Simon Ghraichy's guest-vedette, Chilly Gonzales. The Canadian pianist composed a play, "Robert on the Bridge", inspired by this mysterious entity. In the second part, he came to play it in duet with Ghraichy, on a piano positioned right in front of that of his host.

Electron effects

After the intermission, the scenography left no room for applause until the end of the show. With his magical case, which he approached with emphase, Ghrachy glided electro interludes, like commas, between each room...

A little pre-concert teaser, posted on Facebook by composer Jacopo Baboni Schilingi, who wrote a play for "33"
In the repertory of □33□ and his stage projection "Humoresken", coexist the themes of the passing time, of madness, of water and death, in the image of Ariel Ramirez's magnificent song "Alfonsina y el Mar", of which Ghrachy has made a free and inspired transcription. The program reveals itself at the heart of a very contemporary, poetic, sometimes staggered scenography, with video projections, a closet at the bottom of the stage and, in the second part, a moment of total darkness, a turning dancer (Rama Gorgani), enigmatic characters among which the composer Jacopo Baboni Schilingi who writes a score on the bare back of an unknown... Schilingi signed for Ghraichy a virevoltant piece, "Huge", for piano and MAO (computer-assisted music). At the time of her play, the pianist seized a laptop and the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, a centuries-old temple, was flooded with electro-percussive sounds...

A great audacity

Simon Ghraichy is not the only classical artist who has slipped electro into his music and projects. Other pianists such as Francesco Tristano and Vanessa Wagner have also broken the partitions between these universes. By putting his recital at the heart of a multidisciplinary show, such as those that can be found on the scenes of current music, Simon Ghraichy has hit hard. Of course, one can wonder whether these carefully thought-out visual and theatrical counterpoints, with the assumed autobiographical dimension, may not sometimes interfere with listening to music rather than serving it. But the experience deserves to be tempted. On Tuesday night, the audience appreciated. One can only salute the audacity of Simon Ghraichy. Rejoicing.

"Humoresken"
Musical interludes (and calligraphy): Jacopo Baboni-Schilingi
Directed by Yannick Foratier
Video credit: Antonin Amy-Menichetti