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CD Review by [Henry Fogel](#)

**CLEMENTI** Piano Sonata in C, op. 7. **SCHUMANN** *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*. **RAVEL** *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. *Gaspard de la nuit* • Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (pn) • ST-LAURENT STUDIO 284 mono (2 CDs: 85:44) Live: Carnegie Hall, New York 11/26/1968

Although there are many live-performance “pirate” recordings of concerts given by Michelangeli, this is a major discovery: a first release of his dazzling 1968 Carnegie Hall recital. I have never seen this material elsewhere. Even more impressive is the excellent, if slightly distant, monaural sound. This is not the work of some amateur sitting in the balcony with an Uher under his coat.

The big news here is the combination of Ravel’s *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *Gaspard de la nuit* on one program, something Michelangeli rarely did. *Gaspard* was, of course one of his specialties, and there are recordings of many performances by him. But the *Valses* are much rarer. In both cases, we have Michelangeli at his best here—a complete master of the keyboard, and a master of color in Ravel’s music. Ravel and Debussy were the two composers the mercurial pianist most loved and seemed most at home with. His range of dynamic shading is unique, his sense for chordal balancing and color in this music is without parallel. Michelangeli draws us a picture of the water in “Ondine,” creates a desolate atmosphere in “Le Gibet,” and the technical polish in what we know to be a live, unedited, “Scarbo” in *Gaspard* is jaw-dropping.

About the Clementi and Schumann there will be less consensus. The crystalline clarity of his playing in the Schumann will not please those who would prefer a warmer, darker, more blended sound. This is a performance of extremes—great contrasts of tempo and of dynamics. Some of the playing will seem hectic to doubters. But others will find it exciting, daring, and filled with drama. I will admit to falling into the latter camp. The Clementi Sonata is quite fast, but played with utmost textural clarity and, in the second movement, a lovely singing line. Again, some might wish for a bit less speed in the finale, but I found it exciting.

St-Laurent Studios provides no program notes, only complete track listings and timings. The quality of their restoration work, however, is consistently high and this maintains that standard. The audience is sometimes a bit cough-ridden, and a few people surprise by applauding between some of the movements of Schumann and Ravel. I don’t mind that St-Laurent Studios left this in: It is an historic document, and that is what happened. But some listeners might object. Their recordings can be obtained from their own web site or through Norbeck, Peters and Ford. **Henry Fogel**

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