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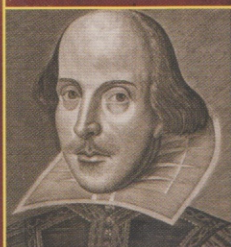
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VIVALDI'S FOUR SEASONS

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Nikita Lukinov, a young Russian pianist who teaches at the Royal Conservatoire

of Scotland, has chosen an all-Russian programme for his debut recording.

Though the piano pieces of Tchaikovsky's Op 72 are contemporaneous with the *Pathétique* Symphony, their closest cousin may be the ballet. The delicately dreamy 'Berceuse' displays Lukinov's ample varieties of touch in an atmosphere of languid chromaticism. A vivid sense of dialogue emerges from 'Tender Reproaches', along with a feeling that this quarrel may not be so gentle. Rather than contemplative repose, 'Méditation' suggests arrival at a momentous decision. The antic 'Valse a cinq temps' could be a comic entr'acte with vivid staccatos and accents, while 'Dialogue' conjures the mutual declaration of two lovers.

Lukinov avoids the overripe fulsomeness and lack of direction that can mar less clear-eyed Scriabin interpretations. Every detail of the two *Poèmes* supports and enhances the overall expressive intent: voluptuousness in the first and bitter conflict in the second. The Op 38 *Valse* is all freshness and ardour, with a piquant dash of capriciousness.

If the Tchaikovsky pieces are redolent of the ballet, Prokofiev's own transcriptions from his 1944 *Cinderella* are the real deal. Happily, Lukinov's interpretations are informed throughout by what could be danced. Most striking is the way they build to a mighty climax of pianistic splendour in the *Amoroso*, in a performance of breathtaking beauty.

Lukinov turns 25 this year. His publicity materials modestly describe him as a 'disciple of the Russian School', but one might confidently replace 'disciple' with 'embodiment'. He exhibits many of the attributes of that association, among them extraordinary technical polish, rhythmic acumen and a strong musical point of view. Yet in Lukinov's case, one must factor in the extraordinary breadth and freedom of his imagination. With his performances already a tremendous pleasure to experience, one is left wondering what form his gifts will take as he matures.

Patrick Rucker

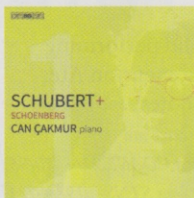
Schubert · Schoenberg

Schoenberg Drei Klavierstücke, Op 11 Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 4, D537; No 20, D959

Can Çakmur pf

BIS (BIS2650 • 80')



From a critical point of view, barring the opportunity to hear an artist publicly,

often after the appearance of a particularly impressive recording a period of uncertainty sets in. Was that special recording a one-shot wonder? Will acquaintance with a wider range of the artist's repertoire meet the high standards of the first glimpse? This release of Schubert and Schoenberg was my first exposure to Can Çakmur since his splendid recording of Liszt's transcription of Schubert's *Schwanengesang* (12/20). I am happy to report that it more than fulfils the highest expectations.

The coupling of these two Schubert sonatas is a congenial one. The principal theme of the early A minor Sonata's second movement would return 11 years later in the Rondo of the magnificent late A major Sonata. Çakmur's approach to both works is symphonic, within the bounds of appropriate taste and style. Throughout D537, the vivid characterisation of themes seems particularly apt and imaginative. In the concluding *Allegro vivace*, pure kinaesthetic joy seems barely containable.

In the Olympian climes of the great A major Sonata, D959, Çakmur inspires even greater admiration. The sense of orchestral space is even more suitable to the lofty dimensions of this august work. One of Çakmur's special gifts is his fluent differentiation between principal material and passagework in Schubert's highly idiosyncratic keyboard-writing. Be warned: the *Andantino* slow movement weaves its tragic course with such extraordinary poise and restraint that you may, as I did, have difficulty restraining tears. This movement alone situates this interpretation among the finest I know. The distance between this abyss of heartbreak and the sprightly Scherzo is astonishing in its contrast, which seems to verge on incongruity. Coming at last to the noble finale, where Çakmur neglects no detail, the dimensions of Schubert's vision on the eve of death are apparent with an immediacy that only the very best of his interpreters are capable of imparting.

The Op 11 Schoenberg pieces exhibit the same depth of discernment evident in the Schubert sonatas. This very distinguished recording should not be missed by anyone interested in fine piano-playing and heartfelt poetic utterance.

Patrick Rucker

'Childhood Tales'

Debussy Children's Corner Dohnányi Variations on a Nursery Song, Op 25^a Mozart Variations on 'Ah, vous dirai-je Maman', K265 Schumann Kinderszenen, Op 15

Isata Kanneh-Mason pf^a Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Domingo Hindoyan Decca (485 4180 • 67')



I wish more artists would mix solo and orchestral repertoire like this. It makes for

a delightful programme that will appeal to those of riper years as much as it will to children – and the pianist's growing legion of fans, for whom Isata Kanneh-Mason has provided an entrée to the previously closed world of classical music. The user-friendly presentation gives separate tracks for each of Mozart's 12 variations, for the 14 sections of the Dohnányi and, more routinely, the six parts of *Children's Corner* and the 13 of *Kinderszenen* (though to label the latter two in the track-listing as 'Variations' is plain wrong, just as it is somewhat misleading for the booklet writer to define 'genius pianist' Dohnányi merely as a 'professor of piano in Florida').

Kanneh-Mason begins, as she did her live recitals last year of the three solo works presented here, with the Mozart Variations. In the studio, as in the concert hall, it is the standout performance of the three, her light-fingered dexterity and minimal pedal ideally attuned to the work's good-humoured mischief. The Debussy and Schumann are fine but less remarkable. I thought the (renamed) 'Cakewalk' far too fussy and the final two *Childhood Scenes* unnaturally gloomy. Besides, 'Der Dichter spricht' makes an unsatisfactory finale in concert as it does on disc. Why not something from *Prole do bebê*, for example? Especially in the light of the Mozart and what follows it, the highlight of the CD: Dohnányi's *Variations on a Nursery Song*.

It is so good to see someone of Isata Kanneh-Mason's generation championing this once-popular work, now puzzlingly neglected. And this account is right up there with the best. I placed Howard Shelley with Mathias Bamert (Chandos, 9/99) in the top spot for my *Gramophone* Collection (8/17), regretting the absence in the current catalogue of Earl Wild's recording with the composer's grandson, Christoph von Dohnányi (Chesky). This new recording can stand comparison with both – it's that good. Domingo Hindoyan gets things going with an Introduction that will have newcomers to the work jumping