

FRANZ LISZT

Sonata in B min; *Don Juan Fantasy*; *Mephisto Waltz No 1*
Jerome Rose (pf)
Medici Classics M30092 (www.mediciclassics.com)



Jerome Rose, the esteemed American pianist and teacher, was a student of both Leonard Shure (himself a student of Artur Schnabel) and Rudolf Serkin, and is a faculty member of the Mannes College of Music. He brings a lifetime's experience to this new Medici release of music by Liszt. At one time Liszt's B minor Sonata, the highlight of this disc, was deemed too difficult by far for most pianists even to attempt to play in private, never mind to play it for public consumption. Now, though most pianists have it as a standard work in their repertoire, few manage to marry successfully the huge technical and musical demands of a one-movement piece that lasts almost half an hour.

Rose, however, rises to almost every challenge. Like Liszt himself, Rose seems to offer an underlying musical logic that propels the music forward from first note to last. It is a powerfully argued performance devoid of ego and artifice, but at the same time offering its own unique perspective. Perhaps there have been more hair-raising performances from the likes of Horowitz, Richter and Argerich, and more subtle, introspective readings from the likes of Arrau and Brendel. But any performance that can shed new light on a masterpiece such as this deserves to be heard, especially when coupled with truly virtuosic performances of the *Don Juan Fantasy* and the first of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltzes*. Warmly recorded (though with a touch of steeliness in the upper registers), this is a disc to be highly recommended.

TIM STEIN

SERGEI RACHMANINOV

Sonata No 2 in B flat min op 36 (rev. 1931);
selection of preludes op 23 and 32; Prelude
op 3 no 2 in C sharp min; and other works
Simon Trpčeski (pf)
EMI Classics 5 57942 2

I wasn't previously familiar with the playing of the young Macedonian Simon Trpčeski, but this enjoyable recital proves him to be a Rachmaninov interpreter of considerable artistry. His programme is well-planned, too, moving through a varied selection of preludes and transcriptions to climax in the C sharp minor Prelude and the Second Piano Sonata. Only with the Sonata did some doubt creep in: despite Rachmaninov's having made the structure more taut in his 1931 revision (which Trpčeski plays here), I felt a certain diffuseness in projecting the structure of each movement, something Trpčeski has no problem with in the generally shorter forms of the preludes.

There is, however, a wealth of well-observed detail to enjoy, allied to superb playing and a vibrant recording. The F sharp minor Prelude from op 23, for instance, is beautifully controlled in dynamics and in the sustaining of expressive tension. The transcriptions hold delights, too: the Tchaikovsky *Lullaby* calls forth wonderfully liquid phrasing, and Trpčeski's left hand has a crisply alert staccato in the *Flight of the Bumblebee*. Only in Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* scherzo did

I feel a lighter touch was called for. On the whole Trpčeski seems absolutely identified with his composer and exhibits his mastery of the

then entire keyboard medium in the very best light. If not in the absolute top rank of Rachmaninov recitals, this is a very competitive contender.

CALUM MACDONALD



DOMENICO SCARLATTI

Piano sonatas
(selection)
Yevgeny Sudbin (pf)
BIS Records BIS-CD-1508



Combine the words 'Russian pianist' and 'Scarlatti' and, inevitably, comparisons with Horowitz will abound. Yet, while he clearly knows his compatriot's rich recorded legacy well, the cannily programmed (and exceptionally recorded) recital of 18 sonatas presented here shows that the young, London-based Yevgeny Sudbin is no imitator.

In Scarlatti's typically ebullient movements, such as the guitar-strumming, castanet-clicking trickery of the D major



K435 and C major K487, Sudbin delivers all with a hugely enjoyable, unapologetic gusto. Yet, for all his accomplishment in the flashier, hand-

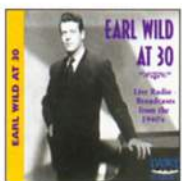
crossing note-spinners, he is certainly no one-trick pony. Indeed, eminently malleable, Sudbin is equally responsive to the more contemplative side of the Neapolitan rogue. For example, in the sonatas in F minor K466, B minor K27 and – most unexpectedly – the usually fleet G minor K30 ('Cat's fugue') and E major K20, there is an unusually profound, spiritual wonder. Here he exploits every inch of the modern instrument's potential for dynamic range and nuance, creating a sumptuous colour and sound to, at times, even rival the old conjurer Horowitz with all his lacquered hammers.

Quibbles? Well, occasionally Sudbin's resonant bass octaves can seem a mite high-powered and, here and there, I miss those touches of sly humour that wink out at you from Horowitz's readings. However, why pick at such capacious subtleties when presented with playing of this calibre?

LEANDRO FERRACCIOLI

EARL WILD AT 30

Live Radio Broadcasts from the 1940s: solo piano works
by Chopin, Daquin, Liszt, MacDowell, Mendelssohn,
Mussorgsky, Rachmaninov and Scarlatti
Ivory Classics 74003



Earl Wild and his devoted partner Michael Rolland Davis founded Ivory Classics so they could do what the major labels didn't want to do – that is, release recordings of the pianist Earl Wild. Certainly not a bad idea, since lovers of high-class piano performance now have nearly 25 releases to choose from, most astoundingly the majority recorded when Wild was approaching or even surpassing his 80th year.

Listening to many of the releases one wonders if the old wizard always had this fabulous technique (as Shura Cherkassky did) or if he actually improved when he got older (as Arthur Rubinstein certainly did).

This latest Ivory Classics release is probably among the very first recordings Wild made during the 1940s. Since he was often performing on the radio for several hours each week during many years, it is hard to pinpoint the date of these off-the-air radio broadcasts. Aside from small two-minute fillers played with elegance, style and refinement, the major interest here is the gigantic Liszt Sonata, which Wild performs as if he had had it in his fingers since childhood (what he probably had!). There's not a trace of strain or struggle, or any doubt about the major lines, structural layers or melodic connection – all of which make this a fiery rendition of this huge one-movement Sonata. A purchase not only for Earl Wild fans, which is the best recommendation I could give.

MARIUS DAWN

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

18 Pieces op 72; plus Chopin Nocturne
No 20 in C sharp min op posth
Mikhail Pletnev (pf)
Deutsche Grammophon 00289 477 5378



Not all the works from the great composers are great works. Tchaikovsky surely had his glorious moments, not

least in his First Piano Concerto, but elsewhere his genius failed him when wrote for the instrument. He produced several piano pieces, but to be fair, none of them ranks above any middle-of-the-road composer. Sadly, even his colossal G major Sonata fails to impress. Turning to the popular First Piano Concerto one can fairly safely say that if the pianist plays all the notes as written the concerto will not fail to impress the audience. When it comes to the minor works only a great performer can convince us that the works are worth listening to. One can even fairly safely say that a great performer can turn a lesser great work from a great composer into something, well, great.

This is exactly what Mikhail Pletnev so convincingly does in his inspiring and satisfying account of the complete 18 *Morceaux* composed when Tchaikovsky's life was drawing to a close. Any skilled amateur should be able to play through the majority of pieces and that is exactly how boring it can sound, unless one has the touch, finesse and imagination of a Pletnev to make them raise above what Tchaikovsky imagined. Albeit, Pletnev turns the *Polacca de concert* into a minor monster and yes, he does pull around with the *Berceuse* and indulges in a few odd tempo changes in the *Un poco di Schumann*. But that is exactly what is needed for these compositions. I'm sure Tchaikovsky would agree.

MARIUS DAWN

