

...ing release.
HARRINGTON

Souvenirs

BARBER: *Souvenirs*; BRAHMS: 16 Waltzes, op 39;
GRANADOS: *En la Aldea*; SATIE: 3 Pieces in the
Form of a Pear

Tonya Lemoh & Cathrine Penderup, p
Danacord 746—73 minutes

This is a big, full program of piano duet music by mainstream composers, but the works are not heard anywhere near often enough. Barber's *Souvenirs* is the only work here that I've heard performed in concert (John Browning & Leonard Slatkin). Even the better-known Brahms Waltzes are usually passed over in favor of the even better-known Hungarian Dances. Lemoh & Penderup are to be praised for their repertoire selection as much as for their perfect ensemble, musicality, and exciting performances.

Opening with the enigmatic Satie is unusual and very effective. Supposedly Satie had been criticized in his use of musical form, so he chose the title "in the Form of a Pear" in response. The 3 Morceaux are actually seven pieces, too. Immediately noticeable in this performance is the very wide dynamic range. Lemoh & Penderup contrast the loudest crashing chords with almost inaudible whisperings—and everything in between. The Brahms Waltzes have the requisite stylized dance feel, but also the flexibility of tempo required to bring off these wonderful pieces with just the right panache.

The Granados was completely new to me. Events in the country village of Aldea inspired 10 movements divided into two parts. Charming, simple, even a little naive, these piano duets fall into the same group as well-known French duet suites like Fauré's *Dolly* or Debussy's *Petite Suite*. Lemoh & Penderup never over-play here and let these wonderful pieces simply work their magic.

Barber's suite of six dances finishes off the program in great fashion. *Souvenirs* was completed in its original piano duet form in 1952. It is, like so much of Barber's music, lyrical, expressive, and tonal. He was later commissioned to orchestrate them for a ballet. The composer wrote that "one might imagine a divertissement in a setting reminiscent of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the

American Record Guide

... about 20 minutes of great music. Good sound on this Danish recording and complete booklet notes complete a most enjoyable release.

HARRINGTON

After a Reading of Liszt

LISZT: *Ballade 2*; *Ernani Paraphrase*; LIAPOUNOV: *Transcendental Etude, op 11:12*;
CHOPIN: *Etudes, op 10*; PIANA: *Apres une Lecture de Liszt*—Antonio Pompa-Baldi

2 Pianists 1039305—72 minutes

I like the idea behind this album better than I like the album itself. The wonderful Italian virtuoso Antonio Pompa-Baldi has recorded a recital program where all of the works share some relation to the music of Liszt. Chopin, for instance, dedicated his first set of 12 etudes to Liszt, who was the only pianist in 1833 capable of playing them well. The Russian composer Liapounov attempted to complete Liszt's 12 *Transcendental Etudes* by composing new studies in keys the great Hungarian composer omitted.

Pompa-Baldi's performance of standard repertory is for the most part excellent. He plays the Chopin Etudes with just the right mix of polish, power, and ferocity. The one exception is the A-minor chromatic study, Op. 10:2, which is inexplicably slow. He plays Liszt's *Ballade No. 2* and *Ernani Concert Paraphrase* with passion and drama, and he's excellent in Liapounov's final, knuckle-busting *Transcendental Etude*.

The album concludes with contemporary composer Roberto Piana's *Apres une Lecture de Liszt* (After a Reading of Liszt), which plays off the name of Liszt's own *Apres une Lecture de Dante* (Dante Sonata). The title is a rip-off, and so is the music, a pastiche of Liszt-inspired, keyboard-pounding kitsch. Pompa-Baldi plays this monstrosity with technical bravura, but no amount of skill can tame this beast.

PITCHER

Russian Gems

MEDTNER: *Piano Sonata 1*; BALAKIREV: *Islamey*;
RACHMANINOFF: *Waltz & Romance fr Suite 2*;
TANEYEV: *Prelude & Fugue*; ISSERLIS: *Fairy Tale*;
RAKOV: *Russian Song*; ROZYCKI: *Waltz*

Sandro Russo, p

Musical Concepts 150—69 minutes

I love Russian piano music and it occupies a

disproportionate number of shelves in my CD collection. I was both pleased and surprised by the content of this program. Balakirev's *Islamey* is not a rarity. It was known to Liszt and to almost every pianist with a desire for a showy, difficult recital closer or encore since. I learned it from an old Turnabout LP by Alfred Brendel, of all people. Russo's playing is on a level with the best.

Medtner's big, four-movement Sonata 1 (over 30 minutes) is his first large-scale composition. It prompted Rachmaninoff to remark that all composers make mistakes when they are young, but that "only Medtner, from the beginning, published works that would be hard to equal in later life". I have been quite pleased with several recordings of this work (Stewart on Grand Piano 617, Jan/Feb 2013; Milne on Brilliant 8851, May/June 2009; Hamelin on Hyperion 67221, Jan/Feb 1999). Russo's performance can stand with the best.

Taneyev's *Prelude and Fugue* is one of only a few piano solo works he assigned an opus number to and published. Performances of this exceptionally difficult work (at least the Fugue) are few and tend to be almost exclusively by Russian-trained pianists. Ashkenazy still has the best recording of this (Decca, Mar/Apr 2007), but I'll always welcome a recording as good as the current one.

The program opens with the absolutely gorgeous Isserlis 'Fairy Tale' ('Skaza'—a title often used by Medtner). I was floored at the solo piano transcription by Leyetchkiss of the middle two movements from Rachmaninoff's Suite 2 for Two Pianos. This is a well-known and often recorded work for piano duos, but never for a solo pianist. How Russo manages to play that Waltz is beyond me. In the original, at a Presto tempo, each pianist plays the main theme a third apart while waltz accompaniment is split between them. I can see playing the accompaniment with one hand, but the melody in thirds with one hand? You have to hear this to believe it. Actually, if you heard this performance in the background, you'd simply think it was the original. Listen closely, and a few logistical matters make the arrangement sound a little different from the two-piano original—but not by much. Same goes for the Romance movement, but at its slower speed you simply enjoy the music and appreciate the performance without having to pick your jaw up off the floor. Two beautiful transcriptions by Grigory Ginzburg finish off this marvelous disc. Both the Rakov Song and the Rozycki Waltz were new to me and quite enjoyable.

These great sounding recordings were made in New York (October 2012 to January

2013). There are excellent and extensive program notes.

HARRINGTON

Grigory Sokolov

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 7, 27, 32*; **ARAPOV:** *Sonata; Concerto for Violin, Piano, & Percussion*; **SCRIABIN:** *Sonata 3*

with Mikhail Vaiman, v; Nikolay Moskalenko, perc; Leningrad Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra/ Alexander Dmitriev

Melodiya 2240 [2CD] 130 minutes

Grigory Sokolov was the winner of the third Tchaikovsky competition in 1966 at the age of 16. Now in his mid-60s, he maintains a busy concert schedule (from 3 to 11 recitals each month, in different European cities). Reviews of this year's all-Chopin recitals are uniformly superb, yet we here in the US have not seen or heard this great pianist very often. The new Melodiya releases should help rectify that. The hyperbole in the booklet notes placing Sokolov on the same level as Horowitz, Richter, and Gould doesn't fly with me. He is, nevertheless, a fine pianist worth getting to know better.

Last issue's Bach (Melodiya 2049) was a 2CD set with many of the strengths and weaknesses found in the current release. Soviet recordings from the 1970s and 80s can be cleaned up sonically, repackaged, and presented in a manner justifying world distribution—as they are here. There is still audience noise (in the concert recordings), poor recording equipment, and questionable microphone placement. English translations of the booklet are much improved these days, as are most of the booklet essays. As noted, there are still some of the old Soviet-era superlative phrases that seem out of place. Tell me what he has done, where and for how long.

The two discs in this release couldn't be more different in terms of repertoire. Three Beethoven sonatas on the first CD contrast with a big early Scriabin sonata, one written in 1978 by Boris Arapov (1905-1992), and the same composer's fascinating Concerto for Violin, Piano and Percussion with Chamber Orchestra. The Beethoven sonatas are a studio recording from 1974 and two recital recordings from 1987 and 1988. The Scriabin and Arapov are studio recordings from 1972 and 1985. The concerto is from a concert in 1974. As you might imagine, even with excellent remastering efforts, there is a wide divergence in recording quality here. But Sokolov's always interesting and perceptive performances make the whole package very much worthwhile.

I found his Beethoven reminiscent of Ashkenazy's, who, as the previous winner of the Tchaikovsky competition would have been of the same Soviet-era school of Russian