

# Instrumental

## INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE



### Shadows of my Ancestors

**Prokofiev:** 10 Pieces from Romeo and Juliet; **Dilorm Saidaminova:** The Walls of Ancient Bukhara; **Ravel:** Gaspard de la Nuit

Behzod Abduraimov (piano)  
Alpha Classics ALPHA1028 73:42 mins

Behzod Abduraimov, who began his meteoric career by winning the London International Piano Competition in 2009 at the age of 18, seems to prefer touring the US to playing in Britain, so this album is the closest British audiences are likely to get to him at present. And this time, rather than allowing his excellence in Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Rachmaninov to shine out, he keeps his main focus on byways.

He's not the only Uzbek on the international circuit – others include Yefim Bronfman and Stanislav Ioudenitch – but he's fiercely proud of his alma mater in Tashkent, and here he's promoting the music of one of

## Roots, byways and a bit of piano poetry

*Michael Church* is enchanted by Behzod Abduraimov's artistry at the keyboard

his teachers, Dilorm Saidaminova. She too likes to flourish her origins, hence the novelty in this programme, her collection of short pieces entitled *The Walls of Ancient Bukhara*. Five hundred years ago, that city was the biggest cultural centre in Asia, with a remarkable flowering of creativity by poets, painters, mathematicians, architects and musicians.

Her pieces are tonal but gently dissonant, and not impressionistic in the normal sense of the word. But they're very atmospheric, and allow

**I have never heard Ravel's 'Le gibet' so gravely beautiful**

Abduraimov ample scope to display his artistry. The first piece feels like an Uzbek lute improvisation, after

which the musical landscape opens out magically, with Abduraimov creating delicately understated effects. His account of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* suite affords further evidence that he is one of the world's most accomplished poets of the keyboard, and I have never heard 'Ondine' so dainty and insinuating, or 'Le gibet' so gravely beautiful.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



Accomplished pianist: Behzod Abduraimov plays with pride and passion for his country

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### JS Bach

#### The Art of Fugue

Christophe Rousset (harpisichord)  
Aparté AP313 83:00 mins



Ever since his death in 1750, Bach's contrapuntal masterpiece has enjoyed

– and perhaps suffered, too – speculation, hypothesis, fantasy, legend and romance. We should not be surprised since Bach did indeed invite questions which, in all probability, will never be answered. Though he left no specific instrumental requirements for performing *The Art of Fugue*, it is nowadays widely accepted that he

conceived it for keyboard. Bach died during the process of engraving, leaving us in the dark over his final intentions. A taste for alternative instrumentation has comfortably held its own since Wolfgang Graeser's large, orchestral edition of 1926.

For his new recording, harpischordist Christophe Rousset understandably favours his own instrument, in this instance one built by an anonymous German craftsman dating from the early to mid-18th century. Rousset plays with commendable linear clarity, taking the 13 Contrapuncti in their accustomed sequence and concluding with the four Canons. For the prospective listener, it is

of importance to know that, following the lead of Gustav Leonhardt, Rousset omits the final uncompleted *Fuga a tre soggetti*, which may not even belong to the work. Two reasons are given: first, that Bach would never have played an incomplete fugue; and, second, that all available completions are to be avoided. Readers must decide for themselves the merit of such considerations.

Aside from that issue, this is a fine performance where I found myself revelling in the delightful mirror fugues, where Rousset is joined by fellow harpischordist, Korneel Bernolet. *Nicholas Anderson*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

### Beach

#### Piano Music – Variations on Balkan Themes; Three Pieces; Prelude and Fugue etc

Martina Frezzotti (piano)  
Piano Classics PCL10277 65:01 mins



The sheer quantity of Amy Beach's output indicates a prolific composer who meant

business. Its quality, especially that of her piano writing, demands attention and recognition. In this excellent account of well-chosen works, composed across some 40 years, the Italian pianist Martina Frezzotti is a superb advocate, never stinting on demonstrating the

virtuosity Beach demands, or the heights of her emotional expression.

The American composer started out as a prodigiously gifted pianist, and she studied with a pupil of Liszt before making her official debut at the age of 16. After her marriage, she was restricted to giving just two performances a year, but composing quietly at home was not frowned upon in the same way as – shock horror – appearing on a stage. She resumed her performing career after her husband's death in 1910 and continued to compose for the rest of her life.

Although these works are not arranged in chronological order, the contrasts between them highlight the progression in Beach's language, from the early salon piece *Dreaming* to the impressively rugged *Variations on Balkan Themes*, and beyond. The later works, despite pictorial titles, exceed salon pieces, often making Lisztian demands upon the pianist's technical abilities. *Honeysuckle* twists and twines apace; *Humming Bird* is a positively impressionistic perpetuum mobile.

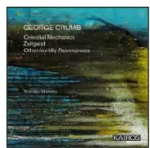
The programme begins with the two most intense creations: the imposing cries of *Out of the Depths* and the *Variations on Balkan Themes* find Beach at times risking sensory overload. Frezzotti, who studied at Imola under Lazar Berman, brings the music a generous, refulgent sound and a strong sense of perspective through well-controlled voicing. Recorded sound is sometimes a little over-bright, but basically good. *Jessica Duchon*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

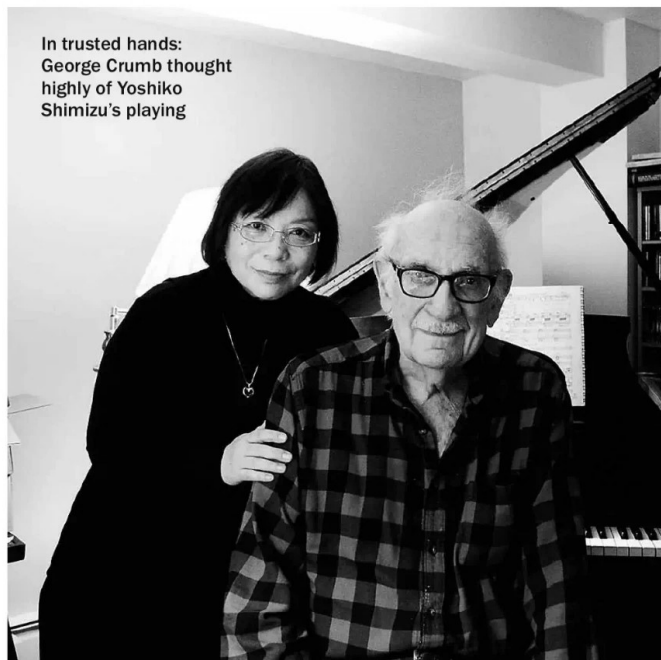
## Crumb

### *Celestial Mechanics; Zeitgeist; Otherworldly Resonances*

Yoshiko Shimizu (piano)  
*Kairos 0022012KAI 69:42 mins*



Among some ill-advised tech breakthroughs in music – a singing hologram of Maria Callas; an AI-imagined Beatles song, to name a couple – Yoshiko Shimizu's 'solo' recording of George Crumb's works for two pianists is a remarkable achievement. Given that the composer considered Shimizu, with whom he worked directly over several decades, to be one of the finest interpreters of his music, the pianist finds herself suitably



In trusted hands:  
George Crumb thought  
highly of Yoshiko  
Shimizu's playing

matched. The Bartók-inspired opening movement of *Celestial Mechanics (Makrokosmos IV)* is hewn with a diamond-cutter's precision; each facade glints and winks. Crumb employs increasingly complex techniques throughout the four movements, creating overtones by muting strings in 'Beta Cygni', dropping metal rulers with cork strips glued to one side into the piano guts for 'Gamma Draconis', and combining the damper pedal with plucked strings in the final 'Delta Orionis'. The latter two movements are actually for six hands: in a nod to Charles Ives, Crumb includes a part for page-turning pianist, bringing to life all non-performing musicians' nightmares about the perils of helping as a stage hand.

Shimizu blends the varied timbres effortlessly – there's no indication of the pianistic acrobatics required from a score that involves the interior of the instrument as much as the keyboard. Few composers have integrated extended techniques into their harmonic language as neatly as Crumb; whether it's the partial tones in *Zeitgeist's* 'Monochord' (delightfully depicted in a circular score, incidentally) or the cluster chords in *Otherworldly Resonances*, nothing jars. Crumb's own programme notes are provided for each work, with additional comment by Shimizu, who contextualises pieces with quotes from Crumb's

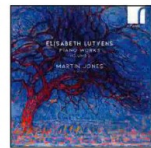
letters and insight into techniques. Sadly, though, these don't include the recording method. *Claire Jackson*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## Lutyens

### *Piano Works, Vol. 3 – Holiday Diary; Helix; Three Books of Bagatelles etc*

Martin Jones (piano)  
*Resonus RES10331 77:32 mins*



One of the most international-looking of British composers, Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–83) studied in Paris but came to be influenced most of all by the serialism of the Second Viennese School. That leaning is audible even in such a relatively early piece as the *Berceuse*, given a warmly enigmatic performance by Martin Jones in the third and final volume of his survey of Lutyens's piano works on Resonus Classics. Famously hard-living and combative, Lutyens coined the term 'cowpat music' as a derogatory reference to the English pastoralists, but her own styles could range quite widely. As a reminder that Hindemith was the fountainhead of many composers during this period, there's also the stately Overture (a third pressing, perhaps, of the Hindemithian oil) with which this album opens. Another early piece, the *Dance Souvenance*, features a

haunting tune that points towards Lutyens's film scores.

The childlike simplicity of the *Holiday Diary* comes complete with a now slightly dated-sounding narration (spoken, I think, by Jones himself) – the small-scale theatricals recalling Milhaud's occasional mix of piano and narration. Written long after Lutyens's breakdown in the late 1940s, there are such mature scores as *Helix* for piano duo (Jones presumably duetting with himself, but again no indication is given) and the three books of *Bagatelles*, wide-ranging in their emotions yet all brief, one lasting only half a minute. All are world-premiere recordings, and if that implies at least a little barrel scraping, everything is meticulously played. *John Allison*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## Schubert

### *Piano Works, Vol. 7 – Impromptus; Moments musicaux; Adagio & Rondo; 'Grazer' Fantasy; Variations*

Vladimir Feltsman (piano)  
*Nimbus NI6442 158:00 mins (2 discs)*



I generally avoid lengthy series of collected works, organised in ways composers would never have recognised. The completist approach fosters a tendency to play lighter pieces with great portentousness in order to justify their inclusion. Vladimir Feltsman, though, believes 'Schubert was incapable of writing bad music or a mediocre tune' which, at least, is the right spirit for this sort of project.

Feltsman's liner notes reveal his understanding of Schubert's miniatures as 'calculated works put together in a specific order', despite their being published mainly piecemeal and posthumously. He finds anything other than 'whole opus' approaches 'unfortunate'. Well, I still recommend listening to selections because more nuances emerge than when we try to swallow over-large chunks.

That said, some interpretations only make sense in sequence; for instance, the *Moment musicaux* No. 2 is exquisitely healing after the robust No. 1. The unexpectedly violent No. 5 nearly made me fall off my chair, after which No. 6 was a huge relief. Indeed, the piano does sound bright and heavy at times, evoking