



Mark Viner continues to impress with his command of Alkan's highly virtuosic textures in the sixth volume of his complete survey of the composer's piano music

means there's no explanation of his moderately individualistic selection, ordering and editorial choices. But that's a minor flaw, given the calibre of the playing.

**Peter J Rabinowitz**

## Beach

Canoeing, Op 119 No 3. Dreaming, Op 15 No 3. A Hermit Thrush at Eve, Op 92 No 1. Honeysuckle, Op 97 No 5. Nocturne, Op 107. Out of the Depths, Op 130. Three Pieces, Op 128. Prelude and Fugue, Op 81. Serenade, 'Ständchen' (after Richard Strauss). Variations on Balkan Themes, Op 60

**Martina Frezzotti** *pf*

Piano Classics (PCL10277 • 65')



The more I listen to the music of Amy Beach, the more I wonder why it is not more widely known or played. She has, it is true, never quite faded from the repertoire, though only a single recording of her music was made during the entire roughly 60 years of the shellac era (*Improvisations*, Op 148 No 2, made by pianist Jeanne Behrend in 1940, if you want to know). And the more I hear it, the more does

much of it resemble the music of Edward MacDowell – not, perhaps, surprising since Mrs Beach spent each summer after 1921 as Fellow-in-Residence at the MacDowell Colony, a retreat for artists in New Hampshire founded by the composer's widow in 1907.

Listen to the first track on this album, *Out of the Depths* (1932), a clear homage to MacDowell's 'From the Depths', the sixth of his *Sea Pieces* (1898). And doesn't the subject of her *Variations on Balkan Themes* (1904) remind you of MacDowell's 'AD MDCXX' from the same suite? In the Variations, considered by some to be Beach's most important work for solo piano (at over 25 minutes it is certainly the longest and, sadly, presented here without separate track numbers for the eight variations), it is easy to hear the influence of other composers, Chopin, Liszt and Grieg among them. All of which might suggest that Amy Beach is a bland simulacrum of others. Nothing could be further from the truth, as those who know her Piano Concerto and Piano Quintet will attest. While not Bach or Beethoven, this is all good, rewarding music.

You would be hard of heart to dismiss her nocturne 'Dreaming' (where are you Stephen Hough?), the simple delights of

'Honeysuckle' (1922) and 'Canoeing' (1927) or her elaborate (and unexpected) transcription of Richard Strauss's 'Ständchen', and what is perhaps her most famous piece, 'A Hermit Thrush at Eve', written at the MacDowell Colony in 1922, faithfully replicating the call of the bird, albeit an octave lower. Some will be more drawn to her portentous Bach-Liszt inspired Prelude and Fugue than me.

So what of the artist? Born in 1986, Martina Frezzotti is a former student of Lazar Berman and a remarkably gifted pianist. She has been given a superbly voiced Steinway (exceptionally well recorded in Westvest Church, Schiedam, Netherlands, by producer Pieter van Winkel and engineer Peter Arts) and is not afraid to make full use of its sonorous bass, say in the opening to the Prelude, while conjuring up delicate half-lights and deft characterisation elsewhere whenever needed. Frezzotti, in short, is finely attuned to this repertoire, is a pleasure to hear and has made an artfully chosen selection to show Amy Beach in the best possible light. A detailed booklet by label-mate Mark Viner completes a valuable addition to the catalogue.

**Jeremy Nicholas**