

ALBUM REVIEWS

Reviews by **Peter Quantrill**
and **Warwick Thompson**

INON BARNATAN

Rachmaninoff Reflections: includes *Moments musicaux, Vocalise, Symphonic Dances*
Pentatone PTC 5187 113

★★★★



I was half-expecting to see a portrait of a swivel-eyed lunatic on the front of Inon Barnatan's latest album. Who else, after all, would take on the challenge

of transcribing and recording a solo piano version of Rachmaninov's mammoth *Symphonic Dances*? But the Israeli-American Barnatan actually looks very presentable, and his transcription is most impressive – if not, perhaps, 100 percent successful. The loss of percussive effect and range of colour from the two-piano version (let alone the orchestral version) hampers things, even if there are some wonderful moments: the touching finale of the first movement sounds particularly tender and engaging from a solo performer. There are more solid delights from an energetic and wonderfully varied account of the *Moments musicaux*: I particularly loved the fieriness of the C major *Maestoso*, and the way Barnatan creates a contrasting sound for the middle section without losing momentum. **WT**

MARTINA FREZZOTTI

Beach: Variations on Balkan Themes, *Out of the Depths*, etc.
Piano Classics PCL10277

★★★★



Here's a recital to challenge received ideas of Amy Beach as a salon miniaturist. If a friend had played me *Out of the Depths* Op 130, I would have guessed at Scriabin or

Liadov, for its brevity and rootless harmony. Beach was 66 when she composed it in 1933, and Frezzotti shows how far she had come from the stylish but predictable rise and fall of 'Dreaming' from her Op 15 *Sketches*. The focus here is on Beach's 'late style' in all its variety, from the glittering impressionism of the minute-long *Canoeing* Op 119 No 3, to an American translation of Busoni and Reger in the Prelude and Fugue Op 81. An Op 128 trio of sketches is absorbingly unclassifiable in style yet profoundly 'pianistic'. A 25-minute sequence of progressively more intricate variations on Balkan themes demonstrates what a virtuoso Beach herself must have been, and Frezzotti takes imperious command in a slightly constricted recording (or possibly piano). **PQ**

SIMON TRPČESKI

Brahms: Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 2
WDR Sinfonieorchester/Măcelaru
Linn CKD732

★★★★



After the rip-roaring success of their recording of the two Shostakovich concertos, Macedonian pianist Simon Trpčeski and Romanian

conductor Cristian Măcelaru offer this equally engaging live account of Brahms's two works in the same genre (although with a different orchestra). Trpčeski and Măcelaru display an obvious musical bromance – the interplay of orchestra and soloist is handled with delightful generosity on both sides, and the result is that this feels like the kind of properly symphonic, muscular account that Brahms must surely have imagined during composition. But there's no sacrifice of delicacy from the pianist either, and both slow movements sound wonderfully dreamy and poetic. (The solo cellist – uncredited, but probably Oren Shevlin – in the Andante of the Second Concerto does a particularly heavenly job as well.) There are no surprises, nothing radically new: but these big-souled performances stand up against the best. **WT**

JAVIER PERIANES

Granados: *Goyescas, El pelele*
Harmonia mundi HMM902626

★★★★



As the pre-eminent Spanish pianist of our time, Perianes owed this to himself, if not to us: a record of his take on the second (after Albeniz's *Iberia*) and even

more extravagantly challenging of the two landmark Romantic-Spanish piano cycles. His *El pelele* (inspired by Goya's drawing of a straw man) is irrepressibly rhythmic, unpredictably accented, with a feel for the elusive Granados rubato to rival de Larrocha herself. Hardly a bar moves in quite the same tempo, yet Perianes conveys the courtly manners of 'Los Queiebros' (No 1 in the cycle proper) as much as the mounting erotic tension of the Fandango (No 3). 'Love and the Nightingale' is often taken as the most approachable of the *Goyescas* for players and listeners alike, but Perianes elevates it to Lisztian heights of contemplation with the most considered kind of 'improvisatory' phrasing. This is *Goyescas* as a worthy Spanish counterpart to the Berg Sonata and Debussy Etudes. **PQ**

ANNE QUEFFÉLEC

Mozart: Piano Concertos Nos 20 & 27
Paris Chamber Orchestra/Kuokman
Mirare MIR686

★★★★



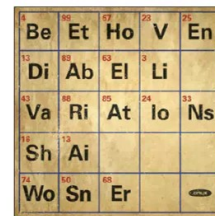
It comes as a shock to realise how little Mozart Queffélec has recorded over her long career: this is her first concerto album, after two solo discs for Mirare. The

meticulous voicing and tender shaping of her Satie and Ravel serve her unsurprisingly (but satisfyingly) well in Mozart. This is not a K466 boiling over with repressed, *Don Giovanni*-like violence. There is no shortage of tension or pathos in the moment, but everything is in proportion, including the sleek contours of the accompaniment, expertly steered by Lio Kuokman. The recording brings out the steel to her fingerwork, especially at the keyboard's lower end, but it also captures the classically rounded, 'jeu perlé' feel of her upper register: not an ugly note or blemish. Bavouzet's K595 (on Chandos) belongs to the same tradition, more inquisitive where Queffélec is serene. Both of these 'French Mozarts' nevertheless share a quality of intense listening among all the musicians involved. **PQ**

SHAI WOSNER

Beethoven: *Diabelli Variations*
Onyx ONYX4241

★★★★



Not for Wosner the infinite jest and variety of articulation which Uchida finds even in Diabelli's own modest waltz. The March goes merrily on its way with neat echo effects,

a spring in its step and a spontaneity which becomes a hallmark of Wosner's approach to the cycle. Not that transitions are arbitrary or abrupt – tempo relationships are always smooth and intelligently worked out – but Wosner gives off the air of sitting down one evening and thinking, 'Yes, the *Diabellis*. Why not?' On a technical level, the trills of var. 6 (and elsewhere) glance off the keys like the prisms of a diamond. The relatively neutral, close studio sound nonetheless allows for generous weight in the bass for the solemnity of var. 14, and razor-sharp articulation in the bass makes a rustic satire of var. 17. The cover design wittily reflects a theme of abstract playfulness which is central to Beethoven's later music: as he searches deeper, and thinks back to Bach in the later variations, Wosner ventures patiently with him. **PQ**