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can only hope that there will be more to come in the future.

FARO

**BARTOK:** *Concerto for Orchestra;*  
*Viola Concerto*

Amihai Grosz; Lille Orchestra/ Alexandre Bloch—Alpha 1013—62 minutes

Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, composed near the end of his life, has reached the status of "warhorse", based on the number of recordings, especially recent ones. Interpretations vary but not all that much, so it is usually safe to assume that if you are considering a well engineered recording of the work with a strong orchestra and conductor, you will be neither disappointed nor startled.

Such is the case here. It is well performed and recorded, and interpretively interesting. The orchestra is good if not necessarily great and certainly not plush, but that adds a weird and interesting color to these readings. The string presence is strong, with prominent winds.

The slow opening is dark, mysterious, and brooding. The ensuing speed-up is well carried out with full-sounding strings. Textures are smooth, and the fast parts are exciting without pushing the tempo. The fugue is steadily marked and not too fast as it maintains the impression of smoothness. This first movement sounds more thought out than usual. If Alexandre Bloch is trying to be different, he succeeds with panache and subtlety. II sounds fresh, smooth, and expressive while maintaining an atmosphere of mystery. The muted trumpet passages sustain that mystery, partly by a slow tempo, and the passage with the brass chorale and full strings displays a regal balance in the middle harmonies. All of this is more expressive than impressive in a way that works well. III is slow, detailed, and somewhat restrained. The section where the brass and strings create a churchlike response effect is mysteriously subtle and even weird in a good way. The wind passage with its prominent piccolo is spooky as well as the usual bubbly. IV is slow and episodic, a little creepy, and the winds dance gracefully. All that is countered by the rush to the finale, which proceeds like a jailbreak of instruments heading to a carnival. The herald-like trumpet passage is weirdly distant and almost lost in the textures, but the per-

formance recovers quickly, leading to a slow fugue. The final section, slower than usual, restores the earlier creepiness, and the slow ending is effective. This is not the best Concerto for Orchestra available, but it is one of the more interesting.

Bartok wrote three more major works after the Concerto: Solo Violin Sonata (1944), Piano Concerto 3 (1945), and the uncompleted Viola Concerto (1945) recorded here. That work was finished and orchestrated by Tibor Serly, a Hungarian-born composer and violist and a strong advocate of Bartok after the latter's arrival in the United States. (Serly also completed Bartok's Third Piano Concerto and wrote his own Viola Concerto [July/Aug 1991; Mar/Apr 2007].) Bartok planned on writing 4 movements for his Viola Concerto but produced enough material for only 3. It is a beautiful, ruminative piece, well suited to violist Amihai Grosz's darkish, nearly vocal sound and interpretation.

HECHT

**BARTOK:** *Cantata Profana*; see KODALY

**BEACH:** Piano Pieces

*Balkan Variations; Prelude & Fugue; Out of the Depths; Dreaming; Serenade after Strauss; Canoeing; Honeysuckle; A Hermit Thrush at Eve; Nocturne; 3 Pieces*

Martina Frezzotti

Piano Classics 10277—65 minutes

In her piano music, Amy Beach (1867-1944) is mostly a miniaturist in the vein of MacDowell, Chaminade, and Florence Price. She did write a few pieces of greater ambition and gravity—and those relative rarities are on this recital. 'Out of the Depths' is a stern disquisition on Psalm 130, and the ten-minute Prelude & Fugue on the eponymous theme A-B-E-A-C-H is clearly inspired by Liszt's also ten-minute prelude & fugue on B-A-C-H, though Liszt's fugue is cast in the most refulgent and dazzling pianism imaginable—Beach's virtuosity is not so overwhelming.

Her largest work for solo piano is the 25-minute *Variations on Balkan Themes*, of course a set of variations principally on a wistful and haunting theme, joined sometimes by three additional themes disguised in a tempestuous and monumental style that's more often orchestral than idiomatic.

cally pianistic. Its difficulties are such that Beach arranged it for two pianos to emphasize and exaggerate its manifest symphonic qualities. The other 25 minutes of the program are devoted to Beach's evocative miniatures.

Joanne Polk surveyed all but one of these pieces ('Canoeing') in a fine three-disc series from the late 1990s that I own (N/D 97, J/A 98, M/A 99). There's also a four-disc series on Guild reviewed in these pages that I haven't heard (J/A 2008 through M/J 2013). Frezzotti is faster than Polk in almost every piece, and her left hand is more powerful in the many climactic octave passages of the prelude & fugue and variations. She also plays with greater dynamic contrast than Polk—her fortissimos are louder, her pianissimo is softer. She imbues each piece with greater substance, color, and character than Polk, whose pianism is more genial and generic. One flaw is Frezzotti's heavy, undisciplined sostenuto pedal in light, rapid passagework of pieces like 'Canoeing' and 'A Peterborough Chipmunk'. Polk's pedal technique is utterly quiet and pristine where Frezzotti seems to lose control of her right foot when technical demands are high in both hands. This infects less than 5 minutes of the recital. If you're looking for a single-disc survey of Beach's piano music, this is most recommendable, especially since Polk's set on the Arabesque label is long deleted.

WRIGHT

## **BEETHOVEN:** *Diabelli Variations*

George Lepauw, p  
Orchid 100266—82 minutes

We have not reviewed this fine pianist's previous releases—both books of the WTC and both books of Debussy's preludes; the latter is especially notable—the right tempos, the right sound, the right phrasing. He took the doctorate from Northwestern University and makes his home in Chicago working as a performer, teacher, and writer.

Recorded at the Beethoven House in Bonn, this is a performance of the Diabellis unlike any I have ever heard or even dreamt of. Lepauw plays with considerable freedom, sometimes suggesting that he is improvising the variations rather than recreating them. Some tempos are extremely odd for their luxuriant absence of haste (Variations 2, 5, and 33, to name but three).

But the fast variations are speedy and clear, if sometimes including a slowing of tempo to make a musical point along the way. And it's easy to see Beethoven as taking center stage here (after all, he was highly prized for his improvisations). He makes me hear the piece as if I have never heard it before, and makes me pay the closest attention to see what will happen next.

Many will find this recording outré, even outrageous or obscene. But I went thru my musical adolescence treasuring Glenn Gould's performances which, by his own admission, were sometimes made to present a work in a way not heard before. I haven't been as excited by a recording in years. It gives me hope that we might have again a generation of pianists that really takes risks and interprets the music imaginatively. If you like a provocative approach to musical interpretation, Lepauw is your man. In a world dominated by superior recordings of this work, no one has ever seen in it what he does. He's soon to embark on a Beethoven sonata cycle; I can hardly wait.

HASKINS

## **BEETHOVEN:** *Flute Pieces*

Ginevra & Gian-Luca Petrucci, fl; Francesco Bossone, bn; Mirei Yamada, v; Luca Sanzo, va; Giovanni Auletta, p

Brilliant 96494 [3CD] 158 minutes

I'm afraid I can't muster much enthusiasm for the complete flute works of Beethoven no matter who's playing them, though this young lady is a fine choice—preferable to Rampal, who is inconsistent on his set—and Beethoven was very accomplished even while young. Thus although there are no heroic symphonies to be found here, there is significant talent.

These are players of modern instruments, and they take a sensibly stylish but modern approach to the music: a sonata, two sets of variations for flute and piano, a flute duet, and trios for flute, bassoon, and piano as well as flute, violin, and viola. The pianist sounds crystalline and has been balanced superbly with the others. This bassoonist is marvelous, and the strings are lovely too. The violist uses vibrato less than the violinist. Overall the playing has fine contrasts and variety.

GORMAN