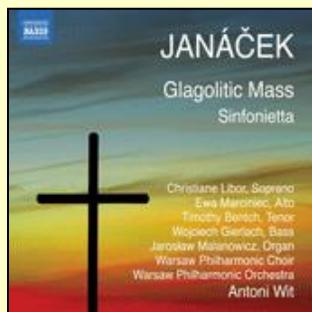


Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

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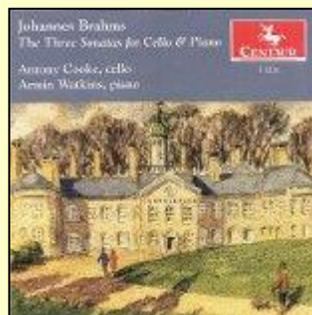


Janáček: Glagolitic Mass, Sinfonietta
Soloists, Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Choir
Antoni Wit, conductor
Naxos

These two works of Czech composer Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) were, astonishingly, written in the last two years of his life. At a time when other composers are taking stock of their lives' work, Janáček was exploring virgin territory, working with more vivid colors and harmonies, pungent rhythms, and a profusion of terse, swiftly flowing motifs within the musical stream. Coming after the seventy year old composer had already established an enviable reputation for his opera, symphonic and chamber music, there is simply no precedent for the *Sinfonietta* (1926) and the *Glagolitic Mass* (1928). They seem miraculous. Most first-time listeners will have heard nothing quite like them.

Janáček wrote his Mass in a language known today as "Old Church Slavonic," which was written in the Glagolitic alphabet and first appeared in Moravia in the ninth century as the work of early Christian missionaries. It was thus contemporary with Old English. As a defunct language that was a forerunner of modern Slavic tongues, Old Church Slavonic suited Janacek's purpose very well because its archaic sound fit in with the feeling of the primitive emanations of a people who had made vital contact with Christianity at its living source that he wanted to convey. At the same time, his technique, as was Stravinsky's in *Rite of Spring*, was quite modern and sophisticated, what with its remarkable harmonic complexities, its vivid color palette, and the way its highly rhythmic motifs are flung about with a (calculated) wild abandon that keeps the listener on the cutting edge of expectation as each new marvel is revealed.

That being the case, and given the way great blocks of sound are hurled out by orchestra and chorus in mind-boggling profusion, it is well that we have the interpretive insight of Polish conductor Antoni Wit, in command of all the resources of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir and a quartet of highly capable vocal soloists, to guide us on the way. Wit previously distinguished himself



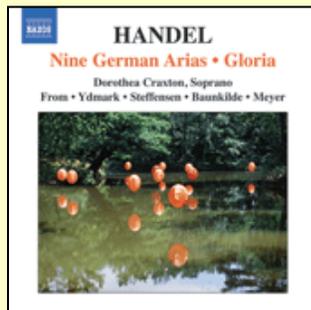
Brahms: Three Sonatas for Cello & Piano,
Opp. 38, 78, 99
Anthony Cooke, cello; Armin Watkins, piano
Centaur

Brahms' three sonatas for cello and piano, including the transcription of Violin Sonata in G Major, Op. 78 which was authorized by Brahms, may well represent the summit of his efforts in the realm of chamber music. There is such a freight of emotionally charged, closely integrated material for both instruments, worked through with almost diabolical cleverness by the composer, that it is advisable for any artists to have considerable experience as a concertizing duo before undertaking these works. Antony Cooke and Armin Watkins have been performing together for 40 years now, which is just about right. Even more than their earlier Centaur release "Homage to Chopin" which I was pleased to review several years ago, this new specially priced 2-CD set captures our artists at the very top of their form.

Greatness is apparent right from the beginning in the Sonata in E minor, Op. 38. I've never heard a darker, richer, more passionately conceived cello sound than Cooke cultivates here, and Watkins is right with him, step for step. The long, slow-moving, line in the cello over chords in the keyboard makes an indelible impression in the opening movement, one that is intensified when the instruments switch roles. It is hard to conceive of a more magisterial opening than this. The music surges and then dies away into the quiet return of the opening theme. Cooke and Watkins do a splendid job of managing the flowing progress of this altogether remarkable 16-minute movement, including the calculated use of heightened tension and changes of register at key points to create what they themselves term Brahms' "sunrise moments." The challenges, and their happy resolutions, are no less daunting in the succeeding movements in which Brahms pays homage to the past in the form of a minuet, its sinuous melodies and right-hand figurations requiring much unison work between the performers, and an electrically charged final movement with a good deal of fugal material.

in Naxos recordings of Szymanowski, Penderecki, Gorecki, and Messiaen, but this may be his best effort of all. From the vibrant introduction to the concluding Intrada, the orchestration, which includes the striking presence of the organ, the sound is so vivid and so diverse as to give the impression of a much larger orchestra, while the tessituras of the singers in the double SATB chorus are often stretched to airy thinness as they reach for higher realms of light and spiritual beauty. That is especially true of the vocalists –soprano Christiane Libor, alto Eva Marciniac, tenor Timothy Bentsch, and bass Wojciech Gierlach. Libor is particularly impressive in handling the great expressive demands of her role in the *Gospodin pomiluj* (Kyrie) and the *Slava* (Gloria) sections.

Sinfonietta (1926) may be translated literally as “little symphony,” but there is nothing small-scale about Janacek’s vision or his musical ideas in this work, with its brilliant waves of successive fanfares for brass and percussion in the opening Allegretto providing the germ of the themes for all the successive movements. The swirling string figures in the opening to the finale will be familiar to listeners from their use as intro music to Richard Hittleman’s popular TV program “Yoga for Health.” As in the Glagolitic Mass, Wit and the Warsaw Philharmonic bring out the ecstatic joy in Sinfonietta to perfection. Highly recommended.



Handel: Nine German Arias, Gloria
Dorothea Craxton, soprano
Naxos

What an unlooked-for, pure delight this one was! Wuppertal, Germany native Dorothea Craxton was a name completely unknown to me, though she has recorded for Naxos on at least four other occasions, with the Immortal Bach Ensemble under Morten Schuldt-Jensen in sacred works by Domenico Scarlatti and Schubert and as featured artist in recitals of songs by Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel. With her previous experience in lieder and bel canto, Craxton seems to have been born to sing the Nine German Arias and the setting of the Latin *Gloria* by Handel that we hear on this gorgeous-sounding offering.

Gorgeous-sounding, that is, because of the soprano’s distinguished vocal qualities. Her vocal production has charming brightness and a completely unforced, natural quality that is the last attainment of the singer’s art. And

The familiar “*Regenlied*” (Rain Song) Sonata, p. 78 loses none of its charm in its transcription from violin to cello and its change in key from G to D major. It even benefits from an increase in intensity due to the close relationship between the cello and piano left hand, resulting in an atmosphere in which Brahms’ striking harmonic inventiveness is heard to best effect. At the same time, the rhythmic alertness and the deep sense of nostalgia of the original come through with renewed vigor in this performance.

The F major Sonata, Op. 99, is a marvel of concise form contending with romantic material to produce a great deal of dramatic and musical tension. It is in four movements: *Allegro vivace*, *Adagio affettuoso*, *Allegro passionato*, and *Allegro molto*. (Come to think of it, I can’t recall another instance when Brahms used so many qualifying adjectives to specify the exact degree of intensity he desired.) Cooke talks about the “regal” flourishes of the opening movement, but other “R” words come to mind here, as well – rigorous, robust, rugged – as the composer introduces a terse, fragmented theme for cello over tremolos in the piano in the opening movement, then has the cello stride through the slow movement in seven league boots in the form of powerful, remarkably dissonant pizzicati, heard over chords in the piano. The scherzo, “perhaps the best ever written for this combination of instruments” (Coke), with its songful trio section, and the sweeping, affirmative finale, keep our artists on their toes, bearing further witness to a work that establishes and fills its own musical space as few other works in any genre have ever done.



Brahms: Piano Trio, Op. 8
Smetana: Piano Trio, Op. 15
Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio
Bridge

This was my first acquaintance with this performing trio consisting of Yael Weiss, piano; Mark Kaplan, violin; and Clancy Newman, cello. If, as they say, first impressions are the most important, mine was definitely favorable. These artists work very hard at the underlying pulses and basic tempi of a work of music, bringing out its expressive beauty in the process. That, and the fact that they aren’t afraid, collectively or individually, to step up to the plate when a given moment calls for really virtuosic brilliance, pays off handsomely in one of the finest accounts I’ve ever heard of Bedřich Smetana’s Piano

her sensitivity to the poetic text is unerring. These qualities are admirably brought to bear upon the German arias taken from the collection *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* (Earthly Pleasure in God) by Barthold Heinrich Brockes. On these poems, written as the title suggests, to attest to the poet's astonishment in finding the hand of God in familiar everyday things, Handel lavished splendid vocal writing surpassing even *his* usual standard. All but one are da capo arias. Craxton relishes the florid embellishments with which these arias are enhanced. Unlike some of Handel's opera arias, this is not a matter of mere decoration, but an essential ingredient that adds character to the vocal line, much in the way J. S. Bach does in the solo arias of his cantatas. That Handel should have taken time away from his busy international career as an operatic composer to write German songs that would have had little commercial value would seem to indicate that the poems themselves had a personal significance for her. Craxton certainly makes them personal, in a way that every first-rate vocal artist knows so well.

If the Nine German Arias invoke the spirit of Bach, the shade of Antonio Vivaldi seems to hover behind the setting of the *Gloria* that Handel wrote in the summer of 1707 on commission from an Italian nobleman. The youthful ardor of the 22 year old composer infuses the florid vocal lines and tasteful embellishments over a figured bass. Helping move the music right along are a fine ensemble of Danish instrumentalists supporting Craxton's sensitive artistry: Fredrik From and Hanna Ydmark, violins; Kjeld Lybecker Steffensen, cello; Lars Baunkilde, violone; and Leif Meyer, organist.



“Art of the Sonata”
Bach G minor, Franck A Major, Brahms No. 3
Petteri Iivonen, violin; Kevin Fitz-Gerald, piano
Yarlung

“Art of the Sonata” complements nicely the earlier Yarlung release “Art of the Violin,” which also featured the irresistible talent and solid musicianship of Petteri Iivonen in solo violin repertoire and in close partnership with Kevin Fitz-Gerald in key works for violin and piano. Once again, the magic occurs.

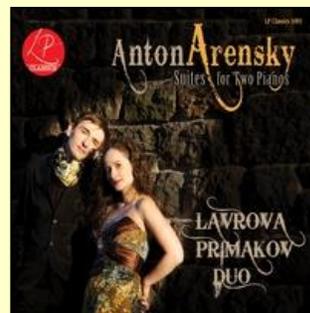
Beginning with J. S. Bach's great Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001, we thrill to Iivonen's beautifully contoured molding of some of the composer's shapeliest melodies. Few accounts I have heard of this marvelous

Trio in G minor, Op. 15, and the most convincingly account ever of Johannes Brahms' Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8. It all makes for one of the best chamber music CDs you are likely to hear, this or any year.

We have here the revised (1891) version of Brahms' B Major Trio, the one that is almost always performed. The key words to observe here are three R's – Rhythm, Restraint, and Rubato – and in that respect the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio certainly have the number of this great masterwork all the way. That starts off with the broadly stated theme in the cello and piano which increases in intensity with the surreptitious entry of a more delicate theme that counterbalances it. After the Scherzo with its fleeting filigree passages interrupted by fortissimo outbursts, the heart of the matter lies in the slow, poignant, and reflective Adagio movement, with the piano setting the tone for spaciousness and stillness. The finale is simple marked *Allegro*, but that tells us nothing of the turbulence and agitation of the ride on which Brahms takes our trio of artists before they arrive at a very satisfying conclusion.

Smetana wrote his G minor Trio in memory of his first child, a daughter named Bedřiška, who died at the age of four and a half. Curiously, there is no slow movement as such in this work, although there are slow passages scattered throughout its three movements. Even more than most such elegiac works, there is an enormous range of emotions and dramatic contrasts in this work, as the composer seems to be struggling to work through to some understanding of, or consolation for, this tragic loss. That consolation occurs late in the third movement with an ascending scale that seems to come mystically out of nowhere only about a minute or so before the ending in the major key. Until then, changes in mood and tempo typically occur after dramatic pauses, creating a sectional structure based on stops and starts that our artists are able to take in stride and incorporate into more logical coherence than we might at first have imagined.

While we're at it, let's credit the superb recorded sound – produced, engineered, and mastered by Silas Brown – that has come to be a Bridge Records tradition.



Arensky; Suites for 2 Pianos
Natalia Lavrova, Vassily Primakov
LP Classics

Natalia Lavrova and Vassily Primakov, fellow Muscovites

work for unaccompanied violin have been so successful in stressing its forward looking dynamism. In its own day, it would have struck listeners by its powerful melding of German counterpoint and Italian style, especially in the sheer excitement of its Vivaldi-esque Presto finale. Earlier, the fugal movement challenges livonen's artistry to preserve a feeling of continuity and movement amid Bach's varied configurations. For many listeners the lilting beauty of the *Siciliano*, with its gentle swaying rhythm, will exert the greatest attraction.

Cesar Franck's Sonata in a Major, up next, is a work for violin *and* piano in the truest sense of the word. The piano, in fact, often leads the way into a new section, requiring the close collaboration of partners that we witness here. From the gently swaying and rocking movement of the opening of the Allegretto with its quicker contrasted episode to the exciting turbulence of the Allegro, the exhilarating sense of boundless exploration in the third movement, and the thrill of the chase in the finale with its voices in canon, there's a lot going for this performance. It conjured up for me treasured memories of a long-unavailable Decca recording by Erica Morini and Rudolf Firkusny (and *that's* highest praise). Refined, restrained, exuberant, and lyrical, the Franck A Major benefits from an intelligent approach in which the performers do not telegraph its striking contrasts and changes before they occur.

Miniature VIII for Solo Violin by NYC native David Lefkowitz is a "miniature" only in terms of its more modest scale than the major repertory works heard elsewhere on this disc. But, as livonen demonstrates in his coolly passionate but not detached account, it is possible to cultivate infinite harmonic riches in a little room. Here, we are at first arrested by the strange harmonies early-on, and then taken in by their haunting beauty once we have adjusted our ears to them.

Finally, we have Brahms Sonata No. 3 in d minor, Op. 108 to bring matters to a smashing conclusion with the heart-pounding tension of its concluding *Presto agitato*. For sheer excitement, this is one of the great moments in the repertoire. Along the way, livonen and Fitz-Gerald thrill and charm us with the abundant lyricism of the earlier movements, particularly the cantabile writing for the violin in the opening allegro and its equally songlike cavatina melody in the Adagio. Typically for this artist, livonen's playing can be gentle without lapsing into sentimentality, his tone as appropriately sweet as the situation requires, but never cloying. That makes the sensational outburst in the third movement, with its virtuosic arpeggios and forceful chords, all the more convincing. But listen to the effective way the piano states the major theme sotto voce in this same movement, and you will realize the need for the close collaboration of livonen and Fitz-Gerald here, too, for just as in the Franck, this work is for violin *and* piano, and they don't let us forget it!

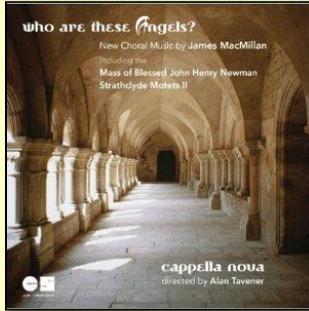
who both studied under Jerome Lowenthal at the Juilliard School in New York, launch their brand-new LP Classics label auspiciously with Suites 1-4 for Two Pianos by Anton Arensky (1861-1906). They couldn't have made a better choice of composer for their debut recital on the new label, as Arensky did a great deal to popularize the duo-piano genre, for which he showed a definite flair and wrote some of his very best music.

In these suites, Lavrova and Primakov obviously enjoy the zestful as well as the purely musical qualities of music for which Arensky did not stint on the virtuosic demands for the artists just because they share a joint responsibility for its success.

Suite No. 1 is in three movements: Romance, Waltz, and Polonaise. From the opening bars, it is clear the composer knows his business, giving the lie to Rimsky-Korsakov's over-confident prediction that "he will soon be forgotten." The Waltz, as a matter of fact, is probably Arensky's best-loved piece and shines here as the jewel centerpiece in an economically written score. Suite No. 2, subtitled "Silhouettes," pays its respects both to the 18th century French Clavecinists in the titles of an implied *Carnaval*-esque program: "Le Savant" (The Scholar), "La Coquette," "Polichinelle," "Le Reveur" (The Dreamer), and "La Danseuse" (The Dancer). The last-named, a Fandango with a pronounced Spanish bolero rhythm, reminds us that the good artist of the silhouette, as the name implies, draws the general outline of his subject but reserves the right to fill it in with his own boldly conceived details.

Suite No. 3, "Variations," reminds us that Arensky was a master of the theme-and-variations genre (see his Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky, Op. 35a for string orchestra). With consummate artistry, Lavrova and Primakov explore the delicious ingenuity of Arensky's musical ideas, which amount to a cavalcade of 19th century forms: waltz, scherzo, triumphal and funeral marches, nocturne, and polonaise. In the lightly tripping Minuet (with a charming Musette in its center) and a strongly accented Gavotte with its superbly contrasted double, Arensky even paid tribute to the previous century. The moment in which the final bar of the Funeral March (*March funébre*) merges without a pause into the opening measure of the glorious Nocturne simply takes the listener's breath away in the present interpretation.

Finally, the Rachmaninov-like Suite No. 4 is the most succinct of all in its four movements: Prelude, Romance, *Le Rêve* (The Dream), and Finale. The arpeggiated figures in the third movement, in particular, carry us off into an exalted world of the imagination, which is stunningly executed here by the present artists.



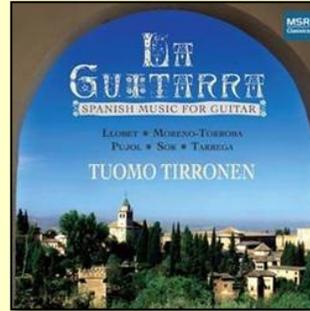
James MacMillan: "Who Are These Angels?"
 Mass of Blessed John Henry Newman
 John Tavener, Cappella Nova
 Linn Records

"Who are These angels?" is Scottish composer James MacMillan's latest essay into resurrecting the great polyphonic traditions of the past. Citing Pope Benedict XVI's *Spirit of the Liturgy*, he proclaims joyously, "Now there's an encouragement to do so because, when you do look at the documents, you realize that they suggest that one digs deeply into the tradition and draws on it for sustenance in the modern age." And God knows, we could use some spiritual relief just now.

Of course, the modern composer drawn to the music of the 16th Century and earlier for inspiration must be more than simply an archeologist with pick and shovel. He must make a great tradition his own if it is to mean anything. And that is just what MacMillan does, in many subtle and interesting ways. The evidence is revealed in the present program of fourteen compositions – antiphons, hymns, motets, and one *Missa brevis* – interpreted in glorious sonic splendor by the eighteen singers of Capella Nova, directed by co-founder Alan Tavener. Produced and engineered by Philip Hobbs at the Church of the Holy Rude, Stirling, UK, the recorded sonics capture that vocal radiance to perfection.

We hear seven of MacMillan's justly celebrated 'Stathclyde Motets' on this program, six by Capella Nova plus a moving performance of *Os muorum* (Mouth of the Dumb) rendered by the medieval vocal group Canty under its founder Rebecca Tavener, with William Taylor on the medieval harp. This is music that calls for the highest discipline in voice leading and polyphonic effects. Of particular notice are the highest treble voices in those motets proclaiming the rapture of God's mercy in terms of pure, serene light, such as *Lux aeterna* and *O Radiant Dawn*. Here the voices are so pure, so stretched to airy thinness that I thought for a moment that Tavener had slipped in some boy choristers. But no, a quick check among the personnel listed in the booklet revealed that these remarkably beautiful voices were all women's.

The Mass of Blessed John Henry Newman, perhaps here given its first recording (?) was unjustly criticized at the time of its public premiere. It is different from all the other works on this program because its vocal demands are purposefully such as would fall within the capability of



"La Guitarra," Spanish Music for Guitar
 Tuomo Tirronen, guitar
 MSR Classics

Finnish guitarist shows a proper *afición* for his Spanish predecessors in "La Guitarra," showcasing the music of Emilio Pujol, Fernando Sor, Miguel Llobet, Francisco Tárrega, and Fernando Moreno-Torroba. His style emphasizes the quiet, softly expressive beauty and gently swaying rhythms of many of the pieces heard on this album. If the program is rather short in playing time (46:49), the brevity does encourage the listener to replay these miniature gems, recapturing their subtle beauty.

Pujol, who studied under Tárrega, showed the influence of Spanish traditional music in his *Seguidilla*, a triple-time Catalan dance, *Studio Romantico*, and *Festivola*. Llobet, another Tarrega pupil, was at his best in his arrangements of Catalan folk songs: *Canco del lladre* (Robber's Song), *El Mestre* (The Master), and the Christmas song *El Noi de la Mare* (The Child of the Mother). Sor (1778-1839) was noted for his Etudes, which tend to be character pieces. Among the five heard in this collection are Etudes in E-flat, with the lyrical flowing of a religious procession (*Mouvement de prière religieuse*) and B-flat, in march tempo.

We come to Tárrega, whose deftly inflected pieces in dance time – Mazurka, Polka, and Gavotte (originally a Basque dance, as it is here) reveal a bel canto singing style as well. All have feminine names – Adelita, Marieta, Maria, Pepita, and Rosita – though the intent is not descriptive. Finally, Moreno-Torroba, in *Suite Castellana*, celebrated the beauty and the history of his home, the old kingdom of Castille, in such pieces as *Fandanguillo* (a courtship dance), *Arada* (Plowed Land), and *Danza*.

Speaking of Tárrega, we come to a controversy that you should be aware of, namely the issue of whether to play with the fleshy part of the fingers on the strings or to use the nails. Tuomo Tirronen typically plays the pieces heard in this recital with his fingers, and the result is an undeniably expressive quality that was much prized as long as the performer was heard within an intimate circle of admirers. But as the guitar moved from the salon to the concert hall, it became necessary to use the nails for more volume and carrying power. You can still get a lively argument among guitarists on the virtues of each style, as Andrés Segovia voiced in his assessment of Tárrega: "Absolutely stupid. You reduce the volume of

most good parish choirs. It is what Francois Couperin would have termed a “Mass for parish use” rather than performance by a professional ensemble. And very singable it is, too. Finally, the Edinburgh String Quartet are heard in a strange sounding postlude to the title work, “Who are These Angels,” to a Latin text by St. Augustine. They are intended to sound like the cries of seabirds (Tavener says they are a metaphor for “The unknowability of God”), but seem to me rather like a tree full of demented starlings. *Very effective!*



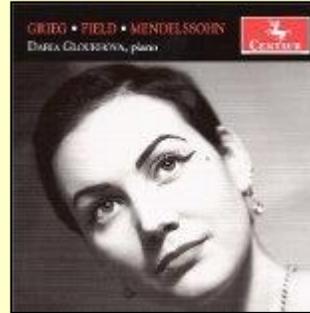
Rachmaninoff: The Bells, Spring, 3 Russian Songs
Soloists, The Mariinsky Chorus, BBC Philharmonic
Gianandrea Noseda, conductor
Chandos

In presenting three more or less unfamiliar choral works in Russian by Sergei Rachmaninoff, Gianandrea Noseda and the BBC Philharmonic have the inestimable advantage of a first-rate Russian chorus, that of the Mariinsky Theatre of St. Petersburg. Quite aside from the fact that the Mariinsky is one of the world’s great operatic and concert choruses, here is simply no way a chorus that has learnt a language phonetically can compare with one for whom that language is their native tongue, and that goes double when the subject is Russian.

Even for the non-Russian speaker, there is obvious drama and abundant lyricism in Rachmaninoff’s cantata *Spring*, with its lurid tale of a husband contemplating the murder of his faithless wife, the verses for the bass soloist alternating with increasingly urgent pleading from the chorus concerning the blandishments of the coming spring and the promise of spiritual renewal and the need for forgiveness. Three Russian Songs, Op. 41, for altos and basses alone, are in folk style and are titled “Over a brook, a swift-running brook” in which a drake, sad for the absence of a flown-away grey duck, has obvious human implications, “Oh, Vanka, what a hothead you are!” (A wife complains of her husband’s jealousy: “Who shall I spend the dark nights with?”) and “White of my cheeks, blush of my cheeks” (a young bride dreads the wrath of her husband over an innocent flirtation).

The major work on the program is The Bells, set to Konstantin Balmont’s free adaptation of the poem of that name by Edgar Allan Poe. Here, Rachmaninoff let his imagination wander over the significance of the different types of bells, which were always a source of wonder and spiritual beauty to him. There are the silver bells of a

the guitar, and the difference of timbre and color. Tarrega has renounced the real nature of the guitar, which is the richness of its timbres, the different colors of the guitar.” The dispute will probably never be resolved. In the present instance, we should let the beauty of Tirronen’s playing serve as a fine example of the older school.



Grieg / Field / Mendelssohn Recital
Daria Gloukhova, piano
Centaur

Once again, Russian pianist Daria Gloukhova brings her bold, infectious keyboard style to the aid of somewhat neglected Romantic works that need to be heard more often. She begins with Edward Grieg’s Sonata in E minor, Op. 7. It is a commonplace to speak of the Norwegian folk influence on Grieg’s piano music, particularly when one doesn’t have much else to say. But the master touch is already present in this attractive work by the ardent 22-year old romantic, particularly in his skillful incorporation of his signature motto EHG (for “Edvard Hagerup Grieg,” where H is German notation for B natural) and in the inclusion of two quieter, more pensive episodes in the turbulent Finale.

I am indebted to Gloukhova for being the first pianist who ever gave me an insight into the subtle beauties of Irish composer John Field. Previously, the specimens I’d heard on record were so bland they left me without much feeling for a figure that Franz Liszt praised for his chromatic harmonies, like “*half-formed sighs floating through the air, softly lamenting and dissolved in delicious melancholy.*” In Gloukhova’s interpretations Field’s Nocturnes Nos. 4 in A Major, 10 in E minor, and 18 in E Major and his Variations on a Russian Folksong (“*Kamarinskaya*,” familiar to us from Glinka’s use of the melody) reveal delicate melodies over sonorous left hand accompaniment and ingenious pedaling.

The program concludes with Felix Mendelssohn’s Fantasy in F-sharp minor, Op. 28. This delightful work in three movements often goes by the subtitle (which was not the composer’s) “*Sonate ecossaise*” because the falling cadence, heard early-on in the opening, reminded listeners of the same frequent procedure in the Scottish folk music which was then much in vogue on the continent (Mendelssohn used the device again in his Third Symphony). By turns deeply songlike and ebullient, Gloukhova makes much of this little miracle of warm emotion allied with crisply defined cantabile phrasing and

sleigh ride, the golden bells of a wedding, the bronze alarm bells proclaiming a blazing fire, and the iron bells tolling a death and burial. The references are to four stages of a human life: Childhood, where the enchanting wonders of life await our discovery; Youth, and the rapture of love; Mid-life, filled with turmoil and conflict; and finally, Death, and the promise of rest and respite from all worldly strife. One is reminded, in performances of utter conviction by the chorus and soloists of the Mariinsky, of both Rachmaninoff's prowess as an operatic composer and his preoccupation with Russian liturgical chant, including in the final section the *Dies Irae* that was his personal motto. That section also recalls his recent *Isle of the Dead* in its multi-layered rocking figures in the strings and one luminous moment where the orchestration lightens and we hear the beauty of the brass and strings in what amounts to a near-quotation from that tone poem. Overall, the sound quality of this Chandos offering is good, though not exceptional.

a nice sense of sweeping movement. Though the LP length program is a trifle short at 46 minutes, one feels he has been given his money's worth in the attractiveness and sheer vivacity of the performances.