

## Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

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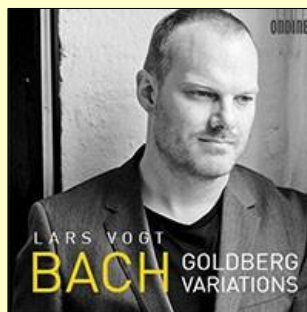


Sonatas for Viola & Piano  
Geraldine Walther, viola; David Korevaar, piano  
(MSR Classics)

I don't have to tell you. You can gather by the smiles lighting up the faces of violist Geraldine Walther and pianist David Korevaar that they've contended with some of the most challenging works in the repertoire and come out on top. Three of them, in fact: Paul Hindemith's sonatas for viola and piano. Hindemith, who made a point of mastering most of the standard instruments in order to understand their capabilities, always had a special place in his heart for the viola, which came to succeed the violin as his own personal favorite. On it, in fact, he was a world-class performer. Consequently, these three sonatas represent the full range of effects of which the instrument is capable.

The program begins in reverse apple-pie order with the Sonata for Viola and Piano (1939), a mature, large-scale work that Hindemith wrote during a coast-to-coast tour of the United States. It opens in an uncompromisingly intense mood as the prelude to a powerful fugal development. The weightiness of this opening movement which reflected the tension of the world situation at the time creates such a lasting impression that I was unaware, until subsequent hearings, of just how lyrical this music can be. A quirky scherzo is followed by a cadenza-like *Phantasie*. That in turn gives way to a finale with two finely-detailed variations, the first a nocturnal piece in which pointillistic figures and sudden, sweeping flourishes seem to create the erratic patterns of fireflies and moths, and the second an energetic and virtuosic march that ends the work in an optimistic spirit.

It's easy enough to characterize Hindemith's Sonata, Op. 25, No. 4 of 1922 as the product of an *enfant terrible*, particularly in light of the controversial works he was then engaged in penning that helped define the Berlin avant-garde of the 1920's. And certainly, as the present performance shows, this densely packed work does project an "in your face" spirit in which, according to Korevaar, "Dynamics, registers, and tempos are all extreme." It is undeniably more dissonant than the other works on this program. But we are given an unexpected



Bach: Goldberg Variations  
Lars Vogt, piano  
(Ondine)

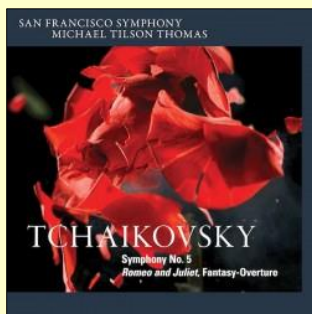
German pianist Lars Vogt really surpasses himself in an outstanding a performance as I've ever heard of J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations. Not only does he bring his immense technical prowess into play, cleanly articulating even the busiest and most richly ornamented passages without the slightest slur or omission, but he has a keen awareness of the emotional element that underlies these variations. In his account of the Goldbergs we have a perfect balance of technique, intellect, and emotion. That is precisely what this work calls for.

The Goldberg Variations consist of thirty variations on an Aria da capo that is essentially a slow Sarabande. It is a surprisingly moving, heavily ornamented melody in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time with a descending arpeggio midway-through that never fails to give me goose bumps, as often as I've heard it. The variations are unusual in that they are built on the bass line of the aria rather than its melody. There are nine canons, in which one voice is the leader and the other follows it at a specified interval. (A familiar example would be "Row, row, row your boat"). Every third variation is a canon. The intervals increase from Var. 4 (canon in unison) to Var. 27 (canon at the ninth). Var. 30, instead of being another canon, is a *quodlibet*, based on the juxtaposition of two popular songs that would have been well-known to Bach's listeners. In this instance, he chose a languid melody, "I have been absent from thee so long," and a rollicking one, "Cabbage and turnips drove me away. If my ma had cooked meat, I'd have managed to stay." Here, we are given a choice example of Bach's broad humor.

The variations can be fiendishly difficult to play, calling on the performer to be continually alert for changes in tempi and emphasis. We encounter a rich variety of sparkling trills, florid arpeggios, swelling appoggiaturas, noble passages built on dotted notes, and other graces in the course of the 30 variations. Bach wrote this work with a two-manual harpsichord in mind (two keyboards, one above the other), and he correspondingly marked "a 2 Clav" above the variations that require the use of both

respite from all of that in the lyrical second theme of the opening movement. Here, the piano plays the same beautiful phrase over and over while the viola interpolates a series of cadenza-like melodies. The finale opens with a violent chord in the piano, followed by a slow, softly stated middle section, and then increasing acceleration, marked by crescendos, up to the very end.

The early Sonata, Op. 11 No. 4 (1919), with elements of both fantasy and theme-and-variations, is a unified work in which the movements are meant to be played without pause. The opening Fantasia, which serves as prelude to the two sets of variations to follow, is in a probing vein, passing through 10 keys in the space of a mere 41 measures and featuring the viola spinning decorative charms over a shimmering 32<sup>nd</sup> note accompaniment in the piano. The variations in the following movements range from pastoral to obsessive, with one in the finale marked to be played "*mit bizarrer Plumpheit*" (with strange clumsiness) as an example of Hindemith's sly humor. Ranging in mood from grotesque to charmingly simple, and with a studied ambiguity about the key it will end in to pique our curiosity (will it be E-flat major or minor?) this sonata has everything it needs to remain one of Hindemith's most popular works.



Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 5, Romeo and Juliet  
Michael Tilson Thomas, San Francisco Symphony  
(Avie Records SACD, DSD)

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in a Tchaikovsky program for which many home listeners may well ask, "What, not again?" After all, considering the fact that the Romeo and Juliet Overture and the Fifth Symphony have long been among the most performed and oft-recorded works in the entire symphonic literature (with 205 and 177 current listings, respectively, in Arkivmusic.com) is there a need for yet another CD recording of either? Happily, there is, as Thomas and the SFSO make out the case for both venerable warhorses in compelling live recordings made in Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco. The PCM 192kHz, 24 bit DSD transfers sound well, as they should. But Thomas does a fine job injecting new life into thrice-familiar musical masterworks.

manuals, usually to facilitate the numerous Scarlatti-like hand crossings.

This is best demonstrated in Var. 8, where both hands are engaged at the same part of the keyboard, one above the other, a comparatively easy procedure with a two-manual harpsichord but requiring considerable application of technique when playing it on a modern piano. Besides the hand-crossings, there are several instances in which the hands move in opposite directions on the keyboard. Var. 15 is a good example, ending with a wonderful effect in which the right hand is suspended in air on an open fifth. Despite the greater technical difficulties involved, I personally prefer to hear the Goldbergs performed, as here, as a piano, because of the greater range of sonority.

Lars Vogt characterizes all the variations beautifully. Besides giving us a clear impression of the different dance genres – allemande, sarabande, passepied, and gigue – he is particularly sensitive to the mood of each. The dark beauty and passion of Var. 25, a world-weary cantilena that is the high point of the entire set, really moves us in his account of it. When we get to the repeat of the Aria da capo at the very end, the notes are the same as we heard at the beginning, but, as Vogt correctly surmises, there's a difference. Call it sadness, nostalgia, or resignation, it's there. We've come a long way: perhaps the difference is in us?



Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez, Fantasia para un Gentilhombre, Concierto Madrigal – Narciso Yepes, guitar; English Chamber Orchestra under Garcia Navarro (PentaTone Remastered Classics SACD)

The strong artistic personality of the Spanish guitarist Narciso Yepes (1927-1997), a product of his fantastic technique allied with a very personal involvement in the music, is abundantly on display here in the release of three major works by Joaquin Rodrigo. Though he was sometimes accused by his critics as being too cool and detached in his artistic style, you could not say that of the performances on this disc. They are remasterings of original quadrasonic recordings made by Deutsche Grammophon in 1977 and 1979 when most home playback systems were not equipped to handle quad. The presence of the sound in this reissue complements the searing intensity of Yepes' performances with the English Chamber Orchestra to a perfection that we are seldom privileged to hear.

Of course, I always have to keep in mind that there are some audiophiles out there in home-listener-land who are so narrowly focused on technical specs and equipment test reports that they may never have actually heard either R&J or the Fifth. In that case, the present recordings, sturdily and affectionately handled by all concerned, may prove a valuable introduction.

The account of Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64 is marginally the better of the two. Clocking out at 50:33, Thomas takes his time with this long-limbed work, allowing it plenty of room to breathe but keeping things taut in the right places. After all these years, new insights into this work are neither needed nor supplied. It unfolds in sequences, rather than evolving enharmonically, as the Austro-German tradition required of a proper symphony. In that regard, Tchaikovsky was a typical Russian, although he generally showed a greater regard for symphonic form than did most of his colleagues, which is why we still remember and love his numbered symphonies today while those of Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Glazunov, Gretchaninov and Rubinstein have mostly been forgotten.

The most persistent knock one hears about the Fifth Symphony is that of "insincerity" in the way Tchaikovsky structures his repetitions and climaxes. For that, the composer himself was largely to blame. After conducting the work in Prague in 1888, he wrote: "It was a failure. There is something repellent, something superfluous and insincere that the public instinctively recognizes." One might dismiss this negative assessment as evidence of a morbidly neurotic personality prone to insecurity and self-doubt (as Tchaikovsky was). But I think a more cogent explanation for the Fifth Symphony's initial rejection in some quarters lies in its principle of organization – in particular, the way the dire "fate" motif for full orchestra and brass occurs in all four movements. Wherever it occurs, and that includes even the lovely Andante Cantabile and the insouciant Waltz, it seems like a nemesis, something evil that seems bent on detracting from the sum of human happiness. The key to interpretation, which Thomas observes very well here, is to avoid "telegraphing" one's blows so that these forte passages have the greater impact for being unexpected, no matter how many times we have heard this work. That's no easy achievement!

When the Fifth first appeared, academic critics were scandalized by the fact that it included a waltz movement in a numbered symphony, an objection that may seem quaint today. At any rate, Brahms loved it, and so has most of the world ever since. On the present CD, it comes across as sentimental without getting sloppy.

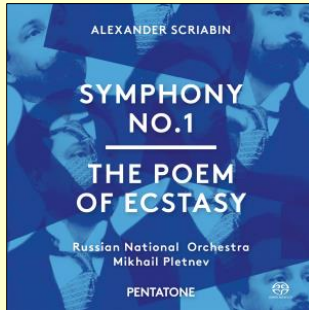
Romeo and Juliet, one of the world's most popular symphonic programmatic pieces, comes across here with all its expected impact, though it is possibly a little cool in contrast to other versions one might have heard. Still, the big climaxes are there, and the famous "Love Theme" makes its wonted impression.

The program begins with Rodrigo's world-famous Concierto de Aranjuez, inspired by the shaded gardens of the royal residence of that name and nostalgia for times past. In it, Rodrigo consciously evoked "the singing of birds and the gushing of fountains," with a courtly dance in alternating double and triple time as the main feature of a taut finale. But the show-stopper in this work is the Adagio with its searing emotion against the soft accompaniment of the strings. No one ever derived more dramatic intensity out of an initially softly-stated melody than Rodrigo did here. That achingly beautiful melody that the world has grown to love so much that it has become Rodrigo's "signature" is first stated by the cor anglais, accompanied by the guitar. Thereafter, the guitar maintains an intimate dialog with that instrument and also the horn and oboe, building to the stunning climax we hear in the present recording.

Persistent legend has it that this movement was Rodrigo's response to the 1937 terror bombing of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War. Rodrigo maintained a discrete silence on that subject for many years, and his wife Victoria, in her autobiography, declared that it was his evocation of the happy days of their honeymoon and his sadness over the miscarriage of her first pregnancy. Whatever explanation one gives it, there is a strong personal element in this movement, and Yepes captures that mood most definitely.

In Aranjuez, Rodrigo consciously held back the forces of a full orchestra so that the voice of the guitar would not be overwhelmed. In the succeeding works on this program, Fantasia para un gentilhombre (1954) and Concierto madrigal (1966), he was more confident in the balance of forces and allowed the guitar more scope in confronting the orchestra. Fantasia, written at the request of Andrés Segovia, pays tribute in its title to both that eminent guitarist and to the 17<sup>th</sup> century composer Gaspar Sanz. The opening movement, *Villano*, is warm, golden and expansive, and establishes the sharing of melody between soloist and orchestra that characterizes the work as a whole. *Españoleta*, with a haunting melody second only to that of the Adagio in the Aranjuez, is the most memorable moment in a work that features drum beats and fanfares in the middle of the same movement, a lively *Danza de las Hachas* (Dance of the Axes) as its third movement and a jaunty *Canario*, a dance of the Canary Islands, as its finale.

Concierto madrigal for 2 guitars, in which Yepes is joined by Godelieve Monden, pays homage to the spirit of the renaissance, actually quoting the melody of the madrigal "*Felices ojos míos*" (Happy Eyes of Mine) in its second movement, marked *Andante nostalgico*, and again in the similarly marked Arietta, which is the heart of the matter. It runs as a thread throughout the work, which, in ten movements, plays like a suite rather than a concerto. A work of the greatest variety, it includes a fanfare, a stately *entrada*, a Pastoral, and a stomping Zapateado that pushes both soloists to the limit. The finale, *Caccia a la Española*, even briefly quotes Rodrigo's signature "Aranjuez" melody!

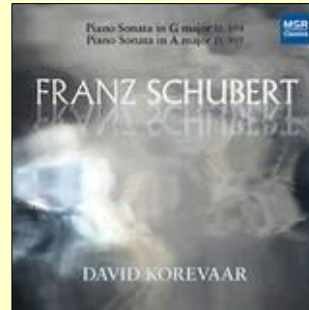


Scriabin: Symphony No. 1, Op. 26; Poem of Ecstasy, Op. 54 – Mikhail Pletnev, Russian National Orchestra (Pentatone SACD, DSD)

The Russian National Orchestra, founded in 1990 by artistic director and principal conductor Mikhail Pletnev, celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in high style with this pairing of two glorious symphonic works by Scriabin. As good as was their fine Tchaikovsky cycle for PentaTone, this new recording represents their best achievement to date, and the best evidence so far that this orchestra and conductor have reached maturity together.

It's a good omen for these recordings that Pletnev, already well established as a concert pianist by the time he took up the baton, had much previous experience with the piano music of Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), for this is a composer who must be taken on his own terms. Scriabin was a visionary, one who saw his mission in life to be that of a high priest bent on transforming the world through his own highly personal synthesis of complex chords, atonality, and dazzling harmony based on a color-coded circle of fifths. His mysticism, starting with natural philosophy and pantheism, was later influenced by his readings of the Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky, and he reached the point where he considered himself to be a God, inspired to lead humanity from the chaos of a dissolving world. He also claimed, perhaps erroneously, to experience synesthesia, a phenomenon by means of which musical tones can be experienced as colors.

Well, you get the idea. When the young Sergei Prokofiev and his fellow student Nilolai Myaskovsky attended the Russian premiere of Scriabin's Poem of Ecstasy in 1909, they had to admit there was nothing quite like this new work. "Both the harmonic and thematic material, as well as its contrapuntal voice-leading," recalled Prokofiev, "resembled nothing we had ever heard before." As did Mahler and Schoenberg before him, Scriabin called for a very large orchestra here. Unlike them, he did not use its resources sparingly. No "less is more" nonsense for Alexander Scriabin; for him, "more" always meant "more" and he massed his forces accordingly. The rhythmic impulse, driven largely by a staccato trumpet that overcomes the softer pleadings and intercessions of a searching flute and a dreamlike clarinet, reaches a point of almost unbearable tension about 20 minutes into the 21-minute work, at which point the glowing harmonies are at their densest. It's a symphonic catharsis if there



Schubert: Piano Sonatas, D894, D959  
David Korevaar, piano  
MSR Classics

The music's the thing for David Korevaar. As I can say of this artist and only a few others, he is self-effacing to the point where he sublimates his own personality to the service of the music at hand. To be sure, the former student of Earl Wild (piano) and David Diamond (composition) has ample technical prowess. But he also shows a keenly defined sense of form and a beautiful feeling for tone color that enable him to make his points naturally, without fuss or undue display. And that allows him to present the music of Franz Schubert to us as it is, without egotism or showy virtuosity. As a result, we get an impression of Schubert as a composer who could be a lot like Beethoven, but with a difference.

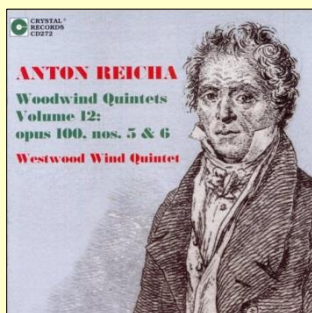
The lack of opportunity for shameless display, incidentally, hurt Schubert's reputation for a long time and caused his reputation to languish throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when virtuosity with a capital "V" was the rule of the day. There is a great deal of technical skill involved, for instance, in the Sonata in G major, D894, particularly in the opening movement with its stark textures and severe dynamic extremes which can be disjunctive when a *ppp* passage is interrupted by an *fff* outburst.

But in the last analysis, it is all a matter of interpretation. Schubert's fortissimos can hardly be said to represent a Beethoven-like struggle with implacable fate. The overall impression this sonata leaves us is that of cheerfulness, sunlight, and happiness (which are precisely the feelings the 18<sup>th</sup> century theorists identified with the key of G major). "As ever with him," writes English pianist Imogen Cooper, "there are contrasting passages which become stormy and a little bit dark, but the overall mood is one of peace and luminosity." That's the impression I get from Korevaar's account, in which the landscape of this large-scale work may be momentarily overcast but is never plunged into darkness. The critical factors here – tempi, pacing, and texture – are all nicely observed. We well understand why this is one of Schubert's best-loved works.

The A major Sonata, D959, is quite another matter. Korevaar cites its large-scale structure, its thematic cyclicism, drama, and lyricism, all of which make a lasting impact on the listener. "Symphonically conceived," writes the artist, "this sonata takes full

there was, and Pletnev pulls it off magnificently through his careful attention to pacing and proportions, even in a work of music whose avowed aspiration, evident in its very title, is to go over the top.

Scriabin's Symphony No. 1 in E, Op. 26, premiered in 1900, has to qualify as the most ambitious first symphony any composer ever undertook. It is in six movements, which most observers consider to consist of a prelude, four standard symphonic movements, and an epilog with soprano and tenor soloists and chorus (here Svetlana Shilova and Mikhail Gubsky and the 50-member Chamber Choir of the Moscow Conservatory under chorus master Alexander Solovyev). Petnev paces this performance exceedingly well so that its 55-minute duration doesn't feel long to the listener. My previous experiences of this symphony had been unsatisfying, for it had always seemed to be gorgeous-sounding but inconsequential. Pletnev brings out the structural coherency in a work that in lesser hands had seemed mere incontinent rhapsodizing, so that *this* performance, at least, is very satisfying. Already, Scriabin's philosophic thrust is evident in the paean to the transcendence of Art: "*O highest symbol of divinity, supreme art and harmony, we bring praise as tribute before you.*"



Reicha: Woodwind Quintets, Opus 100, Nos. 5 & 6  
The Westwood Wind Quintet  
(Crystal Records)

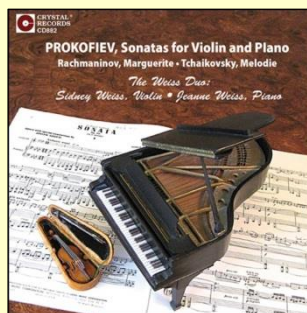
Reeds so flavorful you can taste them. A horn so warm you could bask in its genial glow like a sunbath. A flute that could sing hymns at Heaven's gate. That is the music of Anton Reicha, presented here for our enjoyment by the Westwood Wind Quintet. This splendid ensemble, consisting of John Barcellona, flute; Peter Christ, oboe; William Helmers, clarinet; Calvin Smith, horn; and Patricia Nelson, bassoon, are heard in the 12<sup>th</sup> and last volume of Reicha's wind quintets. The final maturity could not have been riper or more glorious.

Reicha (b. Prague, 1770; d. Paris 1836) was a lifelong friend of Beethoven and was influential in his day as the teacher of Adolphe Adam, Hector Berlioz, Charles Gounod, Franz Liszt, and Cesar Franck. He devoted much of his attention to theory, in which he was an early advocate of the use of polyrhythms, polytonality, and microtonal music – all of which were blithely ignored by his contemporaries as too far ahead of their time. Nor did he have much success in drumming up interest in his

advantage of the textural and dynamic capabilities of the instrument."

Listening to the A major Sonata, one gets the impression that its extremes of dynamics and shading are more the product of an unsettled and frightfully uncertain world than was the case in its G major album companion. Its second movement, an Andantino, in Korevvar's words, "[contasts] intimate lyricism with existential terror." It is probably the movement that will most recall for the listener Schubert's idol, Beethoven. The scherzo, by contrast, begins innocently and playfully enough, with a momentary outburst into a descending minor scale before it resumes its graceful, waltz-like character.

The finale is an expansive rondo, marked Allegretto. It requires the pianist to be continually alert for subtle changes in mood, texture, and rhythm, as Korevaar demonstrates most persuasively. The coda is enlivened by a swirl of arpeggios. It ends the work on a surprisingly affirmative note for one that has had its share of high drama in addition to its undeniably lyrical charms.



Prokofiev: Sonatas for Violin and Piano  
Performed by the Weiss Duo  
(Crystal Records)

No, folks, the image on the booklet cover isn't what you think it is. It is not a photograph of an actual violin and piano superimposed over the opening manuscript pages of Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata No. 2. The amazing truth is, these instruments are actual hand-crafted miniatures, meticulously created by Sidney Weiss, who has been for some years the violin half of the Weiss Duo, with his wife Jeanne as pianist.

That Weiss would take the infinite pains to design and execute miniatures such as these in his own wood-working studio (he also built the six violins he has used in his concert career over the years) says volumes about the care that he and Jeanne apply in preparing for their duo recitals. (Really, I don't know of another violinist of note who is his own violin maker.) Sidney's violin tone is elegant, warm, and refined, possessing as much tensile strength as beauty. Jeanne, a fellow Chicago native whom he met in their student days, proves the ideal recital partner for him, with an instinctive empathy that is

operas. Much of his music remained unpublished and unperformed in his lifetime.

Amazingly included in the general neglect of his music by the 19<sup>th</sup> century were his twenty-four quintets for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn. The reason is hard to fathom, for this genre is as inherently attractive for listeners as it is irresistible to musicians, and Reicha was a past master. In them we hear fanfares, marches, elements of woodwind serenades, and touches of the frustrated operatic composer. Happily, there is little evidence of Reicha the ahead-of-his-time theorist in these highly idiomatic quintets that are so easy to love for their romantic charm and ebullient good spirits.

Hmm ... I take back what I just said. There *is* evidence of Reicha the futurist in his binary tonal structure and his use of different key signatures simultaneously in the third movement of the Quintet in A minor, Op. 100, no. 5. Otherwise, what I said above still goes. Both this quintet and No. 6 in B-flat major open in the best classical style with slow introductions leading to expansive main sections, noticeably operatic and joyful in tone in No. 5. The same quintet features an *Andante* with a fine set of "solo" variations in which each of the five instruments has its moment in the limelight, and also a brilliant finale in which great virtuosity is required of all hands, and in particular the flutist.

The excitement, good spirits, and bold lyricism continue in the opening movement of No. 6, which likewise has a slow introduction. The slow movement, *Andante poco adagio*, is very beautiful in its rich polyphonic writing. The amiable third movement, like its predecessor in no. 5, is in the time of a freely handled Minuet, with Trio and da Capo sections. The finale, with its bracing alternations of tempo and meter, is absolutely thrilling as a fitting conclusion to Opus 100.

quite noticeable to the listener. Together, they bring out the range of moods and the profoundly human values in two of Prokofiev's best and most popular works.

Prokofiev composed his Sonata in F minor, Op. 80 for Violin and Piano between 1938 and 1945. It was premiered by the famous duo of David Oistrakh and Lev Oborin who had been coached by the composer. The swirling figurations and eerily slithering scales in the violin in the opening movement, *Allegro assai*, were said by the composer to suggest the wind sweeping over forgotten graves. The succeeding scherzo movement, *Allegro brusco*, has an unmistakable air of defiance, though with a soaring violin melody in a contrasted section. (Prokofiev intended a certain *forte* passage for the piano to cause people to jump out of their seats!) The slow movement, *Andante*, bears witness to the composer's melodic genius (he could be a softie when he wanted to), and the finale, *Allegro molto*, calls forth devil-defying virtuosity from both instruments.

The Sonata in D major, Op. 94 (1943), was again premiered by Oistrakh and Oborin. The former had suggested to Prokofiev that he transform it from his recently completed Flute Sonata. Its origin may account for its elegant classical form and abundance of lovely and (comparatively) innocent melodies as contrasted to its F minor counterpart. At the risk of simplification, one might say that the F minor sonata compels, and the D major charms, the listener into submission. The stomping finale, *Allegro con brio*, has plenty of fireworks for both violin and piano. Its affirmative tone made it the perfect morale raiser for war-weary audiences.

Two encore pieces, Fritz Kreisler's arrangement of Rachmaninoff's song *Marguerite* (daisies) and *Melodie* (song) by Tchaikovsky, provide the perfect ending to a recital that will stay with you for a long time.



"Theme & Variations," Carol Rosenberger, piano, plays Beethoven Sonata, Op. 109; Schubert Impromptu, Op. 142/ 3; and Mozart Sonata, K331 (Delos)

"Theme & Variations" is all the more welcome for being 18 years late in making its debut as a solo disc. It originally appeared in 1997 as a companion disc to Carol Rosenberger's concept album "Such Stuff as Dreams," part of Delos' Young Person's Series. At the time, the pianist had reservations about taking patches of music from works by Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert out of context, presenting them as simple, melodious pieces that would help introduce children to the riches of classical music. Upon its release, quite a few critics focused their attention on the "Such Stuff as Dreams" disc and seem to have completely ignored the companion CD which gave a more complete picture of the major works (and incidentally, of Ms. Rosenberger's

artistry). Some were even unkind enough to take their cue from the title and assumed the album was intended solely to help trundle recalcitrant children off into beddy-bye (We critics can be such lazy dogs!) Hopefully, the present CD release may help to rectify the impression.

Beethoven's Sonata in E, Op. 109, has long been a favorite of this pianist, for personal as well as artistic reasons, which she describes in her booklet annotation. As she cogently observes, "One has the feeling, in the opening of the first movement, that the music has already been going on before you can hear it – floating in from some gentle,

mystical place – and all you have to do is join it.” Of course, Beethoven being what he was, there is also a more robust, forceful aspect to the sonata’s character, which he springs upon us in the following movement, marked *Prestissimo*, which for this composer generally means “hold on to your seat.” The heart of the sonata is the theme-and-variations movement, marked *Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo* (walking pace, very songlike and expressive). Here, one has the impression of being privileged to listen to in on Beethoven’s innermost thoughts and feelings. It begins with the slow, unhurried theme. The succeeding variations range from quietly expansive to joyously extroverted, gently comforting, and forcefully robust in the chorale-like fugal variation. Finally, we arrive at a calm, radiant variation which Rosenberger likens to “a triumphant constellation shining gloriously above cumulative textures and trills, and then ending in reassuring simplicity.” (I seem to hear the chirruping of birds in the trills, a sound such as one can only hear late at night after the noises of the day have died away.) The movement ends with a repetition of the simple 16-bar theme, just as if nothing had happened. But, of course, as Rosenberger’s deeply insightful performance shows us, something *has* happened. We have been on nothing less than a 23-minute circumnavigation of a whole world of human experience in music!

Franz Schubert’s Impromptu in B-flat, Op. 142, No. 3, is also in theme-and-variations form. There’s a deceptive innocence in the abundance of melody in this 13-minute work whose title “Impromptu” signifies the illusion of spontaneous improvisation that a composer has usually been at great pains to put over on us. The beguiling variations, expressing a mood of simple happiness and serenity and breathing the air of the out-of-doors, steal upon us in gentle waves, soothing and reassuring us that all is well, at least in the world of nature.

Sonata in A, K331 has always been popular among beginning piano students and listeners just getting acquainted with Mozart if no other reason than its bracing “Turkish Rondo” (*Rondo all Turca*). For that reason, it has gotten a bad rap as an “easy” sonata. As the present performance demonstrates persuasively, there is a lot more to it than meets the ear in a casual rendition. It opens, unconventionally, with an entire theme-and-variations movement with a duration of 15 minutes. It is marked *Andante grazioso* (walking pace, gracefully). Rosenberger takes Mozart at his word, particularly in the wonderful lift-off at the start of the first variation. Running, gliding, soaring, or aria-like, there’s a range of mood in these variations that she captures to perfection. The Menuetto is very quick (and certainly not danceable), with a noticeable minor mood in the Trio. The *Alla Turca* finale is given appropriately exhilarating treatment here, as Rosenberger’s beloved “Boesie” (her pet name for her own Bösendorfer Imperial Concert Grand) has the depth and range in its bass to impart a percussive feeling to this movement of which Mozart could only dream, given the limitations of the piano of his day.