

Ballet Russes

PROKOFIEFF: *Romeo & Juliet Pieces*; **RAVEL:** *2 Movements fr Daphnis & Chloe*; **STRAVINSKY:** *3 Movements from Petrouchka*

Roman Rabinovich, p
Orchid 28—61 minutes

This brilliant debut from Rabinovich is vivacious and imaginative. The *Romeo and Juliet* is deployed with a brilliance that does justice to the orchestration. His playing oozes vibrancy and just the right amount of tension to propel the music forward. The crisp, staccato rhythms in 'Scene: The Street Awakens' are sharply articulated, but do not sound forced or stiff. Rabinovich has a sharp, almost metronomic precision, but never sounds like a machine. His ability to weave lush textures and create contrasts is apparent in the middle section of 'Arrival of the Guests', framed by the sparkling outer sections. 'Romeo and Juliet' is absolutely lovely and well paced.

The same energy can be heard in the other pieces. The sheer virtuosity of his treatment of *Petrouchka* is astounding. The second of the *Two Movements from Daphnis and Chloe*, in the vein of Tchaikovsky, is a wonderful addition to this program. But the high point of the recording is *Petrouchka*. Everything can be described as crystal ice. Even the lyrical parts sparkle, but never manage to sound brittle. Rabinovich's ability to juggle simultaneous and extremely virtuosic passages is astounding. The sparkle of the right hand in 'Petrouchka's Cell' against the melodious left hand works beautifully, seemingly distinct and separate, yet fused. The sections borders on sheer aggression, but in a piece like this it works well.

KANG

Piano of the Opera

Mozart, Rossini, Liszt, Chopin, Gershwin, Badarzewska, Kapustin, Dohnanyi

Myron Romanul
Hera 2126—80 minutes

This splashy, theatrical piano collection presents opera numbers transcribed for piano by a variety of composers. Pianist Myron Romanul, grandson of legendary soprano Stella Roman, is the rare example of an opera conductor who is also a concert pianist, so he is the ideal executant of this melodic, hyper-brilliant, slightly tacky repertory. The Liszt *Rigoletto* piece is sinfully overdone, and Romanul plays it that way. On the other hand, the delicacy in Chopin's riff on Mozart comes through sinuously, and the piano excerpt from Ravel's *Spanish Hour* has a sophisticated snap.

The salon piece from *Mahagonny* has enough slinky atmosphere to bring back a long-ago era. Some may think the playing from

the *Porgy and Bess* piano scene a bit square, but it has a bluesy ambiance and plush tone. The program concludes with a jazzy variations set by Nikolai Kapustan from a ballet. Everything is done with great style, and the piano sound is as big as it needs to be.

SULLIVAN

Sound Waves

Schubert, Liszt, Debussy, Ravel, Romberg

Alexandra Siloceca, p
Avie 2266—62 minutes

The second release from Alexandra Siloceca presents the pianist in firm control of a provocative and rewarding program. The idea of water runs through the record, creating a thematic unity that binds the selections. But Siloceca has ordered her selections so as to create a rewarding dramatic journey.

The first selection is a commission from Norwegian composer Martin Romberg. Based on the fictional world imagined by JRR Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and other works, the piece owes a great deal to Debussy, demonstrating in addition a debt to both Bartok and Messiaen. Although it does not hold its own with the other compositions on the record, it has a quasi-improvisatory quality that sets the stage well for what follows. Three selections by Debussy firmly establish the water theme: 'L'isle Joyeuse', 'Reflets dan l'eau', and 'Poissons d'or'. The playing is brilliant and engaging; variously hurried and impatient or relaxed and expansive, as the music demands. In Ravel's 'Jeux d'eau' she manages to imbue the textures with unexpected depth—presenting more than simply a lush surface of sound.

The selections by Liszt occupy the expressive heart of the program, with the monumental Variations on Bach's Cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* appearing about two-thirds of the way through. Here we realize that there has been a very deliberate narrative thread coordinating the choices. The music of Debussy and Ravel is never merely impressionist, but the juxtaposition with these pieces by Liszt—which also include 'Nuage gris' and 'Les jeux d'eaux a la Villa d'Este' and 'Orage', from *Annees de Pelerinage*—imbues them with special meaning. In addition to the clear religious underpinning of the Bach variations, we are reminded of the inscription from St John that Liszt placed over 'Les jeux d'eaux a la Villa d'Este': "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life". The strong dramatic impulse running through the program takes us up to 'Orage' (Storm) and breaks on the final selection,