



Igor Stravinsky & Dmitri Shostakovich: Works for Violin and Piano

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Now that Shostakovich's Violin Sonata has entered the mainstream repertoire, a common interpretation of it has emerged. The timings of each movement in these two performances are only a few seconds apart, and the biggest difference is in the middle movement, where Ingolfsson and Stoupel clock in at 6:29 to Kutik and Bozarth's 7:00. The conservatories and universities are probably teaching this sonata now, so a good, workable interpretation circulates from teacher to student, and from musician to musician through concerts, records, and radio. This is certainly not a bad thing. It establishes an interpretive "floor", so to speak, that performers generally don't sink beneath. Most of the music we hear is played in standard interpretations.

The Soviet-born Yevgeny Kutik is more sensitive to the oppressive mood of the Shostakovich sonata and makes many more well-considered nuances than Ingolfsson does. Listen to Ingolfsson's expressionless playing in the second subject of I and compare it with Kutik's more bumpy, angular phrasing. Still, the greatest Shostakovich Violin Sonata that I've ever heard remains the amazing performance by the young brother-sister duo of Sergei and Lusine Khachatryan (July/Aug 2008).

Ingolfsson's playing in Stravinsky's Divertimento is not much better. Just compare the opening bars of the Sinfonia with the magic spell chanted by Cho-Liang Lin and Andre-Michel Schub in their classic recording. This isn't a bad interpretation, but it is pedestrian.

Alfred Schnittke's Violin Sonata 1, written in 1963, is obviously cut from the same cloth as the Shostakovich. While Schnittke's signature polystylism is especially evident in the hymnlike tune at the end of the Largo and the pop tune-like dance at the start of the finale, a dark mood prevails, with much acerbic humor, if this can even be called humor.

It is interesting that Kutik would program the two works by Joseph Achron in a program titled Sounds of Defiance—the famous Hebrew Melody of 1911 and the Hebrew Lullaby of 1913. Achron was born in Russia in 1886. He certainly must have been aware of the horrible pogroms. He left the Soviet Union in 1922, never to return. Arvo Part's Mirror in the Mirror, written in 1978, is a minimalist work with a vaguely religious atmosphere.

This is the first time I have heard Kutik, and I hope it will not be the last. He is always thinking, always playing the music, not just the notes.