audite

Elisso Bolkvadze plays Prokofiev and Schubert

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Gramophone (Patrick Rucker - 01.10.2015)

GRAMOPHONE

Until now, the Georgian pianist Elisso Bolkvadze has recorded primarily for the Sony Classical Infinity Digital and Cascavelle labels. On her latest release, for Audite, she makes a number of highly original interpretative choices.

Her approach to the opening of Prokofiev's 1912 Second Sonata is redolent of Scriabin – plush, full-sounding and rife with detail. The rhythmic vitality of the Scherzo becomes waylaid by explorations of colouristic ornament and the misty haze enveloping the slow movement feels more French than Russian. The moto perpetuo of the finale rattles along at a splendid clip until it too is bogged down in an expressively overgrown contrasting section. In place of Prokofiev's brightly unambiguous colours and rhythmic elan vital, we encounter over-stuffed decor and aching expressivity.

The Schubert Impromptus are prevailingly lyrical, though the rhetorical eloquence and emotional urgency of each is diminished by indecisive rhythmic underpinning. For all its admirably vivid contrasts, the C minor Impromptu seems to wander, uncertain of its ultimate goal. The E flat Impromptu comes off as more notey than•fleet, while the abandon of its contrasting section is impeded by undue focus on inner voices. The golden melody of the beloved G flat major threatens to come untethered and float into the ether for lack of an adequately anchoring bass.

Throughout the disc, Bolkvadze's undeniably sensitive playing moves note to note. We are invited to admire each tree, if not each individual leaf, heedless of the magnificent forest surrounding us. Combined with a certain stylistic ambiguity with regard to both composers, the result lacks a strong personal stamp, prompting the question of just how fully Bolkvadze inhabits the music she plays.

As for alternatives in this music, both Frederic Chiu (Harmonia Mundi - nla) and Anne-Marie McDermott's complete Prokofiev cycles are of sustaining interest and Pletnev has a great deal to say in the Second Sonata. In the more personal realm of Schubert preferences, the performances of D899 by Maria-Joao Pires, Imogen Cooper and Vassily Primakov are more compelling.

»audite« Ludger Böckenhoff • Tel.: +49 (0)5231-870320 • Fax: +49 (0)5231-870321 • info@audite.de • www.audite.de