



Sergei Prokofiev: Works for Violin & Piano

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[American Record Guide](#) (Joseph Magil - 01.11.2016)

Reviewed in [American Record Guide](#)
 I reviewed Franziska Pietsch and Detlev Eisinger's recording of Grieg's violin sonatas in the January issue. I enjoyed them, and I found Pietsch especially affecting at lower dynamic levels. I have always been impressed by musicians who can hold the listener's attention without having to resort to loud playing and bold, heroic gestures—though there's certainly nothing wrong with those when they are called for. She again offers her sensitive phrasing at low dynamics here but also much, much more.

Pietsch was born into a musical family in East Germany at Halle (near Leipzig) in 1969. She studied with special state support until 1984, when her father escaped to the West. She suffered reprisals from the state until she was able to move to West Germany with her mother and younger sister in 1986. She continued her studies in the West with celebrated teachers like Ulf Hoelscher and Dorothy DeLay.

The booklet notes point out that she has an affinity for Prokofieff, and I can only add after listening to this that she has it in spades. I hear this in Sonata 1. She is completely inside this music, which is reputed to be a monument to the victims of Stalin's purges. I know of only two other performances of this masterpiece that I can place in the same league as this one: Kai Gluesteen and Catherine Odroneau (May/June 2004) and David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter (Jan/Feb 1999).

Although I can think of two other recordings of Sonata 1 that I can place in the same league as this one, I cannot say the same for Pietsch and Eisinger's performance of Sonata 2. It is in a class by itself. Arranged from Prokofieff's Flute Sonata, it is a very beautiful work, though it has always stood in the shadow of its illustrious companion. Pietsch plays it as if it is the greatest violin sonata ever written. She finds contrasts of light and shade that others miss, and her very expressive nuances are timed to split-second perfection. One of the most notable things about this reading is that she and her partner make more of the tempo changes indicated in the score than any other duo I've heard. As in her Grieg recording, her playing at low dynamic levels is unusually expressive.

I have heard the Five Melodies many times before, usually included with recordings of the sonatas. I had never paid much attention to them until now. Pietsch plays these works as if she is playing five masterpieces. She makes you hang on every note. It's as though I had never heard these works before. As in the sonatas, the playing is so expressive that it is impossible not to be riveted to the music.

I have loved the sonatas since I was a boy and first heard them on Itzhak Perlman and Vladimir Ashkenazy's RCA recording. Those are very fine performances, but I couldn't say that their reading of either work is one of the absolutely best available. I

can say that about this recording though. Pietsch and Eisinger's reading of Sonata 1 is among the very best available, and their reading of Sonata 2 is easily the best that I know. Add to these remarkable performances of the sonatas the also remarkable performance of the Five Melodies, and you have one of the greatest recordings of this or any music that I have ever heard.

Eisinger plays a brand of piano that I had never heard of before, Steingraeber and Sons, which was founded in 1820 in Germany and is found in Bayreuth. It sounds very good. Pietsch plays a violin made by Carlo Antonio Testore in Milan in 1751. Some millionaire should give her a Stradivarius or a Guarnerius. She deserves one.

