



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky & Sergei Rachmaninov: The Seasons & Variations on a Theme of Corelli

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[American Record Guide](#) (Vroon - 01.05.2009)

New recordings of this keep coming, and before the 1990s they were very rare.

These two are almost textbook cases. The Japanese woman is very sensitive – too sensitive, I would say – and has a bright and somewhat brittle tone. Her tone is almost standard Japanese, and her ever-so-sensitive readings sound very feminine. The Russian pianist is certainly more masculine but still not insensitive at all. (That would never do for Tchaikovsky.) His tone is much sweeter and gentler, less hard and percussive. He almost floats thru some passages. He does what he wants with the music; there's a lot of give-and-take, loud-and-soft – contrasts are important in his interpretations. So are phrasing and punctuation. Tempos are elastic. He is never mechanical, never routine. He is listening to every note and phrase. Everything has meaning in the whole.

The engineering makes a difference, of course. If Mr Primakov comes across as warm and atmospheric the engineers certainly contributed to the effect. It's very moving. SACD technology doesn't do much for a piano – or at least I can't hear it. When stereo came along I continued to buy piano records in monaural sound, and I still have Philippe Entremont's delightful Tchaikovsky album (monaural). The Audite engineers are not interested in atmosphere or warmth but in Germanic clarity.

I can no longer say whether a new recording eclipses the three or four older ones I have loved so long. With something as good as Primakov's Tchaikovsky I just enjoy it and add it to the others.