



Sergei Prokofiev: Violin Concertos

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Gramophone (David Gutman - 2018.02.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Turning her back on the recent fashion for mixing Prokofiev's concertante and chamber works and having already recorded the violin sonatas and Five Melodies (Audite, 8/16), Franziska Pietsch settles for the concertos alone. Should that sound ungenerous, the music-making is individual enough to make amends. Stravinsky admired Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto but he might not have cared for the passionate subjectivity of Pietsch's interpretation. Embracing more intrusive vibrato and rasp than most rivals – though Leila Josefowicz (Philips, 12/01) is certainly 'grittier' – this is a compellingly individual account, profoundly lyrical where it needs to be, never cloying. Without ignoring the music's delicate fairy-tale element, Pietsch often moves the expression into a dangerous territory of real-world emotion which may or may not relate to her own back story as a victim of Communist repression. After her father's defection to the West in 1984, the East German authorities did their best to scupper her own burgeoning career, preventing the prodigy from giving concerts or taking lessons. Once in the West she specialised in chamber music and has experience as an orchestra leader. On disc at least she would seem to have avoided concertos.

The proto-Soviet Second Concerto is paced quite deliberately, though with no trace of heavy-handedness. The adoption of an anxiously confidential manner here has the effect of bringing the two concertos closer together in terms of feeling. Again Pietsch is at pains to shed new light on the music's itinerary. In the second movement she makes less of the central climax than, say, Kyung-Wha Chung (Decca, 3/77), finding a special *Innigkeit* and sense of regret in the final restatement of the arioso theme. There is no celebration in the finale's final flight.

Pietsch's relationship with the musicians of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin seems close, helped by a fine studio recording made in the ideal acoustic of the Jesus-Christus-Kirche in Berlin-Dahlem. The conductor, himself a violinist, is Romanian-born Cristian Macelaru, who recently took over the directorship of the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music long associated with Marin Alsop. On this evidence he too is someone to watch. You can usually sense whether you're in for a special performance of the D major Concerto even before the soloist enters. Making the most of its opening shimmer entails taking the dynamics down below what the composer actually asks for.

Pietsch was once proclaimed the 'Anne-Sophie Mutter of East Germany'. She hasn't quite the same sovereign command of intonation but her intense commitment is never in doubt. There are plenty of safer, cleaner, more generously coupled alternatives in these concertos – James Ehnes (Chandos, 10/13) springs to mind – but in its mix of tenderness, raw emotion and high fidelity this one is rather special.

Prokofiev
Violin Concertos - No 1, Op 19; No 2, Op 63
Franziska Pietsch / Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Cristian Macelaru
Audite © AUDITE97 733 (50 • DDD)

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Franziska Pietsch *vi* Deutsches Symphonie-
Orchester Berlin / Cristian Măcelaru

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