



Sergei Prokofiev: Violin Concertos

aud 97.733

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Released in 2016 Franziska Pietsch with pianist Detlev Eisinger recorded Prokofiev's two violin sonatas and cinq mélodies on Audite. On the same label for her new album, produced around a year ago in Berlin, Pietsch has returned to Prokofiev for the first and second violin concertos with Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Cristian Măcelaru. Written some eighteen years apart the pair of violin concertos mark the periods before the composer went into exile and the time he was concluding his nomadic lifestyle, deciding to resettle in his Russian homeland.

The first violin concerto is a relatively early work composed in 1916/17 and one of the last to be written before Prokofiev left Russia. Prokofiev ensures that the violin part is dominant although it is not pitted dramatically against the orchestra but more part of it. Nevertheless, it is an excellent score and I would like to see it programmed far more than it currently is. Undoubtedly Prokofiev's works were a source of inspiration to a generation of composers. When I hear the Walton violin concerto (1939, re-orchestrated 1943) it reminds me strongly of these Prokofiev scores which the English composer must surely have known especially the first concerto premiered over fifteen years earlier in 1923. In the fascinating opening movement Andantino Franziska Pietsch creates a heavy and intense atmosphere that evokes an icy Russian chill which makes me shiver such is the passion of her assured playing. Admirable is the way the Halle born Pietsch accelerates through the movement's propulsive climax. The music of the sardonic Scherzo just flashes along briskly with the committed soloist negotiating the wonderful contemporary writing and the mischievous sounding effects. In the Finale Pietsch creates an atmospheric world of inscrutability and introspection with Cristian Măcelaru directing the Berlin orchestra in an explosion of passionate lyricism. The shimmering violin line feels as if Pietsch has dipped her violin (made by Carlo Antonio Testore, Milan, 1751) in liquid gold such is the gleaming quality of the sound it produces. Pietsch imparts the potent elements of intensity and deep concentration creating a highly charged atmosphere seldom encountered in this work.

From 1935 the second violin concerto tends to be overshadowed by the first concerto. Certainly, a high-quality score Prokofiev's writing is highly melodic and more overtly romantic than the earlier concerto. In the opening movement Allegro moderato one immediately notices the concerto has relatively lighter scoring. Pietsch continues her splendid form throughout the long and varied melodic line revelling in the vivid and deliciously warm colours. The central Andante movement sounds so meltingly lyrical in Pietsch's hands and throughout the Finale: Allegro, ben marcato her spirit and verve stand out prominently.



Pietsch produces compelling and intensely passionate interpretations of both concertos complemented by accomplished support from Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Cristian Măcelaru. Excellent sound quality throughout this album from the renowned acoustic of Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Dahlem with the Audite engineers providing vividly clear and well balanced sonics. In addition, I really appreciate the informative and readable booklet essay by Habakuk Traber. My only grumble is with the available space on the CD, enough to have accommodated an additional work.

Franziska Pietsch's recording of Prokofiev's violin concertos rubs shoulders with the finest in the catalogue. My first choice and probably the best-known is the now 'classic' recording from soloist Kyung-Wha Chung and London Philharmonic Orchestra under André Previn. Recorded in 1975 at Kingsway Hall, London, Chung plays passionately displaying a wonderful tone and control with Previn and LPO highly sensitive partners. A generous coupling on this Decca album is Chung's striking account of the Stravinsky violin concerto. Another rival version of the pair of concertos that holds the attention is from soloist Arabella Steinbacher with Russian National Orchestra under Vasily Petrenko. Recorded in 2012 at Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Steinbacher's coupling is the composer's solo violin sonata, Op. 115 on Pentatone.

With Franziska Pietsch in such stunning form there is little reason to hesitate with this album of the Prokofiev violin concertos.

Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19 (1916/17)
[21.56]

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63 (1935) [28.08]

Franziska Pietsch (violin)

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin/Cristian Măcelaru
rec. March 2017 Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Dahlem, Berlin

AUDITE 97.733 [50.07]

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