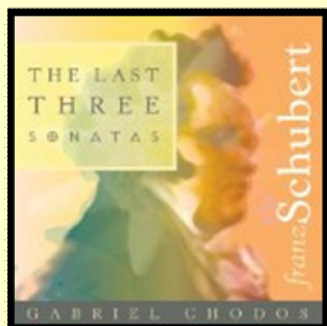


## Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

August, 2011

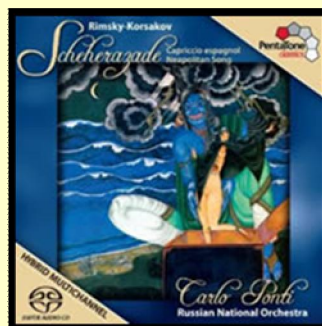


Schubert: The Last Three Sonatas  
Gabriel Chodos, piano  
Fleur de Son (2-CD slim line set)

Fleur de Son, a small U.S. label with high artistic standards, has released a terrific album that is bound to get attention and raise some eyebrows. Gabriel Chodos, head of the piano department at the New England Conservatory of Music for the past 25 years, draws on his long acquaintance as a concert pianist with the music of Franz Schubert to present the composer's last three sonatas in a compelling way that stresses their unique place in the history of music. Along the way, he takes (warranted) liberties in order to bring out the deep, haunting beauties of each of these works as well as their family resemblances.

These three "Posthumous Sonatas" are as follows: C Minor, D.958; A Major, D.959; and B-flat Major, D. 960. Long dismissed as structurally and dramatically inferior to the greatest sonatas of Beethoven, they are in fact nothing of the sort. They are profoundly moving creations that run a wide emotional gamut while opening new pathways through their use of cyclical form connecting structural, harmonic and melodic elements within each sonata and all three taken as a group. Each requires a larger canvas than had previously been considered necessary for a keyboard sonata – a true symphonic scale, in fact. In addition, their remarkable emotional depth has long been taken as the personal testament of a composer who knew his days on earth were numbered.

In his booklet notes, Chodos sees this trio of works as representing different aspects of life and mortality: anger and terror (C minor), "glorious affirmation of life" (A Major), and finally, resignation and acceptance of death (B-flat). That is best taken as a broad generalization, since there is considerable diversity within each sonata. The Adagio of the C minor sonata is certainly awe-inspiring, with the haunted atmosphere of its B section, full of strange modulations, frightening forte outbursts and starkly accented passages which are positively terrifying in Chodos' account. But the corresponding slow movement in the "gloriously affirmative" A Major, marked



Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade; Capriccio Espagnol  
Carlo Ponti, Russian National Orchestra  
PentaTone

What can one find to say about such thrice-familiar symphonic favorites as Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and *Capriccio Espagnol*? Well, quite a lot, actually, and Carlo Ponti, conducting a Russian National Orchestra that is in particularly fine fettle in these recordings, is at pains to bring out all the fine points in these scores with the greatest clarity. That's important because it was a sore point with Rimsky-Korsakov that critics and public alike always focused on the most obvious element of these symphonic masterworks, their colorful, glowing, and highly imaginative orchestrations, to the exclusion of structural elements such as the alternation of timbres and the finely calculated way in which melodies recur at just the right psychological moment for maximum impact.

At some 47 minutes' playing time, Ponti's account of *Scheherazade* is slower than most versions I have heard, but it is by no means tedious. It's a work in which every little instrumental timbre has a meaning all its own, from the soft percussive sounds underscoring the dance theme in the contrasted section of the third movement, "The Young Prince and the Young Princess," to the muted horn calls, growing ever more clear urgent, in the finale, "Sinbad's Shipwreck." The composer's touch, making his melodies even more memorable, is evident in such movements as the second, "The Story of Prince Kalendar," in which the theme changes only in terms of orchestration, allowing for greater orchestral clarity and brightness as it moves along.

At first, I was somewhat puzzled by Ponti's holding back on the climaxes within movements 1-3, until I realized that his intention was to make the finale all the more thrilling and exciting as it moves through several stages from "Festival at Bagdad" to the moment when "The Ship Breaks against a Cliff Surmounted by a Bronze Horseman," followed by a stunning coda and a return to

*Andantino* and taken very slowly here, is equally dismal in its own way, suggesting a “sadness beyond sadness” (Chodos) that is reinforced by its desolate minor key ending in the piano’s lowest register.

In the opening of the B-flat Sonata, marked *molto moderato* and played even slower for full dramatic effect, Chodos takes his greatest liberties. Ranging from quietly subdued to rhapsodic and dreamlike, the movement benefits greatly from this pianist’s intelligently insightful, unhurried approach. At a playing time of 23:39 (49:50 overall for the entire sonata), this is the longest account of D.960 I have ever heard, but it is in the ballpark with most contemporary accounts and is by no means tedious since Chodos draws compelling insights at every turn. There is, by the way, no generally accepted “proper” way to play this, or any one of the three last sonatas, as opposed to what we have with Beethoven. I was struck by the time difference between Chodos and a 2008 performance by a great artist of even longer experience, Claude Frank. Without skipping an exposition repeat, dropping any notes or blurring the tempi, Frank clocks in at 14:05 for the same movement – a difference of a quarter of an hour(!) – 35:21 overall.

After an ineffably sad, beautiful slow movement, *Andante sostenuto*, with its hymn like middle section and the mood of benediction with which it ends, we find that Schubert has committed the greatest of sins in terms of proper sonata form, namely by loading his profoundest material up front in the first two movements, leaving no greater obstacles to conquer. Consequently, he makes amends with an emotionally uncomplicated scherzo and a jaunty, galloping finale filled with simple happiness and high spirits. As he did earlier, Chodos captures the prevailing moods of both movements to perfection.



“East of Berlin,” includes Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition  
Florence Mustric, organ  
MSR Classics

Florence Mustric, organist of the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cleveland, Ohio, gives a moving recital on that church’s Von Beckerath organ that shows us why there is still room for a large mechanical-action organ of this sort. Built in Germany by Rudolph Von Beckerath and installed in 1956, this wonderful instrument was designed along baroque lines but, as the

main theme that began the symphony. That theme, representing the voice of the storyteller, Scheherazade herself, recurs in various guises in all four movements, and is played here with distinction by violinist Tatiana Porphneva.

Ponti gives equally incisive treatment to the companion work, Capriccio Espagnol, with its colorful orchestration masquerading the careful structure of a work in which charming musical ideas succeed each other with the greatest naturalness as Moorish, Gypsy and Spanish elements come together to form a compelling musical experience, ending in a brilliant Fandango, a dance from the Asturias region of Spain. As in Scheherazade, there is a violin solo at key moments, played capably here by Alexei Bruni. A delightful trifle, Rimsky’s orchestration of the popular Neapolitan song “*Funiculi, funicula,*” rounds off the program.



Rachmaninov: Piano Concertos 1 and 4,  
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini  
Simon Trpčeski, piano  
Vasily Petrenko, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic  
Avie Records

I don’t want to spoil what appears, at least on the basis of the booklet cover, to be a beautiful artistic partnership between pianist Simon Trpčeski and conductor Vasily Petrenko (for the benefit of you audiophiles, he’s the one with the little stick), but the first thing most listeners will notice about these recordings is the big, compelling sound of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. It is absolutely stunning in the climaxes but solid in every respect in the secondary passages as well. Only upon closer inspection does the unusually close collaboration between Petrenko and Macedonia native Trpčeski become evident. And it is precisely this mutual sympathy of soloist and conductor that pays off big dividends in this, their second Rachmaninoff collaboration (Rachmaninoff’s Concertos 2 and 3 were released to critical acclaim last year).

Piano Concertos No. 1 in F minor, Op. 1, and No. 4 in G minor, Op. 40, have both been unfairly cast in the shade by Nos 2 and 3 – *how* unfairly, these performances demonstrate. The First (1891), a world-storming statement by a precocious youngster determined to make his mark on the world, is filled with youthful ardor, most evident in the propulsive fanfare that

present recording clearly indicates, it is ideal for modern repertoire as well.

Beginning with Mustric's own transcription of Modest Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, we hear early-on the qualities make this organ so distinguished, even as it passed its half-century mark at the time of these recordings. Though to the trained ear it was in need of renovation, the Von Beckerath shows, as early as "The Old Castle," its beautiful degrees of tone coloring and rare ability to create atmosphere that are so essential to make this tableau come alive. "The Cattle," a portrait of the world's weary, bleating labor in the person of a yoke of oxen drawing an overloaded wagon, benefits from the deep sonorities of this instrument and the slow, steady rhythm that underlies the melody.

With 244 keys on the manuals and 32 pedals on a pedal board that is kept continually busy, Mustric clearly needed help in setting the stops, which undergo numerous changes in this recital – some 700 in Pictures alone – and she expresses gratification in her booklet annotation to the registrants who pulled the stops for her. This is no small matter, as it enables the artist to give a fluid performance that would not be possible otherwise. At 38:45, these Pictures have a longer playing time that we are used to in either the piano or the orchestral versions, but the result is by no means tedious, quite the opposite in fact. The transition between the recurrent Promenade theme and the "Ballad of the Unhatched Chicks" is a trifle labored, owing to the fact that the tableau music has to begin before the promenade has ended. But the transition from the flurried activity of "The Market Place at Limoges" to the stark solemnity of "Catacombs" is so accomplished, it takes one's breath away – as was indeed Mussorgsky's intention.

The remaining tableaux – "With the Dead in a Dead Language," "The Hut of Baba Yaga," and "The Great Gate of Kiev" – transpire with the greatest excitement and conviction in this performance. One can feel Mussorgsky's keen anticipation to commune with the spirit of his departed friend Hartmann in the first-named of these tone pictures, the slow movement through the catacombs, resting place of the dead, and the soft light that seems to glow within the pale skulls.

There follow two fine encores by Mustric: a Prelude by Israeli composer Paul Ben-Haim that plays like a near-eastern lullaby with a more perturbed middle section, and a Toccata by Miloš Sokola that keeps the performer alert with its intense rhythms and fresh harmonies. The program concludes with a Prelude and Fugue in G minor by the rather short-lived Estonian composer Peeter Sõda (1883-1920) that ought to be much better known than it is – a part of the organist's standard repertoire, in fact. In its masterful fugal treatment of the famous BACH motto (that is, B-flat, A, C, B natural in German notation), it pays eloquent tribute to the great composer's memory.

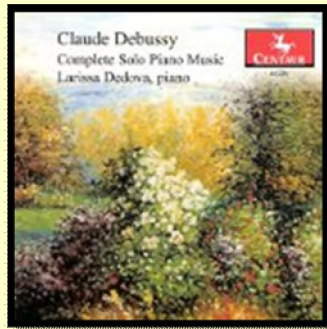
opens the work and the fiery finale that closes it, but also in the fashionable melancholy and nocturnal tenderness that suffuses the Andante. By contrast, the darker, sadder emotions that inform the Largo of the Fourth Concerto (1926), with its introspective musings in the keyboard, so capably realized by Trpčeski over the yearning calls in the horns and other woodwinds, are just what we might expect of Rachmaninoff at this stage of his life as a Russian in exile, a weary world wanderer acclaimed everywhere except in his native land. The "modern," machine driven sounds in this concerto that seemed incomprehensible to listeners and critics at its premiere (even the ones who had gone nuts over similar jazz-inflected elements in Gershwin) are easier for us to take today. And the barnstorming finale is hard to resist.

The close partnership of soloist and orchestra is even more apparent in the work we all know and love, the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43. The altogether brilliant performance we are given here reinforces the concerto-like structure that runs continuously underneath this grand exercise in theme-and-variations: Introduction, theme, and Variations 1-10 as the opening, Variations 11-18 as a beautifully paced and structured slow movement, culminating with the famous Variation 18 that typically (as here) sends us all off to lullaby land, so that we fail to realize the heavenly music is nothing more than the Paganini theme inverted and taken with calculated leisure; and Variations 19-24 as a breathtaking final movement plus coda, incorporating a statement of the *Dies Irae* theme that haunted Rachmaninoff all his life, and finishing with a brief flash of wit as a knowing wink from the composer.



Smetana, Shostakovich, Bernstein: Piano Trios  
The Morgenstern Trio  
Azica Records

Out of Germany comes an exciting new piano trio playing seminal works by Smetana, Shostakovich and Bernstein that cover the vast emotional range of the romantic and modern eras. Pianist Catherine Klipfel, violinist Stefan Hempel, and cellist Emanuel Wehse, performing together as the Morgenstern Trio, show why they were recent winners of the prestigious Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson International Trio Award, as they cultivate a not-too-creamy blend that allows each plenty of room to move around and bring out the stunningly virtuosic elements in their parts while contributing to the total impact of the



Debussy: Complete Solo Piano Music  
Larissa Dedova, piano  
Centaur

Why record the complete solo piano works of Claude Debussy? Actually, as Larissa Dedova, Russian-born pianist who now lives in the United States and teaches on the piano faculty of the University of Maryland School of Music, demonstrates most persuasively, it is necessary to have Debussy's entire canvas for piano spread out before us in order to gauge the stages of his development and his unique contribution to the literature in terms of his broad harmonic spectrum, his fascinating textures and his infinitely shaded range of dynamics. In some 309 minutes of glorious music spread out over 4 CDs, Dedova makes a compelling case for the composer in performances that are equal to, or at least competitive with, the very best Debussy I have heard in more than 25 years as a reviewer.

Debussy himself described his 12 Etudes (1915) as "a warning to pianists not to take up the musical profession unless they have remarkable hands." Besides the digital flexibility and freedom of movement in the arms and shoulders, the pianist who essays the Etudes must be able to make their requisite points without seeming unduly academic or fussy. Dedova does this to a greater degree than I have yet heard, making her account of these pieces, which are widely neglected by other pianists because of their extreme difficulty and the fact that they are pure studies, without the descriptive titles that have for example memorialized some of Chopin's Etudes, more satisfying than any I have yet heard.

I mention the Etudes up front because, in the problems they present to the executant (thirds, fourths, octaves, chromatic degrees, repeated notes, composite arpeggios, and so forth) they provide the key to understanding and performing Debussy. And Dedova's performances of the *Préludes*, Books I & 2; *Images*, Sets I & II; the Children's Corner Suite; the *Estampes* (Prints, or engravings), *Deux Arabesques*, *Pour le piano*, and the various uncollected solo pieces including *Réverie*, *Masques*, *L'Isle joyeuse* (The Blessed Isle), and *Élégie*, are nothing less than distinguished. Listen to her performances of "What the West Wind Saw" from *Préludes* I, "The Terrace of Moonlit Audiences" and "Fireworks" from *Préludes* II, or "Snowflakes are dancing" from The Children's Corner, and you will hear what I mean. *Estampes* may be the best of all, with its deeply

ensemble. Much as the namesakes of the K-L-R Award were wont to do themselves, come to think of it.

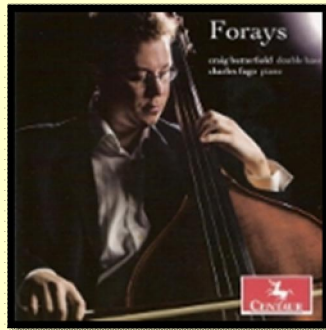
Bedrich Smetana wrote his Trio in G minor, Op. 15 in 1855 as a memorial to his eldest daughter Bedřiška, who had died of scarlet fever, revising it extensively several years later. The poignancy of his loss is reflected in the prevalent mood of the work in which all three movements remain firmly in the tonic minor, with some significant exceptions. The emotionally charged opening movement results in some terse interchanges in this performance, particularly among the two string players as they seemingly jostle one another for the pole position as they approach the end of the exposition. In the second movement, marked *Allegro, ma non agitato*, the warmth of expression given the violin and cello in the two bridge passages, both in the major mode, allow us to witness Smetana's innermost feelings. In the Finale: *Presto*, the galloping nature of the piano writing, realized beautifully here by Klipfel, gets most of the listener's attention to the exclusion of the strings, an imbalance that is remedied when a hymn-like theme in the startling key of A-flat Major suddenly emerges and then becomes transformed into a funeral march. The music moves steadily towards what appears to be an affirmation of faith in the final pages, when it finally resolves in G Major.

In the case of his early C minor Piano Trio, there's a clear relation to the emotional state of the 17-year old Dmitri Shostakovich. Written after he had fallen in love with a girl he had met while on vacation in the Crimea in 1923, it has a surprising vulnerability of feeling that we do not ordinarily associate with this composer. That is especially true of the second section of this single-movement work that encompasses all the regular features of sonata form, where the emotion is that of yearning, perhaps for an unrequited love. Here, the Morgenstern Trio do a splendid job of realizing an ideal balance among the three players, particularly considering that the textures as written are not always self-evident.

Leonard Bernstein's Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano, written in the fall of 1937 for three of his lady friends in Cambridge MA who concertized as the Madison Trio, is by contrast an astonishingly mature work for so young a composer. Much of the writing is quite formal, as if the 19-year old were at pains to demonstrate his mastery of counterpoint. That is stunningly realized by the Morgenstern Trio in the far-ranging opening movement, in which the piano engages in an ongoing dialog in canon between the cello and violin, until finally a full-blown fugue develops in which the piano is in perfect parallel octaves, balancing the two strings. Only in the middle movement, *Tempo di Marcia*, does Bernstein engage in some of the sassy and jazz-influenced lingo that was later to make him famous when its opening music re-emerged in his musical *On the Town*.

atmospheric depictions of “Pagodas,” “A Soirée in Granada,” and “Gardens in the Rain,” all so real that you can virtually see and touch, as well as hear, the various sensations they evoke.

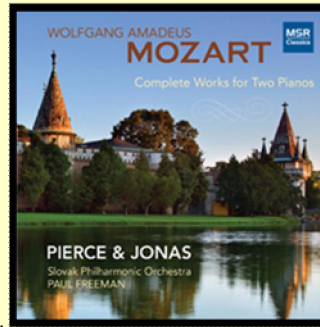
Before closing, I’d like to recognize the technical skill that went into these recordings. The *Préludes* were produced, engineered and edited by Pyotr Kondrashin in 2002 at the Gnessin Academy of Music, Moscow. Antonio d’Urzo performed a similar function in all the other recordings, made at the Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, on seven different occasions in 2008-2009, and did a superb job balancing and editing them all.



Franck: Sonata in A; Vaughan Williams; Schubert  
Craig Butterfield, double bass  
Charles Fugo, piano  
Centaur

Craig Butterfield, known in many concert halls as a guest artist and associate professor of double bass and jazz studies at the University of South Carolina, is joined by fellow USC faculty member Charles Fugo on piano in a compelling and persuasive program of works with the melody parts transcribed for his own favorite instrument. The title of the album, “Forays,” reflects the paucity of works written for solo double bass prior to 1950, and the fact that the bassist in search of repertoire must be his own skillful transcriber as he ransacks the romantic era.

The first work on the program, Cesar Franck’s Sonata in A for Violin and Piano, sounds surprisingly persuasive in Butterfield’s arrangement, partially because previous attempts at transcribing the violin part for double bass have failed because the part was written two octaves below the sounding pitch on the violin. The result was that the melody frequently sounded below the piano register, thus making it an unintended bass line. The key word here is *unintended*. “I have endeavored,” says Butterfield, “to perform the sonata at one octave below the violin pitch in order to overcome this problem of changing harmonies.” This procedure works out so well that there are many moments in which the music seems a “natural” for the double bass. In the finale, there is an extended passage in which the melody line is indeed submerged below that of the piano, but that was clearly Franck’s intention in the original, in which the violin smolders for a time while the piano takes center stage, only to rise with renewed élan for the triumphant conclusion, as the bass does here.



Mozart: Complete Works for Two Pianos  
Joshua Pierce and Dorothy Jonas  
Paul Freeman conducts the Slovak Philharmonic  
MSR Classics

These 1990’s recordings made in Bratislava, Slovakia and at SUNY Purchase show the duo-piano team of Joshua Pierce and Dorothy Jonas at the top of their form, displaying the qualities that have made them world favorites. These include the precision of their sudden attack and phrase articulation, their mutual rapport as if they were two keyboard artists sharing the same thoughts, and the infectious joy with which they toss bold, engaging musical ideas back and forth.

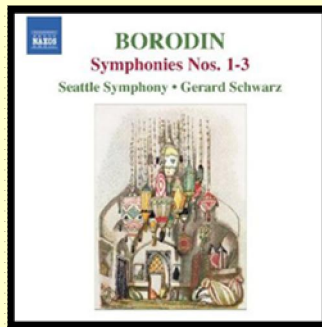
Speaking of the latter, those bold ideas are much in evidence in Mozart’s altogether brilliant Concerto in E-flat, K365 for Two Pianos. Written originally for Mozart to perform with his sister “Nannerl,” who was as much a virtuoso as he, it opens with a typically bold gesture, rather than a melody, consisting of a downward octave plunge, an upward sixteenth run, and a downward E-flat chord, giving rise immediately to a soft, rising theme of great loveliness. The unfolding dialog between the two pianos is as evenly distributed as it is scintillating. In the opening movement, in particular, the music is wonderfully spacious, allowing both artists ample room for creative expression. It ends in a stunning double cadenza. The slow movement, an Andante, is refined, gracious, and discretely playful. The finale is a Rondo filled with imaginative energy, rhythmic drive, and plenty of good humor as the performers trade phrases with each other and the orchestra, ending exuberantly.

The Sonata in D, K448 for two Pianos, the only one of its kind that Mozart finished, is one of his most confident, self-assured works in any genre. Beginning with an ear-catching, sky-rocketing figure in octaves for both performers, it is distinguished for its interlocking melodies and stunning simultaneous cadences and its exhilarating runs and arpeggios. Though the primary purpose of this galante work is to entertain, there is a sudden change to a darker mood just before the conclusion of the Andante, until Mozart disperses the clouds at the end. With all the sophisticated effects the composer calls forth from two keyboards, who needs an orchestra?

The program concludes with two little-known, and therefore welcome, delights: the Adagio and Fugue in C

Of course, all Butterfield's theory would be for naught, if he not were capable of making such a convincing argument for himself with his playing. It is gently rocking and warmly reflective in the opening *Allegretto*, turbulent and dramatic in the succeeding *Allegro*, and freely expressive and improvisatory sounding in the *Recitative-Fantasia*, alternating between quiet intensity and soaring majesty in the *Allegretto* finale which features some distinguished interplay between the two instruments.

Ralph Vaughn Williams' Six Studies in English folksong is up next, weaving its ineffable charm as Butterfield and Fugo explore its gently lilting melodies and warm harmonies. The program concludes with another often-arranged work, Franz Schubert's Sonata in A Minor, D 821. Originally written for a now defunct instrument, the *arpeggione*, which was fretted and tuned like a guitar but bowed like a cello, it is virtuosic in its sudden contrasts between light and dark, tranquil and stormy moods. It requires a delicacy in the execution that Butterfield confesses to have been both challenging and rewarding.



Borodin: Symphonies 1-3  
Gerard Schwarz, Seattle Symphony Orchestra  
Naxos

These are new recordings, made 2009-2011 in Seattle's Benaroya Hall, rather than reissues from the SSO's earlier period. As such, they reflect the current state of the orchestra, still in fine fettle as they honor Gerard Schwarz in his last season as music director before he assumes an emeritus role. The recordings are sufficiently clear and detailed to reveal telling points about three Borodin scores that are rich in color and detail.

Symphony No. 1 in E-flat Major shows Borodin valiantly trying to reconcile received sonata-allegro form with mighty native themes. Despite the sneers of his contemporaries that the form amounted to knock-offs of Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and Schumann, the Scherzo, at least, creates a vivid impression, especially in its Trio section where the long, soulful melody for the cello bears kinship with the music Borodin was writing for his yet-unfinished opera *Prince Igor*.

While the Borodin First is still in need of champions, the same cannot be said for his Second Symphony in B minor, which has enjoyed a secure place in the classical repertoire. With good reason, for it represents a more

minor, K546, in which the masterful fugue sallies forth in a "take-no-prisoners" mood, and a Larghetto and Allegro in E-flat Major. The last-named, a latter-day discovery (hence no Köchel number) is a tantalizing fragment in which the slow, thoughtful Larghetto gives no advance warning of the hi-jinks to follow in the Allegro, including the gracefully leaping second theme.



Piano Recital: Brahms/ Chopin / Debussy / Satie  
Duncan J Cumming, piano  
Centaur

Duncan Cumming, widely respected American concert pianist, scholar, and teacher, presents a well-loaded program ranging from Chopin to Satie. It's hard to remember when I've heard a more engaging piano recital, beginning with an account of Brahms' Piano Sonata in C Major, Opus 1, that is suffused with more pure lyricism than I'd been used to hearing. It is not note-perfect, as Cumming has some difficulty with the tumultuous tumbling measures at the very opening of the work that listeners immediately found reminiscent of the opening of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata (granted, they do not lie very conveniently under the hands). But when he regains his composure Cumming treats us to inspired playing of some of Brahms' most harmonically rich music. In the slow movement, he derives abundant lyrical beauty from the theme and variations based on the song "*Verstohlen geht der Mond auf*" (Stealthily, the moon doth rise), ending in a charming soprano-tenor duet between the two hands.

Brahms follows a stormy Scherzo, enfolding an all-too-brief lyric trio, with a stirring finale based on the opening of the first movement, but with the rhythm transformed. It is like a chase (Brahms, in fact, claimed to be inspired by Robert Burns' well-known poem "My Heart's in the Highlands") with the theme changed at each recurrence, en route to a radiant coda. Cumming obviously relishes its engaging rhythms and the passing notes that add so much to the harmonic beauty of this movement. It was an astonishing work for the 20-year-old Brahms; not until his Fourth Symphony, many years later, would he achieve as natural and powerful a synthesis of smoothly handled sonata form and fulsome romantic feeling. Cumming brings out this achievement to an optimal degree.

It is followed by Chopin's Scherzo No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op. 31, in which Cumming does a superb job of stressing the structural complexities that add up, for the listener, to

successful union of form and passion by a composer who had learned the rules well enough to know when to bend them, as he does in the opening movement, when the stirring fanfare and the surging melody in the brass, the changes in orchestration and tempo, turn the movement into a panoply of vivid contrasts rather than strict sonata form. Following a Scherzo in which quarter-note figures glide through the orchestra in a dazzling kaleidoscope of sound, the Andante, with its poignant horn melody that seems to embody all the vast loneliness of the steppes, is a moment that will live long in the listener's memory. The Finale is as jubilant and unrestrained as only Russian music can be.

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, left unfinished at Borodin's death and completed in two movements by Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov, gives a tantalizing peek at what might have been. That is true especially of the Trio, where Borodin used exotic material originally intended for *Prince Igor*. It completes an intriguing program in which we encounter echoes and pre-echoes of those well-known Polovetsians at every turn.

the tender lyricism of the trio section and the dark, sweeping forces that threaten to crush it. Arpeggiated chords, sometimes cascading and at other times quiet, add to the excitement of a piece that has been likened to a Byronic poem. Two Debussy Preludes from Book I, the sunlight-suffused *Les collines d'Anacapri* (the little hills of Anacapri) and the tumultuous *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest* (What the west wind saw) benefit from the litheness and freedom of Cumming's approach. We conclude with "play-time," in the form of Erik Satie's sharply depictive, often wickedly satirical *Sports et Divertissements* (Sports and Diversions), our pleasure in these deftly sketched miniatures being further enhanced by the inclusion of Satie's own impudent program notes in the booklet.



Byrd: Complete Consort Music  
Phantasm  
Linn Records

Phantasm, the "early music" consort of viols heard on this revelatory recording, brings together musicians who did their earliest training in places like Edinburgh, London, New York, and Helsinki for the purpose of re-creating the music of one of music's golden ages. Consisting of two Britons, Jonathan Manson and Emilia Benjamin, both tenor viols; two Finns, Markku Luolajan-Mikkola, bass viol, and Mikko Perkola, tenor & bass viols; and two Yanks, Wendy Gillespie, tenor & treble viols, and director Lawrence Dreyfus, treble viol, they combine a beautiful blend and harmonious style of playing with exacting scholarship to bring the music of that age to life once again.

In this instance, the subject is William Byrd (1540-1623), who was in many ways the most path breaking composer of his day. In an era when composers were undertaking the long and arduous transition from the old liturgical modes to the modern system of major and minor keys as the basis for composition and instrumental music was still in its infancy compared with the vocal (of which he was also a supreme master), Byrd's skill in counterpoint and harmony resulted in music of rare beauty. Of particular interest are his fantasias, dances, and "*In Nomine*" settings for various members of the family of viols playing in an ensemble known as a "consort." Gut-strung and softer-sounding than modern string instruments, they were bowed underhand (palm up) and typically rested on lap or tabletop; even the large bass viol did not have a peg but rested on the floor when it was played.

The present 80-minute CD comprises all of William Byrd's completed and undisputed music for viol consort. The foundation melody, known as the *cantus firmus*, was based on well-known vocal music, such as the settings of hymns or Masses, but occasionally included quotations from popular, even bawdy, songs such as the catchy duple-time hit from the refrain of "Greensleeves" that pops up suddenly in the Fantasia à 6 (that is, in 6 Parts). Byrd's harmony is at its richest and most imaginative in the three Fantasias à 3, where it is often hard to believe there are only three instruments playing. The solemnly beautiful settings based on hymns from the Compline, the liturgical office sung at close of day, are particularly satisfying in their mood of deep peace and comfort. One of my favorite items on the program is the second Fantasia à 6, ranging in mood from solemn to rather energetic, giving all the members of Phantasm the rare opportunity to make wonderful music together.