

these two 1838 masterpieces, with their respective dedications to Liszt and Chopin, as well as to assess how Collard's approach to Schumann has evolved in the ensuing decades.

Two striking features of this recording are the sheer beauty and health of Collard's sound at the instrument, lovingly captured last year at the recently opened Cité de la Musique et de la Danse in Soissons, and the attentive foregrounding of Schumann's vaunted 'inner voices'. The former precludes excessive speed and stridency, while the latter has the subliminal effect of making these readings seem thoroughly rooted and substantial.

Rootedness, however, is not the first thing one listens for in *Kreiseriana*. One of the aspects that made Nicholas Angelich's recent recording so fascinating was its willingness to explore the darkest, neurosis-infested corners of this mercurial work. Collard's interpretation could stand as the diametric opposite. Certainly far from sunny, it nevertheless plots a progress that never seems willing to sacrifice clarity or coherence for the grotesque.

The full-blooded, torrential first movement of the C major *Fantasia* is largely straightforward, with a thrust that seldom slows for reflection. The notorious leaps at the end of the second movement are perhaps the sanest I've heard. Not precipitously fast, though no less exciting for it, they are prepared by an intense focus on the inner voices in the passages immediately beforehand, so that when the contrary leaps occur, they seem more an overflowing of joy, than an explosion of pianistic athleticism. Perhaps even more remarkably, the final movement eschews visionary mysticism, opting instead for a narrative directly sung, guileless, unaffected, yet deeply poetic. Here too, the inner voices are given full play in what ultimately is a very satisfying reading. **Patrick Rucker**

Kreiseriana – selected comparison:

Angelich (1/16) (ERAT) 9029 59906-7

Stanford

38 Preludes from the two sets of Twenty-Four Preludes in all the Keys for Pianoforte, Opp 163 & 179

Sam Haywood *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68183 (70' • DDD)



Towards the end of his life Stanford wrote two sets of 24 Preludes for

piano boasting impeccable craft and characteristic resourcefulness as well as a most satisfying diversity of mood and genre. The key-scheme matches that of Bach's '48', and the present Hyperion survey contains all but 10 pieces from both books. From the First Set of 1918 I'd single out the charmingly capricious Humoresque (No 9), powerfully elegiac No 16, marked *Adagio (con Fantasia)* and an Irish lament or 'Caoine' in all but name, and deeply felt March (No 22) which – like the composer's enviably taut Third Piano Trio from the same year – bears a dedication to the memory of Maurice Gray (son of Alan Gray, Stanford's organist colleague at Trinity College, Cambridge). Finished some time around 1921, the Second Set likewise contains its fair share of treasures, not least the sanguine swagger of the E major *Alla marcia* (No 33), moody, barcarolle-like No 36 in F minor (echoes here of both Chopin and Fauré), noble Chaconne in F sharp minor (No 38), winsome Musette (No 42) and lofty A major *Alla sarabanda* (No 43). The valedictory final piece (appropriately entitled 'Addio') proves enormously touching.

Sam Haywood (a pupil of Paul Badura-Skoda and Maria Curcio, and regular chamber partner to – among others – Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis) does this repertoire absolutely proud; possessing a pleasingly rounded tone, sensitivity to dynamic nuance and flawless technical address, his is a decidedly superior brand of pianism. Exemplary sound (Ben Connellan) and scholarly annotation (Jeremy Dibble) offer additional incentive to check out this most rewarding issue. **Andrew Achenbach**

'Impromptu'

Beethoven Fantasy, Op 77 Chopin Three

Impromptus Dvořák Impromptu, B129

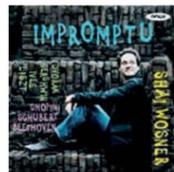
Gershwin Impromptu in Two Keys Ives

Improvitations - No 1; No 3 Liszt Impromptu

(Nocturne), S191 Schubert Impromptus, D935

Shai Wosner *pf*

Onyx © ONYX4172 (75' • DDD)



Lest anyone harbour reservations about Shai Wosner's gifts as an imaginative programmer, this CD should lay them to rest. Using Schubert's second set of Impromptus and three of Chopin's eponymous works as connective tissue, he has juxtaposed a series of pieces, ranging from Beethoven to Gershwin, resulting in a veritable feast of spontaneity.

Those familiar with Wosner's two previous CDs, devoted primarily to Schubert, will find in these D935 Impromptus the same heartfelt lyricism and ultra-refined pianism. In the F minor First, the opening material grows increasingly articulate, with gently lilting tremolo figurations floating beatifically above. The hand-crossing dialogue (2'43") is especially ardent in its longing. The eloquent A flat Second holds its *cantabile* aloft as if on a cloud. Yet, if one were to quibble in the face of such musical and pianistic wealth, Wosner's burnished, poised surfaces can obscure a more robust, masculine Schubert, a man subject to mercurial passions who never strays far from the vital roots of Austrian folk music. One could wish that passages evoking yodelling were earthier, repetitive rhythmic figures in the *Rosamunde* variations more rambunctious, or the flight from the Furies in the final F minor Impromptu more driven.

This abundance of finesse suits the Chopin Impromptus admirably, revealing something akin to epiphanic joy. In Op 29, melancholy mitigates higher spirits naturally and seamlessly. Op 36 exudes morning freshness with gentle sweetness, all the more vivid for the Trio's ecstatic heroism. The whole emerges with a psychological cohesion rarely encountered in this piece.

Of the other pieces – dreamy Liszt, searchingly expressive Ives, smart Gershwin and Dvořák's gentle disquietude – the Beethoven Fantasy warrants special mention. Wosner vividly suggests the white-hot inspiration that we know from historical accounts to have been a quality of Beethoven's improvisations. This reading couldn't sound more original or spontaneous had it been created on the spot.

All is faithfully captured by producer and engineer Simon Kiln. Wosner's abandonment of the still prevalent lexicographic programming practices of so many classical recordings is laudable. It demonstrates that, along with fresh perspectives, unusual juxtapositions, effected with intelligence and taste, may yield a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Don't miss this satisfying listen!

Patrick Rucker

