

With *Sechs Tonbilder in kleinen Rahmen* ('Sound pictures in small frames' – a charming title) and a better piano, one's affection for Philipp's music grows. These are thematically attractive, technically undemanding little pieces for children with descriptive titles ('Widmung', 'Polnisch' and the like) that might sit comfortably alongside the collections by Schumann and Tchaikovsky. *Für die Jüngend* follows in a similar though less memorable vein. The Portuguese pianist Luís Pipa is an effective advocate in these performances, all of which are first recordings and which I should guess are read from the music desk; but on this evidence I would suggest that Philipp Scharwenka needs cherry-picking, not a complete harvest. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 6, D845; No 18, D894; No 19, D958; No 21, D960

Shai Wosner *pf*

Onyx (M) 2 ONYX4217 (148' • DDD)



Of Shai Wosner's 13 or so CDs, if my calculations are correct, four are solo recordings, and three of those are built around Schubert. He has devoted entire recitals to the Viennese master and plays the four-hand works on tour with his regular keyboard partner, Orion Weiss. Wosner's latest Onyx release includes two of the final trio of sonatas (the C minor, D958, and the B flat, D960; he recorded the A major Sonata, D959, in 2014 – 1/15) plus two other sonatas from 1825 and 1826: the A minor, D845, and the G major, D894.

First it must be said that Wosner certainly has a way with Schubert's scherzos. All four of them here (though Schubert labels the third movements of both the G major and C minor Sonatas 'Menuetto') are light, beautifully articulated and fleet as the wind. They are filled with that almost indescribable *echt-Austrian folk naïveté* on which so much of their charm relies. At the same time, they are straightforward, avoiding the excesses that Brendel takes Schnabel to task for. Savour, for instance, the exquisite *ppp* lilt in the Trio of the G major Sonata's Menuetto.

In fact, it may be that the G major Sonata, in its freshness and originality, is the highlight of the entire recording. Few pianists are able to pull off the largely static opening of the first movement:

an abundance of quiet caution seems to paralyse them. But in Wosner's delicate reading, with its perfectly calculated rhythmic impulse, it's as though we imbibe the same crisp alpine air that permeates the great D major Sonata, D850. Most refreshing, perhaps, is the complete absence of any hint of cloying sentimentality. Similar nuanced simplicity allows Wosner to negotiate between the polar opposite characters of the *Andante*.

Evocation of immense space is a factor in the success of this B flat Sonata as well, space being the operative here in lieu of monumentality. The opening movement's noble theme flows with heart-gripping earnestness, unmarred by the less than convincing dry, abrupt termination of the bass trill. Clipped staccatos likewise pose only minor distractions to the persuasiveness of the movement's unfolding discourse. Great depth and unaffected poignancy characterise the *Andante sostenuto*, with beautifully voiced harmonic support. The finale provides ample catharsis, employing only the subtlest of means.

Though it seems ungracious to voice reservations in the face of such strong, original conceptions beautifully realised, I have lingering doubts about the two minor-key sonatas. Despite the poised and expressive slow movements of both works, the outer movements seem to present realms of heroism in the face of tragedy, rage at fate and qualities of sheer desperation that Wosner is yet reluctant to fully inhabit. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, this release can only underscore Wosner's fully justified reputation as one of the more remarkable Schubert pianists of our day. **Patrick Rucker**

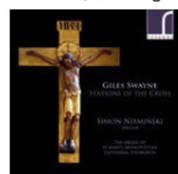
Swayne

Stations of the Cross

Simon Niemiński *org*

Resonus (C) RES10118 (60' • DDD)

Played on the organ of St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral, Edinburgh



For many organists the name of Giles Swayne became associated with their instrument with his *Riff-Raff* of 1983, which set out to bridge what the composer described as the 'gulf between classical music and its popular roots'. The massive *Stations of the Cross*, composed a little over 20 years later, is a very different cup of tea, making no concessions in either its scope or its musical language to anything in a

recognisably 'popular' vein. The scope of the work is dark, dramatic and emotionally intense and the musical language uncompromisingly dissonant.

From the dark, deep rumblings of the opening station ('Jesus is sentenced to death'), through the almost inaudible agony of 'The third fall' and the vicious, swiping clusters of 'Jesus is stripped of his clothes', to the palpitations and desolation of the final station ('Jesus' body is laid in the tomb'), Swayne's visionary writing is imbued with a level of powerful dramatic imagery that requires a highly resourceful organ and a particularly inspiring player to bring it off to its full effect.

It gets both here. The 2007 Matthew Copley organ of St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral in Edinburgh speaks in a disarmingly direct way with a sharp clarity that can seem uncomfortably harsh but certainly captures the work's 'immediacy and humanity', which Nigel Simeone refers to in his extensive booklet essay. For his part, Simon Niemiński champions this vast score with a compelling intensity that captures the visionary scope of Swayne's writing magnificently. This is neither a work nor a performance for the faint-hearted; but for those willing to give themselves up to this strangely powerful music, there is much to savour.

Marc Rochester

Dmitry Shishkin

Medtner Canzona serenata, Op 38 No 6.

Forgotten Melodies, Set 3, Op 40 – No 1, Danza col canto; No 2, Danza sinfonica **Rachmaninov** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 36 **Scriabin** Piano Sonata No 2, 'Sonata-fantasy', Op 19 **Tchaikovsky** Scherzo à la russe, Op 1 No 1

Dmitry Shishkin *pf*

La Dolce Volta (M) LDV223D (57' • DDD)



With its relatively short duration, five-language notes, moody photographs and generous space allotted to sponsors (Breguet Watches of Switzerland, who also support the Geneva competition), a feeling of luxury attends this issue. For some reason it comes to the UK only as a digital-only album. Yet the playing itself is of a very high order, as befits a Geneva first prize and Tchaikovsky Silver Medal winner.

The 27-year-old Russian has a rare feeling for the gentle wistfulness of Medtner's 'Canzona serenata' and 'Danza col canto', and he is no less at home in the more Schumannesque



Personal conceptions: Shai Vosner brings poise, imagination and a crucial sense of space to some of Schubert's greatest piano sonatas

solidity of the 'Danza sinfonica'. But it is above all the Scriabin *Sonata-fantasy* that reveals his credentials as a poet-pianist. His exquisite shaping and layering of textures makes for an unusually private experience of the first movement, and the sheer *Fingerfertigkeit* he brings to the *Presto* finale is a thing of wonder. I have always thought of this as one of the less than fully assured of Scriabin's sonatas but Shishkin has challenged that perception, making me want to sit down and learn it properly.

He brings a similarly cultured approach to the Rachmaninov Second Sonata. Disdaining temptations to let the *fortissimos* detonate and the *pianissimos* languish, he presents it as a thoroughly musical, integrated whole. True, the agogic hesitations that accompany this approach detract somewhat from the thrust and thrill normally associated with the piece, and there were times when I felt a lack of the last ounce of sheer power and grandeur – maybe a symptom of not enough body weight behind the sound?

I would like to hear Shishkin live before being too confident in that last

verdict. The sound quality here is fine, but with a slight tendency to thinness in *piano* and glassiness in *forte* (the high points in the Tchaikovsky Scherzo feel just a little tight). Not that this will discourage me from returning to his Medtner and Scriabin for inspiration.

David Fanning

'The Diabelli Project'

Beethoven Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli, Op 120 Diabelli Waltz

Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli by

Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kreutzer, Liszt,

Moscheles, FXW Mozart, Schubert and Czerny

New Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli by

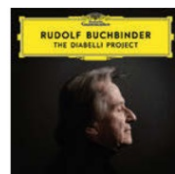
Auerbach, Dean, Hosokawa, Jost, Lubman,

Manoury, M Richter, Shchedrin, Staud,

Tan Dun and Widmann

Rudolf Buchbinder *pf*

DG (M) © 483 7707GH2 (96' • DDD)



Anton Diabelli, the pianist, composer, and publisher from near Salzburg,

brought out Beethoven's Op 120 in 1823 and the following year included it as the first of a two-volume set, *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein* ('Patriotic Artists Association'), with the second volume devoted to variations by 50 other composers. The simple waltz that Diabelli supplied for the project, intended to benefit widows and orphans of the Napoleonic Wars, has inspired appreciation from writers like Bülow, Tovey and Maynard Solomon, and scorn from others, such as William Kinderman. Interpreters seem to fall into similar camps. Some, Artur Schnabel for instance, present the waltz as integral to a magnificent artwork, interpreting it as a charming prologue. Others, such as Rudolf Buchbinder, perhaps motivated to highlight the significance of Beethoven's variations above its tawdry source, treat it as beneath contempt, the sooner out of the way, the better.

Throughout his long career, Rudolf Buchbinder, who is now 73, has been identified with the music of Beethoven and Mozart. His book, *Mein Beethoven: Leben mit dem Meister* ('My Beethoven: