

hobnobbing with for decades. One meets wondrous things: humour, juvenility and even a bit of Viennese buffoonery – a notable feat of Schubertian interpretation!

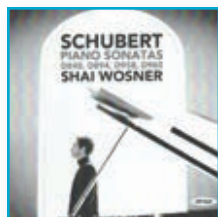
Perhaps it is worthy to note in these trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic that Gaudet is also a full-time emergency physician. We eagerly await the future instalments of his recording project once the current crisis has abated. Our world will need more Schubert *like this*.

**Adam Sherkin**

### **Schubert – Piano Sonatas D845; D894; D958; D960**

**Shai Vosner**

**Onyx ONYX 4217 (shaiwosner.com)**



▶ While Schubert succeeded in publishing only three piano sonatas during his lifetime, the depth of his world is fully revealed in this genre, especially in the late sonatas presented on this album. Shai Vosner, considered to be one of the most prominent Schubert interpreters, is so intimately connected to that world that he becomes a guide of sorts, leaving no corners of

Schubert's musical mind untouched. A beautiful essay Vosner wrote in the liner notes for this album brings these intimate explorations to the next level.

In contrast to the preceding period of songwriting, Schubert's late piano sonatas opened up a different microcosm, putting on full display the unique ingredients of his musical mode – the uncanny combination of intimate gestures in a large setting. Four sonatas on this album show different aspects of that mode – dark, melancholy momentum in *Sonata No.16 in A Minor*, transparent stillness in *Sonata No.18 in G Major*, relentless fire in *Sonata No.19 in C Minor*, and yearning introspection in his last major work, *Sonata No.21 in B-flat Major*. All four seek to deconstruct the conventional sonata structure and do it with the vulnerability of distinct musical expressions.

I love Vosner's sound, the manipulation of colours and his control over the smallest of details. Equally convincing in lyrical language as he is in bold, fiery passages, Vosner brings in wholesome devotion to this remarkable music.

**Ivana Popovic**

### **Louise Farrenc – Etudes & Variations for Solo Piano**

**Joanne Polk**

**Steinway & Sons 30133 (naxosdirect.com)**



▶ The name Louise Farrenc is practically unknown today, but during her lifetime, she was a respected composer and pedagogue at a time when the professional artistic world was very much male dominated. Born in Paris in 1804, she was an almost exact contemporary of the novelist George Sand. Like Sand – and also Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn – she was forced to

overcome societal biases of the time, but ultimately enjoyed a long and successful career. Her compositions include symphonies, overtures, chamber, choral and vocal music, and a great many pieces for solo piano. These latter are well represented on this Steinway & Sons recording featuring American pianist Joanne Polk.

The first three tracks on the disc are sets of variations; the first on a Russian song; the second on an aria from Bellini's *Norma*; and the third, the Lutheran chorale *Ein Feste Burg* used in Meyerbeer's successful opera *Les Huguenots*. The music is elegant and well crafted, with the original themes creatively varied. Throughout, Polk demonstrates a real affinity for the music, approaching it with considerable fluidity and élan.

The two sets of *Etudes Op.26* making up the remainder of the disc were so highly regarded that they were ultimately adopted by the

Conservatoire as required repertoire. There is much to appreciate in these musical gems – do I hear echoes of Mendelssohn and even Chopin? Many of them pose considerable technical challenges that surely only advanced pupils could have handled.

Despite its obscurity, Farrenc's music should never be dismissed as secondary. There is evidence of fine creativity, matched here by an equally fine performance. Kudos to Joanne Polk and to Steinway & Sons for helping bring to light repertoire that might otherwise have been overlooked. Recommended.

**Richard Haskell**

### **Russian Piano Music Series Vol.14 – Sergei Prokofiev**

**Stefania Argentieri**

**Divine Art dda 25156 (divineartrecords.com)**



▶ Prokofiev began his career as a concert pianist; hence it comes as no surprise that piano music comprises a significant part of his output – three concertos, nine sonatas and more than 100 pieces of various types written over a 40-year period. His continual quest for freedom from typical 19th-century styles resulted in a particular eclecticism, clearly evident in this attractive program on the Divine Classics label, performed by

Italian pianist Stefania Argentieri.

This disc is the second in the *Russian Piano Music* series devoted to Prokofiev and includes his first and sixth sonatas, *Six Pieces from Cinderella Op.102*, *Four Etudes Op.2* and the *Suggestion Diabolique*.

The *Piano Sonata No.1* from 1907 – but later revised – owes more than a passing reference not only to Schumann, but also to Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, the style lushly Romantic. In contrast, the sixth sonata, written in 1940, is pure pianistic gymnastics, technically beyond the capabilities of many pianists. Here, Argentieri demonstrates a true command of this daunting repertoire, meeting the challenges with apparent ease. Equally demanding are the *Four Etudes*, music of a confident 18-year-old pianist/composer eager to demonstrate his skills. The set was originally intended as a “slap in the face” to conservative audiences, but it also earned him a loyal following.

*Cinderella* is one of Prokofiev's most popular ballets and while the set of piano transcriptions from 1944 is equally delightful, it's the youthful *Suggestion Diabolique* where Argentieri once again proves her pianistic prowess. Aptly marked *Prestissimo Fantastico*, the piece demands extraordinary virtuosity – a true *perpetuum mobile*, with a surprisingly calm conclusion that brings the disc to a subdued, but most satisfying conclusion.

**Richard Haskell**

### **A Little Dark Music 2**

**Frank Horvat**

**IAM who IAM Records (frankhorvat.com)**



▶ Toronto composer and pianist Frank Horvat's passionate concern for social and environmental issues has long been a core theme in his music. His 2010 album, *A Little Dark Music*, for example, featured *Earth Hour*, an hour-long solo piano improvisation performed in the dark. In it, the composer-pianist passionately advocated for a sustainable approach to the environ-

ment. A decade later, Horvat's follow-up solo grand piano release, *A Little Dark Music 2*, his 11th album, continues to express his extra-musical concerns for the health of our planet.

The title theme of the opening hour-long track *Earth Hour 2* is confirmed by the explicit program notes. Horvat renders a personal commentary on the state of our global environment in this expansive solo. The liner notes suggest we take the time “to become grounded