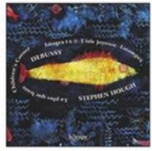


Debussy

Estampes; Images I; Images II; Children's Corner; La plus que lente; L'isle joyeuse

Stephen Hough (piano)

Hyperion CDA 68139 69:25 mins



Stephen Hough's Debussy playing at the Royal Festival Hall a few years ago left me dangling

blissfully from cloud 30, never mind nine, so anticipation ran high for this album. And its beauties are many and varied. Whether it's the gorgeous delicacy with which he orchestrates the different layers of sound in *Estampes*' 'Pagodes', the louche sinuousness of *La plus que lente* (Debussy's closest thing to a café waltz) or the tenderness of 'The Little Shepherd' in *Children's Corner*, there's no doubt that Hough is largely in his element here.

Nevertheless, on the third time through I was still asking myself why I didn't love it quite enough. How is it that some of the melodic phrasing seems a bit over-stolid, that the colour palette is not as varied from piece to piece as it could be, that sometimes the pedalling seems a touch excessive, or that a few elements of *L'isle joyeuse* sound

almost lumpy instead of silken? It is so very untypical of Hough that it seemed necessary to check the booklet – and lo and behold, he's playing a Yamaha. Maybe it's wrong to blame the tool instead of the craftsman. But pianos can make one heck of a difference to a musical result; it's hard not to wonder if this choice is an experiment that, for this recording, doesn't prove wholly successful. *Jessica Duchon*

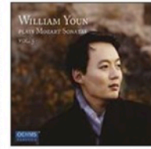
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mozart

Piano Sonatas, Vol. 5: Nos 6, 7 & 14; Fantasia in C minor

William Youn (piano)

Oehms Classics OC 1857 77:04 mins



An irresistible account of the Sonata in D, K284 opens this exceptionally engaging

and warmly recorded Mozart recital. Korean pianist William Youn, performing on a modern instrument, brings a sparkling array of colours to the quasi-orchestral textures of the opening *Allegro*, brilliant flourishes in the treble balanced by a firm and sonorous foundation in the bass. The rest of the work is equally enthralling – a charming and elegant Rondeau en Polonoise followed by an extended Finale where Youn works hard to maximise contrast and character in each of the 12 variations. In comparison to K284, the Sonata in C, K309 is a much less extrovert work. Youn perfectly encapsulates its charming mixture of playfulness and humour in the outer movements, and produces some wonderfully expressive cantabile playing in the central *Andante un poco adagio*.

With the C minor Fantasy, K475 and Sonata in C minor, K457, we move into rather different musical territory. Both works may appear powerful precursors of Beethoven's *Sturm und Drang* style, yet Youn steadfastly resists the temptation to over-dramatise the musical argument with heavy articulation and over-use of the sustaining pedal. At the same time, there are moments in the Fantasy where Youn could perhaps have allowed himself to be a bit more spontaneous in responding to the improvisatory nature of Mozart's invention. However, I have no such qualms about the

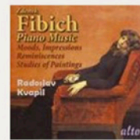
Reissues Reviewed by Rebecca Franks



Debussy Clair de Lune; Children's Corner Suite; Preludes Book 1 (selection) etc

Alto ALC 1364 (1988-91) 78:24 mins

A delicious disc of Debussy piano favourites played by **Martino Tirimo**, drawn from his complete recordings. He has an instinct for the music's poetry, playing with sensitivity and a velvet touch. ★★★★★



Fibich Moods, Impressions, Reminiscences; Studies of Paintings

Alto ALC 1351 (1993) 70:20 mins

The Czech pianist **Radoslav Kvapil** does sterling work championing his compatriot's music here. There are an impressive 384 *Moods, Impressions and Reminiscences* to choose from, and Kvapil has chosen an engaging, varied selection. It's all beautifully played. ★★★★★



Lang Lang Romance: works by Liszt, JS Bach, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven et al

Sony 88985466782 (2010-17) 79:00 mins

This new compilation brings together 'reflective and poetic' items from **Lang Lang**'s discography. His mellifluous technique and legato impress, but there's a tendency to blandness rather than character. ★★★



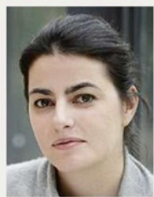
Tchaikovsky Grand Sonata; Children's Album

Alto ALC 1343 (1989) 62:30 mins

Mikhail Pletnev brings fierce life and commitment to Tchaikovsky's Grand Sonata. It's not a masterpiece, but the Russian pianist convinces otherwise. The charming miniatures of the *Children's Album* make an excellent counterpart. ★★★★★

BACKGROUND TO...

Dobrinka Tabakova (b.1980)



Born in Bulgaria, Tabakova moved to London to study at the Royal Academy

of Music, and graduated the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She studied composition under Diana Burrell, Simon Bainbridge, Robert Keeley and Andrew Schultz, and was awarded a Ph.D. in composition from King's College, London. Her choral piece 'Praise' was performed at St Paul's Cathedral for the Golden Jubilee of Elizabeth II. Her first full-length album, *String Paths* (on ECM), was awarded five stars by *BBC Music Magazine* and was nominated for a Grammy in 2014.

performance of the Sonata. The outer movements are delivered with energy and passion, and there's some lovely tender playing in the *Adagio*. Altogether, a fine conclusion to an impressive complete cycle.

Erik Levi

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Halo: music for piano

Kendall: On the Chequer'd Field Array'd; **Tabakova:** Modétudes; **Halo;** Nocturne; **Phibbs:** Preludes Andrew Matthews-Owen (piano) *Nimbus NI 6354* 62:79 mins



Pianist Andrew Matthews-Owen has long been noted as a sensitive collaborator in his more usual role as an accompanist. But he also holds dear working with composers and, for the first time on disc, he steps out solo to present music by three rightly held in high regard: Joseph Phibbs, Hannah Kendall and Dobrinka Tabakova.

The two most recent works were written for Matthews-Owen. Hottest off the press is Phibbs's *Preludes* (2016); six beautifully restrained impressionist essays which comprise an affecting journey touched by personal connection: Colin Matthews is one dedicatee; the memory of Steven Stucky is another.

Kendall's *On the Chequer'd Field Array'd* (2013) depicts the stages of a game of chess. Whether the ensuing battle of wits is internal or between opponents seems not to matter – but what does are the conflicts played out across the keyboard in vivid and intriguing patterns.

Modétudes (1994–99) are seven playful miniatures by Tabakova, characterising different modes. Her folk leanings delight, giving way to a passionate romanticism in *Halo* (1999). The title describes colours shimmering from the moon – as they do, evocatively, from the piano thanks to Matthews-Owen's unshowy finesse. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★