



R. Schumann: Piano Quartet & Piano Quintet

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Hideyo Harada trained in her native Japan, as well as in Europe and, latterly, at the Moscow Conservatory with the venerable Victor Merzhanov (still teaching, aged 91). This third release for Audite reveals her as an engaging artist. Throughout, her carefully detailed fingerwork and pedalling bring clarity within the rich textures, and although she responds well to the introspective moments of the Fantasie – especially in an unusually serene final movement, which becomes something of a delicious reverie – she is more than equal to the work's blustery, testosterone-driven passion. The fact that her expressive force seems entirely driven from within makes for a highly meaningful account.

Her Kreisleriana displays the same combination of athleticism and poetry. An increasingly transparent and deftly spun middle section in no.3, 'Sehr aufgeregt', emerges into a fiery climax, amply underlining the wide mood-swings of Johannes Kreisler – the unstable, borderline-genius music-master of E.T.A. Hoffmann's creation, on whom Schumann based this set of fantasias.

Young Brazilian-born, Paris-based Felipe Scagliusi features Schumann's Piano Sonata no.3 as the focus of his new disc, a work still unjustly neglected despite being championed by Horowitz. Scagliusi is strongest here in the darkly-tinged slow variations movement, based on an Andante theme by the young Clara Wieck. What hinders the rest of the sonata is a lack of surging heroism, which tends to flatten even Scagliusi's unarguably impressive quicksilver articulation in the Finale. 'Tumult and chaos are expressed in a grandiose style,' Harry Halbreich is quoted as saying of the first movement in the booklet notes. Something of this spirit seems to escape Scagliusi. The sonata's flattened trajectory spills into the first of the three op.28 romances in particular, and in no.2 a more lingering, cantabile line is necessary. Scagliusi has scaled the technical demands of these works, but the peak of spontaneous expression seems a short way into the distance.

Claves' ongoing series of Schumann's complete solo piano works continues with Swiss pianist Francesco Piemontesi. There is an immediacy to his characterization of themes, a strikingly coloured quality throughout – even in the tumultuous first movement of the third sonata – though some listeners may wish for a shade more heft. This is neat and natty Schumann, and no worse for it: its freshly sprung feel comes to the fore in the third sonata's Scherzo, while the Finale sparkles with clarity.

Piemontesi's control of intensity in the Fantasie is one of its key features, giving the hymn-like 'Im Legendenton' (In the manner of a legend) section an unusual transparency. His distinctive musical personality and unshowy approach bring a new lightness, for example, to the often stridently march-like second movement of the Fantasie. The turbulent Allegro vivace first movement of the sonata no.1 is served up

with a degree of light majesty and the second-movement Aria achieves a twilight colouring. This isn't the gutsiest Schumann playing, but it is unswervingly sure-footed, and attests to a genuine talent. Though the works on Tzimon Barto's disc are, for many, not top-drawer Schumann, it's rewarding to have the two piano-concertante works (op.92 and op.134) as bedfellows. Nestling between them is the rarely heard 'Ghost' Variations, though with the five variations all reflecting the stasis of the theme, this is perhaps a piece that appeals mainly to collectors.

The pianist's role in op.92 is more restricted than in op.134, which gives American Tzimon Barto more scope to flex his pianistic muscle, which he does with flair. The Six Etudes were written, following a period of intensive counterpoint study, for a kind of pedal extension device placed under the grand piano, to emulate the organ pedals. These are wonderful pieces, and show Eschenbach and Barto well matched both in touch and in temperament.

At around 56 minutes' duration, Claire-Marie Le Guay's CD may not be the most generously filled release, but this German quartet and French pianist give unstintingly of their considerable energies. In the first movement of the Piano Quartet, the languorous Sostenuo introduction bursts into an Allegro with focused rhythmic drive. The following Scherzo has a brilliant sense of urgency. The piano sound is present enough to highlight Le Guay's agile touch, but it blends in well with the ensemble as part of a soundscape that is rich and detailed.

In the Piano Quintet the risingscale figure of the Scherzo is bracingly articulated, and the same movement's rustic second trio is as engaging as its bristling coda. The finale's closing fugue, which combines its own march-like theme with the first movement's opening theme, gathers a formidable momentum.