



R. Schumann: Fantasie op. 17,
Kreisleriana op. 16 & Arabeske op. 18

aud 92.577

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When measured against all the other Schumann releases I have reviewed in the past year, this one places dead last. In almost every track there is at least one sizable stretch of music that comes off as strange. Her telltale mannerism in the Fantasy's first movement involves slowing down at all the phrase endings. Why not just play it straight or try rushing things for a change? II, a march Schumann indicates should be "energetic", is deflated right from the start. There's no meat in the thick chords and no snap in the dotted rhythms. More problems plague the last movement. Though the overall wash of sound remains pretty enough, there is little care given to any of the melodic lines. A deadness pervades the whole thing—most excruciatingly at the contrarymotion arpeggios that appear near the work's close. Harada's Kreisleriana is slightly better, but all the extroverted pieces are too harsh, aggressive, and note-heavy; all the introverted ones are too soft and wandering. Of course, I have nothing against pianists working to cultivate a bipolar sound to reflect Schumann's conflicted moods and mental states. But if the music becomes unpleasant to hear in either direction, you have gone too far. Harada would be well served by going back to basics, letting the scores suggest interpretations rather than imposing her own on them. I am sure she would find that the more natural-sounding results, which demand less patience from audiences, would attract far more of them to her product.