



C. Saint-Saëns: Complete Piano Concertos

aud 91.650

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Turok's Choice (2010.04.01)

Russian pianist Anna Malikova has nimble fingers and plays with much warmth, which makes her an ideal pianist to record Saint-Saëns's five Piano Concertos. Her brilliant performances are magnificently accompanied by Thomas Sanderling and the WDR Symphony of Cologne (hybrid SACD 92.650, two discs). This music is far from trifling. The First, an early work, is "romantic" in the German sense, with much horn writing. The Second, said to "begin like Bach and end like Offenbach," features a magnificent scherzo as a middle movement and a tarantella for the last. The Third, perhaps the most standard of the five, offers dramatic material. The Fourth has the wonderful "one finger" theme based on a French folksong. The Fifth has a cogent first movement, a very original, middle-Eastern sounding slow movement, only to return to the boulevards of Paris in the last. In all these works, the composer's clean textures (which clearly inspired Ravel in his piano music) are omni-present, as well as his wellcrafted orchestration and keen sense of form. There is much to enjoy here, including the fine sound.