



Works for Solo Violin: Bartók - Prokofiev - Ysaÿe

aud 97.758

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[American Record Guide](#) (MAGIL - 01.03.2019)

This is the fourth recording by German violinist Franziska Pietsch that I have had the pleasure to review. The earlier ones were the Grieg Violin Sonatas (J/F 2016), the Franck Violin Sonata and Szymanowski's Myths and Romance (S/O 2017), and the Prokofieff Violin Sonatas and Five Melodies (N/D 2016). In those, she showed that she is a charismatic performer with her own ideas about the music. She doesn't just regurgitate the interpretations fed to her by her teachers. I noticed her enchanting way with passages at low dynamic levels and was bowled over by her superb Prokofieff disc, so I was very excited to get this disc to review when I noticed the Prokofieff Solo Violin Sonata in the program. This sonata, the Bartok Solo Violin Sonata, and the Six Solo Violin Sonatas by Eugene Ysaÿe are, I believe, the finest works in that genre produced since 1900 (sorry, Reger and Hindemith).

My excitement turned to disappointment when I listened. I noticed that she wasn't able to sustain the long lines of the Franck Sonata, and here she fails to elucidate the architecture of the Bartok. It is a very classical work in its emphasis on form, and she doesn't make the work's structure her first priority, opting instead to use varying tone colors in an attempt to give the piece episodic interest. This does not do the piece justice, in spite of the fact that Bartok was a great colorist, especially in his writing for strings. It fragments the work. Robert Mann's recording (J/A 2003) is the most effective at making the form of the piece plain, and Pietsch and everyone else would do well to listen to it. On top of this, she decided not to play Bartok's original quarter tones in the finale, which I believe ruins the buzzing house fly-like character of those passages.

I was surprised to hear Pietsch failing to bring out the simple lyricism of the Prokofieff. Again, her interpretation is episodic and fails to knit these three brief movements together. I expected that she would finally feel sympathy for the two Ysaÿe sonatas; they are the most volatile and episodic works here and demand a broad range of moods and colors from the performer. Again, she is more interested in surface effects than in getting to the heart of the music, especially in the deeply felt Sonata 2, which is a character portrait of the great French violinist Jacques Thibaud.

These are the weakest performances I have heard from her. She relies on her personality instead of her intellect to sustain the music, but it can't. Great music must be met on its own terms and cannot be reduced to a medium for the display of virtuosity and temperament. I had always found Pietsch's manner very appealing, but it hinders rather than helps these performances. The violin was made in 1751 by the Milanese violin maker Carlo Antonio Testore.

Franziska Pietsch
Solo violin sonatas by Bartók, Prokofieff, Ysaÿe
Audite 97.758 – 64 minutes

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