



Fantasque - French Violin Sonatas by Fauré, Debussy, Ravel & Poulenc

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Franziska Pietsch is one of the few musicians whose releases I eagerly anticipate. She is a very individual artist, one of the few with a recognizable style and interpretations unlike anyone else's. Her recording of the violin sonata of Dmitri Shostakovich (S/O 2019) is rivalled only by the Khachatryan siblings' (J/A 2008). Josu de Solaun did a superb job playing on that disc, and he is just as good here. Unless you want to add the sonata by Franck, who was Belgian but worked in Paris, Pietsch has collected all four of the most important French violin sonatas here. The Fauré is played beautifully, with enough propulsion in each movement but with occasional touches of rubato and tempo fluctuations to bring out interesting aspects of the score that others don't, like their slow beginning to the finale. Going from the Fauré to the Debussy is a huge jump not only in time (41 years) but in style. We have entered the 20th Century and are well into the Great War. Fauré's flowing melodies are replaced by fractured phrases and sudden, brief outbursts. I call this style of composition stream of consciousness. The duo is perfectly comfortable with this and understand it from the inside out. Again, their interpretation is unique. As in the Fauré, they take a bit of time to build energy in the finale, to good effect. Pietsch displays a wonderfully wide tonal palette in this sonata, which needs it more than any other violin sonata composed up to its time. Ravel's sonata was completed in 1927, 10 years after Debussy's, and it shows it. The first movement has a dignity and stateliness inspired by the postwar neoclassical movement. II, 'Blues', is strongly influenced by American blacks, who were beginning to travel to Paris to perform at clubs and in shows like the Revue Negre of 1925, where Josephine Baker made her European debut. Pietsch and Solaun bring a smoky character to the movement. Their perpetual motion finale is fleet and bumptious at the same time. Francis Poulenc's Violin Sonata was written in 1943, during the occupation. The piece is clearly a cri de coeur, and the duo bring out its pathos like few others, characterizing the various sections with great vividness. This is great, big-hearted playing. Only Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and Anne-Marie McDermott are in this league (M/A 2006). Audite's sound is superb, very full yet clear. The piano has a huge, rich sound without ever overbalancing the violin. Solaun's booklet notes are very good. Pietsch's instrument was made by the Milanese violin maker Carlo Antonio Testore in 1751.