



**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky & Sergei
Rachmaninov: The Seasons &
Variations on a Theme of Corelli**

aud 92.569

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[Fanfare](#) (Peter J. Rabinowitz - 01.05.2009)

Hideyo Harada's wide international training includes study in Moscow with Victor Merzhanov, and on these new accounts of two Russian staples, she reveals much of the keen edge that marks Merzhanov's fabled recordings of the Brahms Paganini Variations and the Rachmaninoff Third, offering highly controlled readings in which the music's gestural profile emerges clearly. I don't mean to suggest that Harada gives us uniformly hard-toned music-making – Tchaikovsky's "January", for instance, begins the cycle with gentle meditation, and she does a fine job of conveying the muted ardor of "April" and the gentle breezes of the opening section of "May". Nor could she be accused of pushing the tempos or consistently sharpening the music's angles. The Tchaikovsky, in particular, is often on the slow side (sometimes, as in "January", radically so), and there are flashes of exquisite lyricism that reveal the tonal polish that so attracted Peter Burwasser to her Grieg collection (31:6) – listen, for instance, to the melancholy at the end of "October".

Still, when the playing doesn't work, you're more likely to accuse her of excessive belligerence than of excessive bel canto, more likely to regret a lack of spontaneity than any lack of discipline (surely, the Intermezzo of the Rachmaninoff needs more improvisatory character, just as his 14th Variation needs a more retrospective spirit). In the end, then, this CD is more memorable for its kick than for its grace – for the vitality of "August", for the implacable grip of Rachmaninoff's Fifth Variation, for the bite of the 10th, for the bravura confidence with which she builds to the Intermezzo and later to the Coda.

Recommendation? This recital can't displace the more richly characterized classics from such pianists as Wild in both works or – in the Rachmaninoff – Ashkenazy (especially his earlier recording), Rodriguez, and Grimaud. Still, heard on her own, Harada will provide plenty of pleasure, especially given Audite's state-of-the-art sound. Well worth the attention of pianophiles.