



Franz Schubert: Wanderer Fantasy & Piano Sonata No. 21

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Gramophone (Harriet Smith - 2012.06.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Wanderer Fantasy from the Schubert Competition winner

A couple of years back I much enjoyed Hideyo Harada's disc of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov (4/09). This release proves to be a far more mixed affair. She begins with the Wanderer Fantasy, revelling in the colouristic possibilities of its slow section, and proves more than equal to the work's considerable and frequently Wlpianistic technical demands. The final two sections prove more problematic: in the Presto her phrasing can become fussy, while her lack of a constant tempo is distracting. And, where the final fugue builds unassailably in the finest versions (Brendel and Richter would be my pianists of choice), Harada's acquires a dogged feel through overuse of slowings down, breaking up the momentum. So a mixed bag.

But it's in Schubert's final sonata that the real problems occur. It's a work that famously throws out the rulebook: tension, drama and brilliance are all rejected, replaced by writing that induces a kind of hypnotic state in the listener. At least, it does in a first-rate performance. This is what makes Schubert's late music so &agiJe, for it lives or dies by its performer. And in order to have that sense of hypnosis, of suspended animation over the vast spans of this work, the pianist has to set up and maintain some kind of steady tempo in this instrumental Winteneise. Otherwise Schubert the sleepwalker (to coin Brendel's phrase) wanders off into the forest. Harada is, alas, seemingly incapable of holding a speed for more than a bar at a time and her playing sOWlds tentative and lacking in line. She sOWlds as lost as we become during the next 22 minutes of Schubert's huge first movement. Though the Scherzo is not without moments of imaginative touch, it can't erase the memory of what has gone before. Urtless you have a strong masochistic sa-eal