



Works for Solo Violin: Bartók - Prokofiev - Ysaÿe

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 2018.12.01)

Franziska Pietsch truly takes ownership of Bartók's Solo Sonata. Her interpretation is prompted by the idea of his 'explosive seriousness', a notion that fans the flames of her performance, especially in the opening Chaconne and the Fugue that follows, where the voicing has an orchestral dynamism about it. The Chaconne leavens anger with moments of profound repose, always spinning the illusion that this isn't Bartók's music but Pietsch's own, that we just happened to walk in while she was in the throes of spontaneous creation. That's the effect but the truth is rather more subtle, a carefully wrought structure that's never jemmied out of shape. The Melodia is beautifully phrased; the closing Presto a frenzied will o'-the-wisp where the quarter-tones are an integrated part of the narrative. So often they sound accidental rather than colouristic.

It's fair to say that Bartók's Sonata is the principal draw here but the second of Ysaÿe's Solo Sonatas (dedicated to the great French violinist Jacques Thibaud) is also a work to reckon with, its opening 'Obsession' toying with Bach's E major Prelude (Solo Partita No 3) while ghosting the 'Dies irae' chant, which dominates the rest of the piece. Again the cut and thrust of Pietsch's playing makes a big impression, while the Bachian axis is nearly as evident in the single-movement Third Sonata, dedicated to that pre-eminent Bachian Georges Enescu. Here passion takes the upper hand and Pietsch never stints in that respect, nor in her masterful handling of chords.

Perhaps the lightest work on the programme is Prokofiev's Solo Sonata which, as Norbert Hornig tells us in his useful booklet note, was composed in 1947 as an exercise in unison-playing for violin students. Of especial note is the folky third movement, where Pietsch focuses the spirit to perfection. Audite's sound quality is extremely realistic so if the programme appeals, I wouldn't hesitate. If it's just the Bartók Sonata in digital sound you're after then Pietsch is up there with Kelemen (Hungaroton, 5/13) and Ehnes (Chandos, 1/13), maybe even marginally more outspoken than either.