

d finale has cartoon-like sections and a brief spell at its center. "Lots of fun" the composer.

is a six-minute solo violin at year's Carl Nielsen Violin ntially lyrical, as the title across as a sort of dreamy istent violin concerto. The ng.

*Shores of the Cosmic Ocean* Carl Sagan, is a nine-move- rdion and string quartet. ces explore the moon, the Way with quotations from e, and Sagan himself and a rrad for good measure. ng quartet proves an inter- usic spans a variety of tex- om explosive (1) to expres- sive (6) to grotesque (7). ollowing. His fans will want

GIMBEL

*Magnificat; Te Deum*

om Wimpenny, org; Ensemble 's Cathedral Choir/ Andrew

2653—65 minutes

a deft performance that's a areful to rival Rutter's own. *Magnificat* is as good as any. d it well but this is better; . and more sumptuously rientes', which might be the terlude of all, is sung gor- Elizabeth Cragg. (Cleobury ith predictably pale results.) heard in the composer's sion for choir, organ, and a. If the jacket hadn't men- 't have noticed. (Or cared, 'he 8-minute *Te Deum* also oping these folks get a crack n with the same engineering ish and Latin texts are sup- gnificat, exit Cleobury and

GREENFIELD

*Piano Concerto 2; Paganini Rhapsody; 1 Fantasy*

Tbilisi Symphony/ Jansug

le 3151—66 minutes

have been around for nearly it appeared on Infinity Clas- get label created by Sony to

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compete with Pilz, LaserLight, et al. Though the list price was set at \$4.98, they sold in many stores for as little as \$2.99. Cascavella's reissue is at full price.

Is it worth it? Ms Bolkvadze is a competent pianist, but these are rather dull run-throughs. In the Saint-Saens II lacks any playfulness, while III is earthbound. The abysmal Tbilisi orchestra is at its worst in the Liszt—it plods lifelessly until the final pages, where Ms Bolkvadze and Maestro Kakhidze go horribly out of sync. And there's nothing very rhapsodic in the Rachmaninoff, where some glaring orchestral bloopers give the performance an amateur-hour feel. Perhaps the substandard playing of the Tbilisi ensemble explains why the balances are so ridiculous in the Saint-Saens and the Rachmaninoff. The orchestra sounds like it's at the other end of the hall, while the piano is in your lap.

I'm a firm believer in the theory that exceptional performances can be found in unlikely corners, but these are exceptionally bad.

KOLDYS

*SARASATE: Fantasy on Magic Flute; on Faust; Navarra; Muineiras; Barcarolle Venetienne; Introduction et Caprice-Jota*

Tianwa Yang, v; Navarra Symphony/ Ernest Martinez Izquierdo

Naxos 572275—59 minutes

In my review of the second volume of this set (M/A 2008), I described Tianwa Yang's playing as "perfect", a word I reserve for only the rarest of circumstances and the rarest of violinists. I have to use it again for this recording. In addition to perfection, this third volume is full of surprise and delight; surprise because aside from 'Navarra' all the music is new to me, and delight because I love it all.

The orchestra is as present as the soloist on this recording, and Izquierdo brings out all the delightful details of wind writing in the orchestration, particularly in the Mozart Fantasy and the Faust Fantasy. Yang plays both solo violin parts in 'Navarra', but she does each using a different Vuillaume violin. One is her Vuillaume, and the other is the Vuillaume that Sarasate played. I don't even want to think about how Sean Lewis, the remarkable engineer, was able to make this work. Then again, he wasn't working with an ordinary virtuoso or an ordinary orchestra.

This is the third volume of eight. I'm already looking forward to Volume 4, which I hope Yang records with the same orchestra and engineer.

FINE

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**SCARLATTI: Sonatas**

Alexandre Tharaud, p  
Virgin 42016—71 minutes

Tharaud has a supple touch. He allows the sound of the piano to bloom and breath, especially in the slower sonatas, where his messa di voce would make Caccini proud. The fast sonatas reveal a dissonance between Tharaud and the instrument. The ceiling of the piano's sound and threshold Tharaud (or perhaps Scarlatti) is pushing toward exist on parallel lines, most of the time. In K 141, the tension between the pianist and the piano becomes a source of inspiration and energy. In that sonata, Tharaud and the piano meet halfway. This is an honest recording that does not whitewash or ignore the peculiar challenges of performing Scarlatti on the modern piano.

KATZ

**SCARLATTI: Sonatas**

Alberto Mesirca, g—Paladino 3—80 minutes

Jan Sommer, Per Dybro, g  
Scandinavian 220572—56 minutes

Two new releases devoted to Scarlatti transcriptions, one particularly wonderful. A little more than a year ago, I reviewed a performance by Luigi Attademo on Brilliant (M/I 2010) and remarked that entire discs devoted to Scarlatti on guitar were rather rare. Ask and ye shall receive. The next issue I got another by Steven Marchionda (J/A 2010), with a completely different program and a completely different approach. Now here are two more, again with transcriptions mostly by the players, and only two duplications (K 109 and K 466).

Mesirca's performance is the best of the four. Indeed, this is the best Scarlatti I've ever heard on solo guitar. It even rivals the magnificent Assad brothers' recording on Nonesuch—and they had the advantage of two guitars. This is sparkling playing. Passage work is tossed off effortlessly, no matter how rapid; ornamentation is graceful and elegant, perfectly and stylishly realized. He has a wonderful range of dynamics and color and a flawless tone. He has obviously listened to Kirkpatrick's advice that one should not let the tonal restrictions of Scarlatti's harpsichord restrict the range of expression on an instrument with a wider palate. He can express melancholy and mystery when the music requires it, but he is best in passages of sheer joy and exuberance—and that, for me, is what Scarlatti does best.

I might have had a more positive response to the Sommer and Dybro recording if this weren't up for a side-to-side review. Their performance is certainly enjoyable—they also have a lovely tone and a nice dynamic range

Ensemble is good, and they play with ease except in the most demanding passages, where they can't match Mesirca's virtuosity. Their approach to ornamentation is old-fashioned—the sort of thing Segovia might have used. It's more 19th Century than baroque, so if that annoys you, you'd best avoid this release. Notes are scant, and there is a short bio of Sommer, though no mention of his partner.

Still, they also have a nice sense of joy here, and there are few duplications between the two recordings, so if you love Scarlatti on the guitar, you won't regret getting both. But you certainly should seek out Mesirca's outstanding record.

KEATON

**SCHARWENKA:** *Piano Concerto 4; Mataswintha Overture; Andante Religioso; Polish National Dances* (3)  
François Xavier Poizat, Poznan Philharmonic/  
Lukasz Borowicz

Naxos 572637—67 minutes

"Energy, harmonic interest, strong rhythm, many beautiful melodies, and much Polish national character—all that and much more is to be found in the music of Franz Xaver Scharwenka", writes HV Hamilton in the pages of Grove's (Fifth Edition). Reviewing Seta Tanyel's Collins CD of Scharwenka's First Piano Concerto (July/Aug 1992), Donald Manildi reminds us that this sort of effusive, heart-on-sleeve keyboard writing is "an exhilarating celebration of what the piano can really sound like when a skilled virtuoso-composer produces a brilliant vehicle aimed at nothing more (or less) than the pure enjoyment of soloist and audience"—a sentiment I was pleased to echo on reviewing Ms Tanyel's splendid follow-up of 2 and 3 five years later (May/June 1997).

Why then is his music played so seldom in concert these days? The only piece you're likely to recognize from recital programs is the 'Polish National Dance', Op. 3:1, one of the three offered here. Like Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor and Paderewski's Minuet in G this one piece came to be not only Scharwenka's "calling card" but also his curse, the one piece audiences clamored to hear. Certainly Scharwenka took great pride in his Polish heritage; and even when he strays far from home, as in the tarantella that caps the Fourth Concerto, his music is always highly emotional, deeply felt, and by any standard fully equal to anything by his far better known compatriots, Chopin and Paderewski.

In the Fourth Concerto Scharwenka compels attention right away with a massive orchestral tutti ending with a drum roll—reversing the order set by Brahms in his D-

minor Concerto—that soon develops into a melody vaguely redolent of the Dvořák concerto written some 30 years before. There's a broadly nostalgic episode with rippling keyboard configurations that will no doubt remind you of Liszt before the opening movement—by far the longest of the four—closes out in suitably dramatic style.

The Intermezzo, Allegretto molto tranquillo, starts out in the manner of a courtly minuet, with an unmistakable Gallic quality that suggests Saint-Saëns; but it turns quite stormy midway in, with echoes of the very opening theme (something of a "motto" apparently) flailing about with abandon. Somber Wagnerian trombones introduce the dark Lento, which allows both soloist and audience time for respite and reflection before the grumbling bassoons lead into the finale, where the stark "motto" is miraculously transformed into a mercurial tarantella that offers the soloist little chance to catch his breath, alternating with a hearty, galumphing secondary theme before everyone rushes to the final bar, once again spewing clear Lisztian cascades right and left. How such a fine piece could remain almost unknown to modern-day audiences I find difficult to understand.

And I might add it's also difficult to understand why Seta Tanyel never completed her Scharwenka concerto survey after the great success of the first two entries. Perhaps that decision was made for her by Hyperion—who later reissued 2 and 3 in their "Romantic Piano Concerto" series (Nov/Dec 2003): they already had a perfectly good performance by Stephen Hough in their catalog (Jan/Feb 1996). The two recordings—not just the performances—could scarcely be more different. Grenoble-born pianist François Xaver Poizat may not be a Pole, but he plays this music as you might expect Paderewski or maybe even Scharwenka himself to play it. Certainly the "veritable orgies of virtuosity" the composer found in the final tarantella pose no difficulty for Poizat, and yet at such a reckless pace one can only marvel that the strings don't break under the strain. Hough, without suppressing the boisterous quality of the music in the least, gives you just enough space between the notes to bring out the inherent humor of the dance. An even clearer distinction may be found whenever Scharwenka waxes lyrical, as you can hear in the second subject of the opening movement: Poizat positively swoons over it, while his glacial account of the Lento—9:22 next to 7:24 for Hough—turns every melody into a disjointed series of notes. From a sonic standpoint, the auditorium of Adam Mickiewicz University where this recording was made seems fairly diffuse; certainly Lawrence Foster and his Birmingham players register with far greater

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effect and detail on Hyperion's insipid sound of Hough's instrument anything put forth by Poizat; many identify the manufacturer as being Hough's playing; Poizat is not.)

Apparently the Polish ensemble is a lot closer to Poizat with the three dances; I program after the 'Andante Religioso' up and turn down the soloist, why didn't Naxos have of them? (There are 16 in a attends solo recitals with any No. 1 (in E-flat minor), a heard in B-flat minor is charming and No. 15 in B-flat closes out veritable explosion of octave like the finale of the concerto as a non-pianist well-nigh for Poizat is clearly mere child.)

Scharwenka's 'Andante' have made a splendid encore Beecham, had he but known the composer's own arrangement of the Cello Sonata harp, and organ and may be the famous 'Air on the G String' Third Suite. This wondrously played beautifully here by the yet once again they are to see by the diffuse engineering at even feel, let alone hear the Sterling with Christopher Fif Symphony that accompany recording of Scharwenka's C. (Sept/Oct 2004).

If you made it all way through the Overview of overtures, it no surprise that for me the reason to *Mataswintha*, Scharwenka perhaps dating from the late composer opened up a braided esteemed Berlin school of music City. But despite great criticism played at the Met, it soon falls apart opens amid evocative horn to a grand chorale in the brass once again very much in the *grin*. I'm happy to finally set aircheck with the Detroit's Karl Krueger, as this marvelous Poznan players is all anyone can

**SCHMITT:** *Piano Quintet*;  
Berlin Soloists Ensemble  
Naxos 570489—74 min

Florent Schmitt (1870-1958) all sorts. His early music, like the tet, reminds me of a Gallic Ric

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