

LIEBERMANN: *Cello Sonatas 1-4; Album Leaf*

Dmitri Atapine; Adela Hyeyeon Park, p
Blue Griffin 255—62 minutes

Lowell Liebermann is an American composer who has shown a considerable involvement with the process of education. That is not a statement about his career but about the nature of his music, judging by these four cello sonatas. The first, for instance, was written when he was 17, studying with Ruth Schonthal and about to continue with David Diamond. It is something of a study in what can be done with traditional methods to make them fit into the late 20th Century. It only lasts ten minutes, but it is effective. Sonata 2 is nearly twice as long, written 20 years later, and shows what the composer can accomplish in the same general style with maturity and further experience. It is a powerful work, still related to tonality, as all of these sonatas are, but free and personal in its statements. This and the following 'Album Leaf' were written for Steven Isserlis and Stephen Hough. The three-minute 'Album Leaf' was also intended as a work to demonstrate to students the possibilities of cello-piano writing.

Sonata 3 is subtitled *Semplice*. To an extent it is. Written with less accent on virtuosity than the previous sonatas it is, nevertheless, not a simplistic piece, containing much musical depth and enough technical activity to keep the player moving.

Finally, Sonata 4 was written for a 13-year-old virtuoso, Joel Sandelson, in 2008 and is another beautiful and imaginative work.

Atapine and Park play this music with fine style and they are recorded in a good, solid sound. Only Sonata 1 has found its way onto records previously, to my knowledge, so this is a valuable disc for the collector as well as a repository of beautifully conceived music for cello and piano.

D MOORE

LISZT: *Piano Sonata; Rhapsodie Espagnole; La Campanella; Un Sospiro*

Sophia Agranovich
Armonioso 0—60 minutes
(CD Baby; 800-BUYMYCD)

Born in the Ukraine, but now living and teaching in the United States, Ms Agranovich has managed to accumulate a most impressive Curriculum Vitae in a relatively short time. After studies back home she entered the Juilliard School as a full scholarship student at the age of 15 and studied with Sascha Gorodnitzki and Nadia Reisenberg. She began working towards her Doctorate in Music Education at the Columbia University Teacher's College but

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deferred that to raise a family. Never leaving music behind for long, she has been active as a performer, lecturer, and teacher.

This is a bicentennial tribute to a composer who evidently means a great deal to the pianist. Her program is very traditional, concentrating on the juiciest morsels from the composer's pen. The sonata, despite a well known quote to the contrary, does not quite play itself. It is a monster of technical difficulty and requires everything a pianist has to bring it off properly.

Apparently Agranovich has not only the technique, but is refreshingly unwilling to flash it, as she seeks out the subtleties Liszt has built into the music. This may disappoint many who would prefer to be wowed. Her more gentle approach may take some getting used to, but repeated listening pays rich dividends. Consider the once pounding chords at the 'Grandioso' section towards the beginning. It is marked double to triple forte, but here is taken much softer at each of its entries. It may be somewhat restrained, but the power remains undiminished in the pianist's probing hands. The cadenzas sparkle less than in the hands of several other pianists, but this is more a matter of choice, rather than technical ability. At no time does one feel the pianist throwing caution to the wind by taking a chance, and yet, it all comes together in an interpretation that dares to be different. Beauty has tamed the beast.

'Un Sospiro' is a lyrical beauty. The lovely melody rides over rippling arpeggios with phrasing as beautiful as any I have heard. 'La Campanella' has never been a piece of much subtlety. Here it is in the Busoni arrangement that creates additional difficulties while robbing it of some of its most breathtaking cadenzas. It is good having this version.

The *Rhapsodie Espagnole* has always been an impressive show stopper. I'm not really sure that I am willing to welcome anything less than an all stops pulled approach to the music. I should not have worried; Agranovich takes the middle ground and pulls out enough stops to make quite an impression. If I finally prefer a more direct, less subtle performance, I cannot deny the magnificent shading and superior musicianship to be heard here. Add the pianist's own notes and the clarity of the recording and you have a winner.

BECKER

LISZT: *Songs*

Angelika Kirchschrager, mz; Julius Drake, p
Hyperion 67934—63 minutes

This second volume in Hyperion's perusal of Liszt's songs continues the excellent standard set by Matthew Polenzani in the first volume

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