

CHOPIN: Piano Sonata 3; Fantasy;

BEETHOVEN: Sonata 23

Sophia Agranovich
Romeo 7303—73 minutes

Am I twice blessed with two recordings of the Chopin Sonata in one month? This Ukrainian pianist is about as far removed interpretively from Delaage as possible (see Collections). She caresses the notes, milks the music for every expressive possibility, and persuades by a gentle coercion that can be seductive. I loved the opening *Allegro maestoso*, and had to restrain myself from crying with joy at the Venusian beauty of her playing. As a master of restraint she adds a new interpretive dimension to this often-recorded music. The *Scherzo* is less flashy and a little more deliberate than most. After accepting that, it was possible to enjoy its uniqueness. Once again her persuasive skills easily win one over. The *Largo* keeps the alluring melody always to the fore. There is nothing weighty about the playing. Nothing redirects your attention from the nocturne-like warmth of the music. The central section has a beguiling freshness to it and introduces no dark clouds. What comes next in the *Finale* is a sudden burst of energy and passion. It sparkles, notes tumble over each other, and the music continues to build towards a dazzling conclusion. The added touch of restraint works beautifully in a performance that easily reaches the heights.

The great *Fantasy* is not always the easiest piece to bring off. Agranovich is a bit too indulgent for my taste, and the music becomes sectionalized, with a loss of momentum. It just sounds too prissy, too occupied with details.

Beethoven's famous sonata is another story altogether. Here the first movement pushes forward with passion and, while the

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pianist always pays attention to nuance, the flow of the music is never compromised. There is a special quality to the playing that keeps things interesting and separates it from the ordinary. The *Andante con moto* is just that, as it moves along before unleashing the last movement with its bursts of energy and excitement. One of the pianist's major devices is the *subito piano* (suddenly soft). That is exploited to excellent effect in this movement, and because she keeps the tempo flowing it never impedes the relentless progress towards the final *Presto* and the conclusion of the sonata. Agranovich will be a major discovery for piano aficionados. This goes considerably beyond the realm of merely good pianism, and the rich bass sonorities of the recording give an added dimension of satisfaction. The pianist also writes her own notes.

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