

SCHUMANN *Carnaval. Fantasie in C* • Sophia Agranovich (pn) • CENTAUR CRC 3504 (57:21)

The pianist Andrew Willis once told me that when he was working on Schumann's *Carnaval* as a student at Curtis, his legendary teacher Mieczyslaw Horszowski had him study the Commedia dell'arte to put him in the proper frame of mind. One has the distinct sense that Sophia Agranovich received similar advice, based on her lively and colorful reading of that same score. She captures a sense of playfulness with a firm sense of the music's pulse and rhythmic subtleties, and even a feel for the acrobatics one might encounter at a carnival. Her enthusiasm and energy often seem close to crossing over into a hectic state, but she has the wonderful ability to get right up to that line without breaching the structure and order of the music, while still maintaining control of her technique and tonality. This is, for me, a perfect recipe for playing Schumann. The effect is similar in the *Fantasie*, with an especially thrilling reading of the middle movement. There are, of course, many fine versions of these masterpieces, including more than a few of historic interest, but I am loathe to compare these performances to others, except to say that if you seek the last degree of finesse there are compelling alternatives. Most of this music benefits more from passion and imagination rather than from digital precision; Agranovich has a distinctive way with this music that is uniquely exciting. **Peter Burwasser**