

A Reverie of the Soul: Piano Works by Robert Schumann

By

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Written by

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The fluency of classical performances by pianist **Sophia Agranovich** has been on my musical radar for some seven years now, ever since the release of her album in 2019 entitled *Celebrating Chopin*, now as we establish a foothold in 2026, a new release has come to the fore, as we celebrate her latest gift to us ever eager listeners entitled, **A Reverie of the Soul: Piano Works by Robert Schumann**.

Robert Schuman himself was regarded as a master of his style and perhaps even of the romantic era, an era characterized by the poetic nature, musical cryptograms, and a deep sense of romantic fantasy within the tone and timbre of the times.

On **Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22 - I So rasch wie möglich**, there is a wonderful hunger about her performance, one that is beautifully juxtaposed to the following narrative entitled **Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22 - II Andantino. Getragen**, this would be my personal favourite from the album, it contains a manner that is lighter than andante, and tenderly quicker. Attached to this moment of sublime mastery are the following arrangements in **Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22 - III Scherzo. Sehr rasch und markiert**, a piece highlighted by me for its power and precision, one that flows with a pristine ease into the next flourishing narrative entitled **Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22 - IV Rondo. Presto possibile, Prestissimo, quasi cadenza**, symbiotically sublime and textured along with pace and intent, but with a delightfully tender refrain which juxtaposes the more rapid structures.

We now look at the next stage of the album through the eyes of *Schumann's Symphonic Etudes*, this collection of short form pieces are each a tale to tell on their own, **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Thema Andante** begins our voyage of plenty, the slow movements stand out, they are absolutely glorious and free of the clichés of some andante playing, whilst a more proud, almost regal musical pontification can be found here on **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude I (Variation 1) – Un poco più vivo**, the staccato onward marching ethic supremely performed here by the artist.

On **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude II (Variation 2) – Espressivo**, we find a totally flourishing narrative being unveiled, masterful work with both hands playing light and dark, shadow and sunlight, and the keystrokes are gloriously textured. **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude III – Vivace** has an incredibly pristine feel to its performance, this presentation is beyond just speed, it directs the performer to play with energy, brilliance, and an upbeat vibe, whilst **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude IV (Variation 3) – Allegro marcato**, illustrates the perfect rhythm and energy of the movement.

As we move through this realm of performance mastery by Agranovich we arrive at **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude V (Variation 4) – Scherzando**, we can add to the aforementioned previous comment that an even more stylish rhythm can be found on this narrative, in an especially tender way too. **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude VI (Variation 5) – Agitato**, expresses a precision narrative that is deeply palpable, it jumps to great lengths, sometimes using a slightly unstable rhythm to create a feeling of excitement or distress.

Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude VII (Variation 6) – Allegro molto, here one can explore this veritable fireworks display of the movement with great aplomb, one which transforms our journey into the more dramatic flair of the piece **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude VIII (Variation 7) – Sempre marcatissimo**, where each note is a sharp, forceful attack so it stands out to the ever eager and cultured listener.

With the delicacy of **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude IX – Presto possibile**, presto is of course Italian for "fast" or "quick", in standard tempo rankings, it's one of the highest, and here Agranovich shows her utter skillset in achieving a

movement of incredibly high quality. Her touch here is exquisite, and is to be respected in its consistency.

Then onwards in this stunning reverie of a skill filled performance we find ourselves nestled in the valleys of **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude X (Variation 8) – Sempre con energia**, a defined energy-related marking to push the physical boundaries of the piano can be found here, the very soul of the overall narrative can be located in this wondrous movement of style and class.

We can now draw towards the latter half of this section with **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude XI (Variation 9) – Con espressione**, to slightly accelerate or decelerate the tempo to highlight a phrase is no mean feat, but one that Agranovich achieves with ease, in this incredibly heart felt and emotive movement.

This of course is our concluding tale to tell as we move into the welcome and joyous lands of **Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13 - Etude XII (Finale) – Allegro brillante**, here the listener can find pomp and circumstance, a proud regalia of a piece, sweeping tones and vibrations, bringing a glorious sun kissed ending to this magnificent section of the album.

Arabeske in C Major, Op. 18 is our penultimate piece, a creation that is another personal favourite of mine, graceful, flowing, and decorative melodic lines can be found here, there is a certain feeling of a romantic nature at work here too, the sensitivity through the piece is delightful and almost poetic at times, and indeed incredibly intimate too.

Papillons, Op. 2 is our final offering from the album, French for butterflies, Papillons builds upon a steady onward structure throughout this long form opus, one can envisage dancers and the dance of both butterflies and humans juxtaposing each other in a natural movement in time, this work is a testament to the artists performance structure, and shows in great detail just how adaptable and fluent she can be at all times, and a simply superb way with which to leave the album.

Sophia Agranovich the world-renowned, Ukrainian-born American classical concert pianist and recording artist has done it again; she has crafted her presentation of, **A Reverie of the Soul: Piano Works by Robert Schumann** to

such a high standard, that the word glorious is simply not enough, this halcyon manifestation of brilliance shines light a beacon of hope on the horizon of modern classical piano performances, and one must be safe to assume that the legions of fans from this genre will be more than impressed with its contents and be very eager to purchase it.