

Sophia Agranovich's exquisitely rhapsodic *A Reverie of the Soul: Piano Works by Robert Schumann* artfully transcends the realm of a recital—it is a deeply immersive psychological and spiritual journey into the very essence of Romanticism, guided by a veteran artist whose interpretive voice is as dynamic and commanding as it is intimate. Long hailed as a “tigress of the keyboard,” Sophia brings to this repertoire not only formidable technical mastery, but a rare ability to inhabit Schumann's mercurial inner world, where passion and introspection, turbulence and tenderness coexist in a constant state of emotional volatility.

A Ukrainian-born, Juilliard-educated pianist and multi-award-winning recording artist, Sophia has, over the past decade and a half, built a richly diverse and globally celebrated discography devoted to the great Romantic masters—Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Schubert and Brahms among them. Yet her ongoing affinity for Schumann feels especially personal, as if the composer's dualities—his Florestan fire and Eusebius lyricism—find a natural conduit in her own artistic temperament.

From the opening moments of the Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22, she establishes this connection with striking authority. The first movement unfolds with restless urgency and sweeping momentum, its surging lines shaped with clarity and purpose, while the Andantino offers a contrasting realm of poised serenity and inward reflection, rendered with luminous delicacy. The Scherzo dances with quicksilver brilliance, its rhythmic vitality and mercurial shifts handled with effortless precision, leading to a Rondo finale that is at once impetuous and poetic—its cascading flourishes balanced by moments of expressive grace.

It is within the expansive canvas of the Symphonic Études, Op. 13, however, that the pianist's narrative instincts reveal their full depth. Each variation emerges not merely as a virtuosic exercise, but as a distinct psychological vignette—an unfolding gallery of contrasting dramatic states. She navigates the intricate interplay between muscular, rhythmically charged passages and gossamer textures of lyrical refinement with remarkable cohesion, maintaining a compelling sense of architectural flow across the entire cycle. The darker, more dramatic variations pulse with an almost orchestral intensity, while the more introspective moments seem to hover in suspended time, imbued with a quiet, singing quality. The triumphant finale, radiant and expansive, crowns the journey with a sense of hard-won transcendence.

Balancing these larger-scale works are two sublime miniatures that illuminate Schumann's gift for evocative intimacy. In Arabeske, Op. 18, Sophia captures the work's delicate, filigree-like poetry with refined elegance, allowing its gently unfolding phrases to breathe with natural grace. The contrasting sections, tinged with subtle currents of yearning, are shaped with a sensitivity that evokes both wistful longing and quiet resilience. Papillons, Op. 2, offers a more playful yet no less nuanced tableau—a sequence of fleeting dances and character sketches inspired by masked revelry. Here, she delights in Schumann's capricious shifts of mood, moving seamlessly between buoyant charm, introspective reverie and sudden bursts of dramatic intensity, her phrasing so fluid that the music seems to shimmer and dissolve in real time.

Throughout *A Reverie of the Soul*, Sophia demonstrates an extraordinary command of dynamic contrast and tonal color, effortlessly traversing Schumann's rapid mood-shifting transitions—sometimes within a single phrase—with both intellectual clarity and intuitive sensitivity. Her playing embodies a distinctly “Golden Age” aesthetic, where flexibility of tempo, nuanced rubato and deeply personal expression serve the music's innate truth rather than mere virtuosity.

What ultimately elevates this recording is the pianist's ability to fuse structural intelligence with emotional immediacy. She shapes long arcs with a keen architectural sense, yet never loses sight of

the fleeting, almost improvisatory qualities that define Schumann's voice. There is a palpable sense of storytelling throughout—each phrase unfolding as part of a larger narrative that feels both spontaneous and inevitable. Her touch, by turns crystalline and thunderous, reveals an extraordinary palette of tonal color, allowing inner voices and subtle harmonic shifts to emerge with striking clarity.

In an era often drawn to precision at the expense of individuality, Sophia Agranovich stands apart as a true musical storyteller, one who invites us not simply to hear Schumann, but to experience him—viscerally, intimately and in all his paradoxical beauty. With this latest recording, she not only reaffirms her place among today's most compelling interpreters of Romantic repertoire, but also continues her broader artistic mission: to bring the timeless human language of classical music vividly into the present moment.

-Jonathan Widran, JWVibe