

REVIEWS

The best new recordings from North America

Beethoven

Piano Sonata No 23, 'Appassionata'
(Three performances played on keyboards of Viennese design)

Lambert Orkis *fp/pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9169 (77' • DDD)

Three instruments, one player – but do the pianos call the shots?



One sonata, three keyboards: Wolf and Regier fortepianos based on designs from 1814-30 and a modern Bösendorfer Imperial Concert Grand. In the booklet Lambert Orkis says: 'The effect of the pianos themselves on my interpretation was quite subtle. I found that it was my concept of the Sonata that ultimately was the driving force in my renderings of the piece. In each case, I adjusted my approach to the instrument in order to realise how I heard the work in my inner ear.'

The effect isn't that subtle. One aspect of Orkis's approach – his consistent observation of harmonic underpinning – does not mask the differences in realisation that may be heard clearly in the slow movement. On the fortepianos the theme is matter of fact, the variations bitty – qualities more marked on the Wolf, which has the lighter action. These instruments seem to have called the shots; so how did Orkis hear this *Andante con moto* in his inner ear? Maybe as he re-created it on the Bösendorfer, poetically sustained, the variations arising inexorably, repeated chords never insistent, fingers fully attuned to the heavier mechanism.

Orkis is in control here whereas his command of the fortepianos is shaky; the outer movements don't unfold easily either. Articulation often appears 'arthritic' on the old instruments yet their distinctive sounds, and four pedals with great potential for tonal manipulation, highlight the drama of the *Appassionata* in a way the Bösendorfer doesn't quite do. That is a paradox; and perhaps a mystery, too.

Nalen Anthoni

Bittová

'Elida'
Malíři v Paříži. Bolší mě, láska. Ladná Čeladná. Samota. Hopahop Talita. Zapískej. Elida. Presto. Nejsi

Iva Bittová *vn/voc* Bang on a Can All-Stars
(Evan Ziporyn *cls* Mark Stewart *gtrs* Robert Black *bass gtr* David Cossin *perc* Lisa Moore *pf* Wendy Sutter *vc*)

Cantaloupe Music © CA21027 (47' • DDD)

The timing seems short but, with music of this quality, who's counting?



Whether you think of her as a violinist who sings or a folk singer who fiddles, Iva Bittová will either be a Moravian Meredith Monk or a Czech Laurie Anderson. But few performers

exist so comfortably in a musical language essentially of their own making, just as few musicians, regardless of idiom, can blend such stark theatricality and quirky sophistication with heart-rending emotion.

Bittová brings her magpie influences to bear on her folk roots, leaving her version of Czech tradition anything but a museum piece. She finds suitable partners in the Bang on a Can All-Stars, the edgy chamber group that have recently become an impressive back-up band for a number of cross-cultural genre-busters walking a tightrope between world music and modern composition.

Though not as groundbreaking a collaboration as the All-Stars' earlier outing with Burmese traditional drummer Kyaw Kyaw Naing – here the All-Stars sometimes do sound like a back-up band rather than full partners – moments like clarinetist Evan Ziporyn's gypsy-like wail or guitarist Mark Stewart's echoes of Bittová's fiddling do raise the bar. And, thanks to Bittová, this collection never dips into cliché.

My only sticking-point is the running length. After 47 minutes, I'm torn between wanting more or keeping an already near-perfect musical flow. **Ken Smith**

Chopin

Four Ballades. Four Scherzos
Earl Wild *pf*

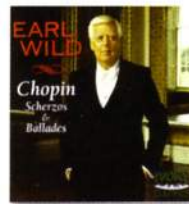
Ivory Classics © IVCD75001 (69' • DDD)

From Chesky CD44

Coupled as above – selected comparison
Rubinstein (6/86²) (RCA) 09026 63045-2

Remastered and sounding even finer, Wild's Chopin is among the best

Previously available on the Chesky label, Earl Wild's 1990 Chopin Scherzos and Ballades



gain presence, amplitude and tonal weight in Ivory Classics' excellent remasterings. More significantly, the improvement does fuller justice to Wild's huge sonority, as in the

Second Ballade's tumultuous A minor episodes and the coda of the First Scherzo. The latter's outer sections stand out for his sprightly pedalled, deliciously etched fingerwork framing an unusually introspective central lullaby.

The Fourth Scherzo's effortless, lyrical poise contrasts to the shattering intensity Wild brings to the Third Scherzo, replete with thunderbolt octaves. While he admirably attempts to purge more than 150 years'-worth of interpretive mannerisms from the Second Scherzo, there's more dramatic immediacy in Rubinstein's sharper pointing of the main theme's dotted rhythms and opening triplet figure. The First and Fourth Ballades often find Wild scaling back his virtuoso panache in order to stress the music's linear clarity, resulting in unconventional-sounding phrase groupings and dynamics that invariably bear out what Chopin actually indicates in the score – as in both codas.

Wild similarly turns the Third Ballade's interpretive conventions upside down. He narrates the opening pages straightforwardly, downplaying the accents and marked *tenuti*, while shaping the second section (beginning at measure 116) in more flexible, poetic arcs. In sum, a catalogue graced with many superb cycles can always make room for the best of what Wild's seasoned artistry has to offer.

Jed Distler

Liptak

Broken Cries^a. Broken Songs^b. Forlane^c. Serenade^d

^bWilliam Sharp *bar* ^dChien-Kwan Lin *sax* ^cDavid Starobin *gtr* ^aTarab Celoo Ensemble; ^bDinosaur Annex Music Ensemble; ^dEastman Philharmonia / Bradley Lubman

Bridge © BRIDGE9167 (58' • DDD)

Music of a natural lyrical bent that is greater than the sum of its parts

Pieces as different in mood and conception as David Liptak's *Broken Cries* for cello ensemble, with its dark atmosphere of fits