

more independent and foreshadow the eventual dispensing of the opening orchestral statement, while increased figuration and virtuosic display made the improvisatory cadenza obsolete. This recording thus sheds light on the influence exercised by lesser-known composers of the early nineteenth century upon more famous later romantic writers of concertos.

Pianist-conductor Howard Shelley has recorded concertos by Mozart, Hummel, J.B. Cramer, Herz and Mendelssohn and is well acquainted with early romantic style and its antecedents. He delivers very fine and sensitive performances on a Steinway piano. This recording is a valuable addition for listeners interested in building their collection of nineteenth-century concertos or in tracing the history and development of the genre.

Thérèse Ellsworth  
*Brussels*

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### Rachmaninov

Prelude op. 2 no. 1  
Oriental Dance op. 2 no. 2  
Sonata for Cello and Piano in G Minor op. 19

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### Franck

Le Sylphe M73  
Sonata for Cello and Piano in A Major M8  
Panis Angelicus

Steven Isserlis *vc*, Stephen Hough *pf*  
with Rebecca Evans *sop*  
Hyperion CDA67376 (78 minutes: DDD)  
Notes and translations included. £13.99

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The cello sonatas of Rachmaninov and Franck make an interesting coupling. Only fifteen years separate their composition: Franck wrote his in 1886 at the age of 64, whereas in 1901 Rachmaninov was only 28. Franck was enjoying a youthful Indian summer of success and mastery as a composer, following years of struggle and lack of recognition. Rachmaninov had recently recovered his self-confidence after the breakdown following the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony, and had just completed his Second Piano Concerto. The Franck is, of course, the Violin Sonata in a transcription – or more accurately an adaptation – made by the cellist Jules Delsart in 1888; the composer was impressed with it and was planning an original Cello Sonata at the time of his death in 1890. And the input of the cellist Anatoly Brandukov into the Rachmaninov was considerable. Both works show unmistakable signs of their composers' own orientations as virtuoso pianists. For considerable stretches, the piano parts carry the main musical substance: the autograph of the second movement of the Franck, for instance, shows that most

of the piano part was completed in ink some time before passages in the solo line were added. These sonatas, therefore, demand equally matched virtuosi who are also sensitive chamber musicians. Steven Isserlis and Stephen Hough are ideal for both roles.

In the Rachmaninov sonata they are in their element. Isserlis's Russian background and his family connections with Brandukov stimulate a strongly personal investment in the performance, while Hough's renown as a Rachmaninov interpreter has been well documented, particularly after his recent recordings of the complete concertos. Their interpretation nicely avoids pseudo-Romantic excess without compromising the passion at the heart of the work, and seems more subtle and nuanced than, for example, the intensely expressive approach of Yo-Yo Ma (with Emanuel Ax, on Sony SK 46486). Isserlis commands a wide range of tone colours and dynamics, which Hough's sensitive playing allows him to use to the full, without his ever having to force the tone or exaggerate the louder levels. He ranges from the chillingly withdrawn immobility of the semitone motif in the *lento* introduction to the full-blooded intensity of the *andante* third movement, where the give-and-take of the dialogue with the piano is finely judged. At the beginning of the main *allegro moderato* of the first movement – where many cellists fail to take due note of the *piano* and *tranquillo* markings, concentrating more on the *espressivo* as if in competition with the piano – Stephen Hough's accompanying semiquavers have the quiet, clean precision that was one of the hallmarks of Rachmaninov's own playing, and the balance is almost perfect. Similarly, in the development section, the cello's fragmentary semitones have no need for emphasis; Isserlis understands well enough that their function is to highlight lines present or implicit in the piano figuration. These performers give the lie to the notion that balance is necessarily a problem in music with such a full piano part. This allows them the freedom to drive forward the development section to the climax prefacing the second subject's reprise (the first subject, over a dominant pedal, is truncated and incorporated into the retransition), with an exciting sense of dramatic structure and a momentum propelled by Hough's virtuosity.

This sensitivity towards the shape of the work and its constituent parts makes it all the more surprising that they choose to omit the first movement's exposition repeat. Although such an omission is, regrettably, a commonly accepted practice among performers, a repeated exposition in a sonata written as late as 1901 is often significant, rather than casual or vestigial. In this movement the repeat reinforces the ambiguous nature of the second subject, which though ostensibly in the dominant major leans so heavily on its minor subdominant chord that its tonal identity is never clear; it always sounds 'on' the dominant rather than 'in' it. This might be a good reason for getting on quickly to the greater tonal variety that comes in the development; but it is so characteristic a feature of the movement, and its effect so integral to the equivocal expressive character of the theme, that the omission of its repetition seems to underplay its hesitant effect, particularly as Isserlis and Hough bring to this theme a limpid pathos that few other exponents can equal.

An interesting issue is raised by their approach to the *meno mosso* passage in the coda of the finale that Rachmaninov marked *pianissimo*, but after publication apparently decided should be *fortissimo*. This information is contained in Steven Isserlis's notes, and comes from his grandfather, who played the work with Brandukov. We are not told, however, if the idea was Rachmaninov's own, or whether Brandukov suggested it. If the intention was to produce a climactic peroration, as in the C Minor Concerto, Rachmaninov would surely have rewritten the piano part with a fuller texture, but we cannot be sure of the composer's final

thoughts on the matter. There remain, however, some interesting questions about the nature and function of the passage. It suddenly interrupts the energetic, ritornello-like piano theme after only five bars, and to the accompaniment of slow arpeggiated chords the cello withdraws into a reverie, musing upon previous ideas, but wistfully fashioning them into a new nostalgic synthesis. When all its residual energy has dissipated, the brilliant coda is resumed. The composer's original conception clarifies the parenthetical function of the *meno mosso* section and underlines the contrast with the extrovert brilliance of its immediate surroundings, which thereby take on an almost ironic formality. Whether or not this new approach convinces future performers and becomes generally adopted, it is, nevertheless, a highly stimulating feature of the present recording and should give rise to much reflection.

The Franck receives a similarly committed performance, with a beautifully paced Allegretto ben Moderato and driving impetus in the following Allegro. Much of this sonata gains from being played on the cello; its capacity for dark tone-colours and sustained intensity suits the work, nowhere more than in the Recitativo-Fantasia. Here, Franck's penchant for hesitant questioning and self-examination, which in some earlier works can be something of an irritant, finds its definitive and most essential form, and these performers shape it convincingly. Only in the final Allegretto poco Mosso do any momentary doubts arise. The tempo is on the quick side, both for the genial main theme with its charming canon and for the impassioned subsequent development; it tends to deny the principal theme its full charm and serenity while at the same time exaggerating the contrast with the turmoil at the centre of the movement. In places I found it slightly too exquisite and over-interpreted by comparison with, for example, the 1972 recording by du Pré and Barenboim, a remastering of which is still available (EMI CDM 7 63184 2).

The other items on the disc may appear to be lightweight fillers, but they have their charms, particularly two of Rachmaninov's early cello pieces. Rebecca Evans is the delightful soprano soloist in an early song of Franck, 'Le Sylphe', and in the ubiquitous 'Panis Angelicus'. Both are given with cello obbligato, the latter in one of the many arrangements either made or sanctioned by the composer. Do we need yet another recording of it? Certainly, if it is performed so unpretentiously and with such taste and sensitivity.

The sound quality is good, with natural presence and a sense of live performance. Though the cello is closer than the piano, the recording avoids giving the impression that there has been excessive manipulation of the balance. The recording was made in Henry Wood Hall, London, during August 2002.

A final word is necessary concerning the notes. These, written by Steven Isserlis himself, are informal and anecdotal rather than scholarly, and convey something of his own commitment to the music. For that reason they will be welcomed by many listeners. His comparisons with the music of the Orthodox Church, which always had strong resonances for Rachmaninov, are pertinent as well as personal and shed genuine light on the character of the music. But when it comes to Franck, it is unfortunate that his conversational style leads him into the trap of perpetuating allegations concerning the composer's supposed infatuation with his erstwhile student Augusta Holmès, even if they are only 'rumours' or 'stories'. The whole question has been thoroughly researched and dismissed by Joel-Marie Fauquet and should now be laid to rest.<sup>1</sup> The retelling of these legends contributes

<sup>1</sup> See Joel-Marie Fauquet, *César Franck* (Paris: Fayard, 1999): 513–20 for a full discussion of facts and evidence.

nothing relevant to an understanding of the music; indeed, the space would be better used for texts (French and Latin, with translations) of the Franck vocal pieces. But, a few minor reservations apart, this is a highly impressive disc of sensitive and authoritative performances, which stand up well to repeated listening.

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## Schubert

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### The Unauthorised Piano Duos

Quintet in A 'The Trout' D. 667 arr. for piano duet by J. Czerny  
Study for Two Pianos on Impromptu in E♭ D. 899 by E. Poldini  
Overture to *Rosamunde* D. 644 arr. for piano duet by J. Hüttenbrenner  
Polonaise in B♭ (from the D. 618a sketches) realized by A. Goldstone  
Waltzes arr. for two pianos by S. Prokofiev  
Adagio from String Quintet D. 956 arr. for piano duet by H. Ulrich

Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow *pfs*  
The Divine Art 25026 (78 minutes: DDD)  
Notes included. £12.00

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The familiar, opening chord strikes followed by the rising arpeggio that lands with a splash across the barline. Ahh, Schubert! ... the lovely Trout Quintet. But something is amiss. No web of strings cushions the twinkling starbursts, no growling double bass supports the whole from the lowest depths. Here and there an ambitious Alberti bass attempts to stand in for the complex texture of the original. We are listening to a two-piano arrangement of what is arguably Schubert's most extroverted composition – a work of motion, exuberance and contrasting colours made even bolder by the unusual ensemble. While some of the finer details are lost in the translation, the charm of the composition arranged by Joseph Czerny and the exuberance and intelligence of the performance by Goldstone and Clemmow threaten to win over even the most ardent purist. Cognitively the mind can fill in some of the missing sounds and, while the instrumental colours are not constantly shifting, the performers clearly know the texture of the original and communicate the delight they certainly feel at being able, with only their four hands and a keyboard, to actively create the sound of this work.

British piano duo Goldstone and Clemmow present what they dub 'Franz Schubert: The Unauthorised Piano Duos' as their third release with the label Divine Art. Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow have already comprehensively tackled Schubert's four-hand compositions – performing all of them as a series of seven concerts on more than one occasion. Now they have dipped into the vast literature of Schubert transcriptions, serving up a rather eclectic selection of offerings. Presumably having run out of original Schubert compositions, yet still yearning for more, the duo has joined the long tradition of