

RUSSIAN PIANO GEMS • Elena Dorozhkina (pn) • NAVONA 6576 (60:53)

MOSOLOV Piano Sonata No. 4., op. 11 **GLINKA/BALAKIREV** *The Lark*. **SCRIABIN** *Etudes*: op. 65/3; op. 42/5. *Prelude for the Left Hand*, op. 9/2. **TCHAIKOVSKY** *Dumka*. **RACHMANINOFF** *Morceau de Fantaisie* in g. *Preludes*: gT, op. 32/12. c, op. 23/7. *Morceaux de fantaisie*, op. 3: No. 1, *Elégie* in eI,

If the title *Russian Piano Gems* makes you. If you think of Liadov music-boxes or Tchaikovsky ballet transcriptions, think again. We begin with a piano sonata by Alexander Mosolov, he of *Iron Foundry*. The music is hard-edged, and when it softens it does so into a Scriabinesque space. The piece is utterly remarkable. It shifts mysteriously, entering esoteric spaces as easily as it would pummel the listener. Dorozhkina embraces this multivalency with open arms, and Navona's recording fully supports her, regardless of dynamic level. Dorozhkina's clean articulation is a major asset in this piece, too. While there are massed sonorities, elsewhere single lines speak, and it is there that Dorozhkina's supreme clarity shines through. A highly convincing performance, one which I for one hope will turn many listeners over to the Mosolov side.

The principal competition here lies on the Grand Piano label, with a twofer of Mosolov's complete piano music performed by Olga Andryushchenko. This is a good performance, but the recording is not as fine as Navona's (it feels a touch blunted).

If the Mosolov takes us towards Russian Futurism, the Balakirev a1864 transcription of Glinka's chirruping lark reminds us of a lost age. That clarity noticed in Dorozhkina's performance of the Mosolov returns to fine effect here: the bird tweets beautifully, the long main melody a swelling cantabile.

It is good to have examples from the various stages of Scriabin's output nested together within the recital program. The first, op. 65/.3, dates from 1912 and is on the interval fo a fifth, but set within a dissonant (if not fully atonal) perspective. Dorozhkina pays with an urgent intensity, projecting the flightiness of the more agile writing very well, and presenting the whole with an almost Soforinitsky-like abandon. The *Prelude*, op. 9/1, is for the left-hand alone and dates from 1894, a reminder of the post-Chopin side of Scriabin's output: this is like an advanced Chopin *Prelude* (in some ways it could be heard as referring to the E-Minor *Prélude* in the way Scriabin presents a melody against just fragile dyads). If there are more incendiary performances of the C sharp-Minor *Etude*, op. 42/5, out there, Dorozhkina nevertheless offers one of the rare instances in which every single note is audible, and each clearly has its place. rhythmically, too, it works the music well into a sustained climax.

I do love it when pianists remind us that there is a whole lot of solo piano music by Tchaikovsky out there, and it is not all about the First Piano Concerto. Here, we have *Dumka*, crisp in its faster section, atmospheric earlier. When Christoph Eschenbach added this to his recording of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony on Ondine, my colleague Peter Rabnowitz called *Dumka* one of the composer's "lesser efforts" (Fanfare 32:2). Dorozhkina gives her all to convince us that is not true, and succeeds. From the charming melody to dark, deep bass rumbles (yet notice how one can still hear every note), to the white-light climax, Dorozhkina gives her heart and soul to this performance. The piece is certainly demanding, and Dorozhkina is fascinating throughout. Perhaps she does not eclipse Sudbin on BIS in this piece, but this remains a captivating performance.

And so to the final tranche: a set of pieces by Rachmaninoff. And how could there be a recital of Russian piano music without him? Dorozhkina's performance of the *Morceau de Fantaisie* in G-Minor is good, but set her against Sergei Babayan on DG, and she sounds positively careful. The famous G sharp-Minor *Prelude*, from the op. 32 set, is one of Rachmaninoff's most famous pieces, and here illuminated by some superior voice-leading.

The E flat-Minor “Élégie” from op. 3 initially adds an element of *tendresse*, even if the right-hand is slightly over-projected; the climax makes its mark, though, as do the lonely post-climactic dyads. The spiraling *moto perpetuo* of the C-Minor Prelude, op. 23/7, makes for a fine companion, Dorozhkina’s steely fingers enabling the most even of flows.

A fascinating recital, not at all what I envisioned. Navona’s recording is a strong one; and Dorozhkina is a pianist I for one would like to encounter again. **Colin Clarke**

Five stars: A fascinating recital, not at all what I envisioned; Dorozhkina is a pianist I would like to encounter again