

↓ **RUSSIAN PIANO GEMS: Romantic to Avant-Garde** • Elena Dorozhkina (pn) • NAVONA 6576 (47:25) Reviewed from a WAV download: 256kbps, 48 kHz/16-bit provided by the artist

**MOSOLOV Piano Sonata No. 4**, op 11. **GLINKA** (arr. Balakirev) **The Lark**. **SCRIABIN Etudes**: op. 65/3; in c#, op. 42/5. **Prelude for the Left Hand in c#**, op. 9/1. **TCHAIKOVSKY Dumka**. **RACHMANINOFF Preludes**: in g#, op. 32/12; in c, op. 23/7. **Elegie in eI**, op. 3/1. **Fantasy Piece in g** (1899)

By including “Romantic to Avant-Garde” in the title, Dorozhkina has reason to give us a good look at both categories of Russian piano music. She was born and trained in Russia (St. Petersburg Conservatory) and this music comes from the very heart of her sensibilities. Now an American, she earned her doctorate at University of North Texas and is a professor at Agnes Scott College, living in Atlanta. Her website shows a gifted and busy pianist, both as soloist and in chamber music.

The Avant-Garde part of the program includes Scriabin’s last Etude. Fifths predominate this very difficult piece with several sections alternating G and CT/DI in the bass. No Romantic harmonies here with that dominating tritone relationship. The Mosolov Sonata is the largest piece on the program and likely the least known. Dorozhkina notes that she first became acquainted with this work about 20 years ago, and her recent public performances along with making it the opening piece on this program display her long knowledge of it. Widespread and overlapping ostinato figures that keep the composer’s best-known piece, *Iron Foundry* for orchestra, in the repertoire are found the Sonata as well. Despite the extreme dissonance and chromaticism of this piece, Dorozhkina finds musical lines amid the exciting and virtuosic writing. This piece alone is worth getting this disc.

Romantic pieces here are, expectedly, from Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff along with a couple of earlier Scriabin works, including the amazing Prelude for the Left Hand. Interweaving the accompaniment and melody is right up Dorozhkina’s alley. Also included is an effective transcription of Glinka’s song “The Lark” by Balakirev. This makes its way onto recital programs occasionally and quite beautifully done here. Tchaikovsky’s *Dumka* is a big piece in several sections that requires a balance between Russian melancholy and folk dance. It is subtitled “Russian Rustic Scene” and at almost nine minutes, it is the second longest work on the program. It gets as good a reading as any I’ve heard with gorgeous melodic lines and infectious, exciting dance parts. The well-played Rachmaninoff pieces are all familiar except the short 1899 Fantasy Piece that I’ve only heard on complete recordings of the composer’s piano music. It stands up well in this program.

Based on her playing, and excellent program notes, I can only imagine how fortunate Dorozhkina’s students are. Had I a teacher with her sensibilities and dedication to Russian piano literature some 50 years ago, my own piano abilities could have developed much further. I hope this debut CD foreshadows many more.

**James Harrington**

Five stars: a great program with both rare and standard repertoire Russian piano pieces that is always musical and enlightening.