



Chopin
Piano Works – Volume 6: Mazurkas Op 6, 24, 41, 67; Polonaises Op 40; Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano' Op 2; Fantaisie in F minor Op 49
Louis Lortie *pf*
Chandos CHAN20117

The latest volume of Canadian pianist Louis Lortie's fine Chopin series mixes Mazurkas and Polonaises, encompassing both early and late periods.

Lortie brings life to the four Op 6 Mazurkas, each of which seems to have its own voice while being part of the set. The Op 67 set glistens, too, the second a beautifully interior riposte to the first. Rhythmically, Lortie is spot-on, supported by a fine Potton Hall recording from Jonathan Cooper and Alex James.

Lortie has a keen awareness of Chopin's musical journey and increasing sophistication. The solo piano version of the Op 2 Hommage à Mozart is a delight, while the deliciously dark C minor Polonaise Op 40/1 holds sudden chords that register as cries of pain. A fine disc.



Thalberg *L'art du chant* Op 70; Three Schubert Lieder Op 79a; 'Auf Flügeln des Gesanges' (after Mendelssohn); 'Mi manca la voce' (from Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto*) Op 36/3
Paul Wee *pf*
BIS 2515 SACD – 2 CDs

Paul Wee, who has previously impressed in Alkan, turns his attention to the virtuoso Sigismond Thalberg (1812-71). In doing, he so

presents what is effectively Thalberg's most substantive release in the catalogue.

Opera was of central importance to Thalberg: the four 'series' of *L'art du chant* present a sequence of operatic numbers in which he explores the thorny problem of how to translate cantabile vocal music to what is fundamentally a percussion instrument. Wee shows us how it can be done.

Discoveries abound: pieces transcribed range from the incredibly familiar (Mozart's *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*) to a magnificent 'Perché mi guardi' from Rossini's *Zelmira*. Other little-known gems come from Weber (*Preciosa*), Donizetti (*Gianni di Calais*) and a deliciously articulated excerpt from Grétry's *L'amant jaloux*.

Wee's performances are consistently excellent. Perhaps a finer 'Casta diva' can be heard on Vanessa Benelli Mosell's new album (see page 60), but no pianist, or student of cantabile, should be without Wee's superbly recorded and annotated BIS release. Each piece is shaped beautifully, its mood captured instantaneously.

On one level this is an immersive listening experience; on another it is a vital musicological endeavour. On both, it succeeds beyond all expectation.



Between Light & Darkness
Liszt Selected works
Vincent Larderet *pf*
Piano Classics PCL10201 – 2 CDs

Liszt, like the moon, has both a light and a dark side. The thundering virtuoso is represented here by the *Dante* Sonata, offset by introspective works from his later years – Liszt as mystic.

Steinway Artist Vincent Larderet has a keen awareness of Liszt's textural workings in the demonic Sonata. This is a performance of utter integrity, closer in intent to Brendel than Volodos or Cziffra.

'La notte' from *Odes funèbres* is an extended work cast in darkest C minor, composed after the death of Liszt's daughter. Larderet finds the beauty in its desolation and despair. The

effect is draining – as it should be – while *Schlaflos* is a heartfelt cry. How poignantly the single lines speak, here and elsewhere. *La lugubre gondola* is a skeletal barcarolle, its crepuscular atmosphere perfectly prolonged by the disturbing *Nuages gris*.

A chthonic Second Ballade meets *RW – Venezia*, carved from granite. *Funérailles* oozes power, rivalling Arrau. *Unstern! Sinistre* is brutal; *En rêve* offers vital solace.

Larderet impressed with his previous release of Florent Schmitt, but this recital takes things to the next level. His melding of the intellectual with the visceral is rare: not since Nyiregyházi has late Liszt emerged with such primal power.



George Dyson: The Open Window
Dyson Complete music for piano
Simon Callaghan *pf* with
Clodna Shanahan *pf*
SOMMCD0622-2 – 2 CDs

There are already some significant recordings of the music of Halifax-born George Dyson, notably on Chandos and Naxos, but this first complete survey of the piano music offers a sequence of revelations. It includes the world premiere recording of the *Concerto leggero* for two pianos, originally for piano and strings. The slow movement is positively dreamy, the finale deliciously playful.

The album's title, *The Open Window*, refers to a set of eight pieces for children, each a captivating miniature, often jolly. A similarly happy-go-lucky demeanour, albeit with a touch more knowing, permeates the *Six Lyrics*.

Perhaps most fascinating is the set of four pithy fugues, *Bach's Birthday*, blessed with a hitherto unsuspected acerbic palette. Callaghan relishes them. But the real interpretative triumph lies in the reanimation of Dyson's educational pieces, which emerge as vibrant music in and of themselves: 'My Birthday' is a case in point, its harmonies simple yet poignant. The pithy *Epigrams* revel in spicier chromaticisms, with No 9 sounding like a take on Chopin's *Revolutionary Study*. The valedictory *Twilight Preludes* are gems. Unmissable.