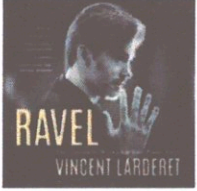


Ravel

'The Complete Works For Solo Piano, Vol 1'
Jeux d'eau. Miroirs. Pavane pour une infante défunte. Sonatine. Valses nobles et sentimentales

Vincent Larderet *pf*
Avie (AV2623 • 72')



Here is the first of four planned discs devoted to Ravel's piano works that promises to be

painstakingly comprehensive, with everything from the traditional canon to unpublished rarities plus every composer-authorized transcription. Pianist Vincent Larderet states that he has prepared his recordings from the personal scores annotated by Vlado Perlemuter during his collaboration with the composer, which apparently contain detailed markings in regard to phrasing, pedalling, dynamics and tempo, along with corrected errors, some of which did not find their way into certain editions in common use.

Larderet doesn't discuss the annotations in detail, although they may well inform certain interpretative characteristics. In *Miroirs*, for example, his *sec* touch and focus on clarity through 'Noctuelles' recalls Jacques Février's stylistically similar traversal, in contrast to the muted deliberation of 'Oiseaux tristes'. Larderet also defines the alternating 6/8 and 2/4 rhythmic scheme of 'Une barque sur l'océan' more consistently than many pianists. In a zeitgeist where incisively speedy readings of 'Alborada del gracioso' are the norm, some might find Larderet's textual rectitude and overall moderation on the lackadaisical side. On the other hand, in 'La vallée des cloches' he maintains dynamic levels across the music's three staves in perfect perspective.

Larderet doesn't caressingly round off *Jeux d'eau's* phrases as one tends to expect, keeping the tempos fairly strict and paying close attention to Ravel's left-hand accents and points of emphasis. It somehow recalls the square-toed style and concentrated integrity that the older Wilhelm Kempff brought to his Brahms recordings. Likewise, the pianist builds much of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* from the bottom up, with bass lines and carefully phrased inner voices to the fore. Like Leon Fleisher, Larderet usually treats up-beats as beginnings of phrases, which prevents cadential ritards from sounding predictably uniform and generic.

The pianist takes the *Modéré* directive of the *Sonatine's* first movement on faith,

where one finally hears the quasi-tremolo demisemiquavers in unblurred estate, not to mention rests that really breathe. Conversely, Larderet's meticulous literalism throughout the Menuet gives a fragmented, discontinuous impression, although such attention to detail yields more audible distinction than most between the finale's *Animé* and *Agité* passages. Finally, the Pavane moves like a real pavane, as a steady and dignified processional, with no *au courant* micromanaged hyper-staccatos or coy diminuendos. In short, Larderet's Ravel may not represent the last word in charm, poetry and surface shimmer, yet one must respect the honesty, the forethought and the hard work that these recordings convey.

Jed Distler

Roseingrave

Eight Harpsichord Suites. Allemande.

A Celebrated Concerto. Celebrated Lesson for the Harpsichord (D Scarlatti). Introduction

Bridget Cunningham *hpd*
Signum (SIGCD783 ② • 106')



Young Thomas Roseingrave, descended from a family of musicians in

Ireland and England, visited Venice in the early 18th century and encountered there Domenico Scarlatti. He was entranced by what he heard. Bridget Cunningham's booklet notes for her new recording of Roseingrave's keyboard suites cite Charles Burney to finish the story: 'A grave young man dressed in black and in a black wig, who had stood in one corner of the room, very quiet and attentive while Roseingrave played, being asked to sit down to the harpsichord, when he began to play, Roseingrave said he thought ten hundred devils had been at the instrument; he never heard such passages of execution and effect before.'

Roseingrave was disturbed by the encounter but also inspired, and he went on to champion Scarlatti's music in London. Scarlatti's influence isn't readily detected in Roseingrave's output except, perhaps, in some of the more virtuosic demands of the eight suites and miscellaneous works, including some wide skips in thirds that give the opening of his *Celebrated Concerto* in D propulsive energy.

Rather, Handel seems a more pervasive influence in both the keyboard-writing and its harmonic restlessness. The suites are in four or five movements and rarely stray from the standard four or five dances

favoured at the time: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue. But there are many lovely moments, especially a Gallic piquancy to some of the harmonies that suggests, at times, the language of Rameau, as in the darkly melancholy F minor Suite No 5.

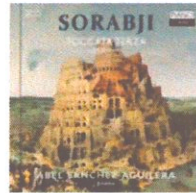
Cunningham can be a fussy player and I found myself wishing she would get out of the way of the music's natural vivacity and flow. There is a choppiness to the interpretations, sometimes the result of breaking down phrases into deliberate two- and four-note divisions. The ornamentation is orthodox and unobjectionable but it, too, wants more smoothness and greater ease of execution. At times, the technical challenges felt not entirely under control.

But this two-CD set will put this music before a wider audience and invite other champions. Any one of these suites could be happily added to a programme of Handel's keyboard works without any embarrassment to the lesser-known and unfortunately neglected Roseingrave. Philip Kennicott

Sorabji

Toccata terza

Abel Sánchez-Aguilera *pf*
Piano Classics (PCL10304 ② • 140')



Composed in 1955, the manuscript of Sorabji's two-hour-plus *Toccata terza*

had been missing for decades when it was rediscovered in 2019. Pianist Abel Sánchez-Aguilera then took on the Herculean tasks first of preparing a critical edition and then of learning this behemoth. Like most of Sorabji's marathon-length concoctions, *Toccata terza* is packed to the brim with daunting textural and polyrhythmic complexities that not only have to be played accurately but must also be voiced and balanced to multi-dimensional effect. Think of Godowsky and Busoni fuelled by amphetamines and steroids, trying to outdo one another writing long pieces, and you'll get what Sorabji is about.

There's a lightness and playfulness throughout the opening *Movimento vivo* that seems to gravitate around C major, in contrast to the dense acres of chromatic sludge one often gleans from this composer. Part of this is due to Sánchez-Aguilera's supple navigation of the rapid scales and clotted chords, plus the transparency resulting from his discreet pedalling. In contrast, the second-movement *Adagio* builds in slow motion



Pianist Vincent Larderet sets out to record Ravel's complete piano works, including unpublished rarities, his first volume featuring *Jeux d'eau* and *Miroirs*

from poignant single notes to chords that are so massive they make Messiaen sound like Cherubini. Next is a 48-minute *Passacaglia*, whose form is actually quite easy to follow. Again, Sánchez-Aguilera's artistry helps make this possible through the variety of character he brings to each variation, from the clipped effect of No 9's accented two-note phrase groupings and sweeping liteness of Nos 15 and 16 to the pianist's impressive control of No 42's difficult two-handed leaps in opposite directions. Yes, the movement probably goes on too long for what it has to say, but that's generally true of all Sorabji *passacaglias*.

After a rather padded and musically inconsequential cadenza, the *Quasi fugato* movement is actually a large-scale and judiciously proportioned fugue, where Sánchez-Aguilera's lucid layout of the linear perspectives holds interest. The little *Corrente* that follows is less of a baroque dance than a sensually interpreted two-part invention that floats in and out of all registers. In the final four movements, Sorabji gathers momentum with the work's most volatile and inherently dramatic keyboard-writing, which builds to a climax and ultimately decompresses in the *Epilogo*'s final pages.

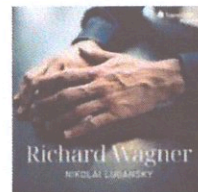
Sorabji fans familiar with Sánchez-Aguilera's premiere recording of the composer's earlier and more stylistically convoluted *Toccata seconda* (1933-34) may find the present work more accessible. Certainly this pianist commands the technical wherewithal for going beyond reams of notes in pursuit of the music, along with his affinity for and gigantic commitment to Sorabji's aesthetic. His articulate booklet notes and *Piano Classics*' superb engineering add value to a release that is likely not to face serious catalogue competition – although one never knows, given all the superpianists coming out of the woodwork these days! **Jed Distler**

Wagner

'Famous Opera Scenes'

Götterdämmerung (transcr Lugansky) – *Brünnhilde and Siegfried's Love Duet*; *Siegfried's Rhine Journey*; *Siegfried's Funeral March*; *Brünnhilde's Immolation*. *Parsifal* – *Transformation Music and Finale* (transcr Mottl/Lugansky/Kocsis). *Das Rheingold* – *Entry of the Gods into Valhalla* (transcr Brassin/Lugansky). *Tristan und Isolde* – *Liebstod* (transcr Liszt, S447). *Die Walküre* – *Magic Fire Music* (transcr Brassin)

Nikolai Lugansky *pf*
 Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 2393 • 60')



Listen to Josef Hofmann's 1923 recording of Louis Brassin's transcription

of Wagner's *Magic Fire Music* and you'll hear one of the 20th century's greatest pianists, at the top of his game, toss off a virtuoso finger-twister with such elegance that its difficulties seem to melt away. Listen to the same piece played by Chitose Okashiro (*Pro Piano*) and the music's technical demands – as well as Okashiro's blazing ability to navigate them – come to the fore. In the hands of Nikolai Lugansky, something entirely different happens. Suddenly, you're off the concert stage and at the heart of the opera, and your attention to pianistic challenges is replaced with your immersion in the emotional and psychological challenges faced by Wotan as he abandons his daughter.

So it goes throughout the recital. Granted, Lugansky, like Hofmann and Okashiro, has a spectacular technique, and those seeking virtuoso thrills – those who revel in the pianist's apparent ability to do the impossible – won't be disappointed (listen to the way he summons the huge