

Schumann's Toccata, though Kitain sends it spinning on its tedious way with more musicality than Barere could muster. What clinches it for me is the fabulous account of Godowsky's potpourri on themes from *Die Fledermaus*, in which Kitain's phenomenal technique, aristocratic poise and lucid handling of the contrapuntal textures (mischievously witty as surely intended) are in a class attained by only a chosen few.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Hymnus'

Alfvén Präludium, Op 31 **Carlsen** Prélude and Intermezzo. Festforspil (Festival Prelude)

Nielsen Commotio, Op 58 **Sibelius** Intrada, Op 111a. Surusoitto (Funeral Music), Op 111b

Sinding Hymnus, Op 124

Anders Eidsten Dahl *org*

LAWO Classics © LWCI050 (74' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Bragernes Church, Drammen, Norway



In its concise but slow-feeling harmonic journey, Sibelius's *Intrada* (1925) sounds

almost like a Schenkerian harmonic plotting of a larger, more colourful orchestral score. It followed the Seventh Symphony and there's a clear motivic parallel (the gesture immediately preceding the symphony's trombone solo). *Surusoitto* (1931) was written for Akseli Gallen's funeral and to my ears manages to capture a number of the painter's visual hallmarks, not least a certain shrieking drama isolated to a fleeting moment or background detail. Genuinely fascinating in a year like this, but there's no getting round the fact that Sibelius's union with the organ was a more funereal than matrimonial one.

Nielsen's relationship with the instrument was more significant. He was immensely proud of *Commotio* (also 1931), the crowning glory of his late turn to polyphony. In a sense, it's his most impressive creation – 23 minutes (under Anders Eidsten Dahl's fingers and feet) and astonishing in its melding of Nielsen's angular shapes to such intense counterpoint (three Danish composers have orchestrated it). I have a soft spot for Keith John's terrifyingly gothic new recording from Gloucester Cathedral (Willowhayne Recordings) but that has to be filed under 'guilty pleasure' when you consider Nielsen's polyphonic project. From Dahl, it all sounds a bit head-over-heart, which was precisely Nielsen's point.

Elsewhere, the compact 1998 Carsten Lund instrument at Bragernes Church can

feel limited. Dahl finds some nice French sounds in Sinding's *Hymnus* but the composer's structural preoccupations come at the expense of the freshening melodies he delivered elsewhere. Well-known Oslo cabaret artist Carsten Carlsen's organ works are of passing interest too. But Hugo Alfvén's little *Präludium* (1913) is a delight – proper chorale-based organ music in the tradition of Reger, which prompts some of Dahl's most nuanced playing.

Andrew Mellor

'Light and Shadows'

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 15, 'Pastoral',

Op 28 **Chopin** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35

Janáček Christ the Lord is born

Schumann Waldszenen, Op 82

Tom Poster *pf*

Edition © EDN1060 (73' • DDD)



Entitled 'Light and Shadows', Tom Poster's thoughtful recital is arguably more shadows than light. As his own accompanying note explains, the funereal tread of the *Andante* from Beethoven's *Pastoral* Sonata is 'melancholic' in contrast to the 'tragic' tread of Chopin's Funeral March. Yet if this most elusive of Beethoven sonatas is outwardly amiable, drama and volatility are never far below the surface. Poster takes a *moderato* view of the opening *Allegro* and compared to, say, Kempff's magical insouciance, is 'almost too serious', lacking that artist's inimitable chiaroscuro, his play of light and shade. In the finale (which Liszt remembered in the 'Pastorale' from his 'Swiss' *Année de pèlerinage*) he is again overly restrained, though suitably breaks out into the light in the whirl-away finish.

Again, in Schumann's *Waldszenen*, when compared to Richter or Pires, Poster is inward at the expense of a greater intensity and a more natural flow. His 'Prophet Bird' is suitably quizzical but, more generally, his pensive view can at times seem ponderous. In Chopin's Second Sonata, the *Scherzo* (a Mephisto-scherzo is ever there was one) is tame; and although I welcomed the lack of an always controversial first-movement repeat in one of Chopin's tautest arguments, Poster again allows the temperature to drop, making for cruel if necessary comparisons with grander, more fiery and committed readings by the likes of Cortot, Gilels and Argerich, to name but three. Poster rounds off his programme with Janáček's fragment, *Christ the Lord is born*, music admirably suited to his

introspective style. Edition Classics' sound is satisfactory rather than vivid or outstanding. Bryce Morrison

'R]evolution'

Beffa Suite **Stockhausen** Klavierstücke I-IV, VII-IX

Stravinsky Three Movements from *Petrushka*

Vanessa Benelli Mosell *pf*

Decca © 481 1616 (58' • DDD)



On paper, Vanessa Benelli Mosell's 'revolution/evolution' concept seems

provocative enough to draw attention.

In reality, the thorny, intricate serial landscapes of Stockhausen's shorter *Klavierstücke* relate to Stravinsky's accordion-like piano-writing in the *Three Movements from Petruschka* like oil to water. Mosell studied the Stockhausen pieces with the composer, and his spirit must be smiling upon the pianist's utmost precision in regard to dynamic scaling and rhythm. Yes, you'll infer additional surface elegance from Stockhausen cycles by Bernard Wambach or Aloys Kontarsky, yet the cutting edge of Mosell's loud, detached notes hits home.

In *Petrushka*'s 'Danse russe', Mosell's nimble yet hectic fingerwork lacks the dynamic range, rhythmic control and textural characterisation of either Maurizio Pollini or Yuja Wang. The same goes for the melodic leaps and busy double notes in 'Chez Pétrouchka'. Mosell fares much better in 'La semaine grasse', as she navigates the treacherous chordal jumps, arpeggio showers and pinpoint *glissandos* with effortless poise. However, she sacrifices both tonal heft and cumulative drama for speed. As a consequence, her interpretation sounds relatively small-scale when compared with Pollini's layered detailing or the joyful orchestral sonorities that Arthur Rubinstein conjures up in his imperfect yet thrilling live Carnegie Hall performance.

A skilfully wrought (if somewhat derivative) suite by the contemporary French composer/pianist Karol Beffa bridges the Stockhausen and Stravinsky. His arpeggio-driven piano-writing resembles a mélange of late Debussy and middle-period Scriabin in the first two movements, while the third movement's manic rag might be described as Schulhoff minus the tunes. Instead of the usual PR puffery that accompanies releases by new piano stars in the making, Decca provides excellent annotations that discuss the music seriously. Jed Distler