

light as a long day closes. The singing is wonderful, the recorded sound is rich, and the rewards are many.

GREENFIELD

Great Music in Small Forms: Russian

Yekaterinburg Philharmonic Choir/ Andrei Petrenko—Fuga Libera 800—58 minutes

How's your Russian? I ask this because here we have an hour of secular fare crafted by the likes of Tchaikovsky, Rubinstein, Moussorgsky, Rimsky, Kalinnikov, and others—but not a syllable of text. English titles and brief, superficial descriptions of the songs are supplied. Alas, they are of little use in promoting our understanding of the music. That's a shame because this was a pretty nifty idea for a program.

Needless to say, most of these composers are known for writing on the grand scale, but here they are light and charming in the penumbra of Russia's folk tradition. Maestro Petrenko arranged several of the songs for his singers and did so quite nicely. His choir is excellent. In short, if it would bother you to be left clueless about what's being sung you probably should pass. But if your Russian is ochen khoroshy, or if the lack of texts, translations, and helpful notes wouldn't bug you, nadeyus tebe eto ponravitsya.

GREENFIELD

Winter Evening

songs by Gurilev, Dargomyzhky, Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky, Glinka, Taneyev, Arensky, Ippolitov-Ivanov, Rachmaninoff, Medtner

Maria Briggs, s; Drew Quiring, p; Kimor Toren-Immerman, v & va

Centaur 3981—54 minutes

This program is a good sampling of Russian art song from the late 19th Century. The composers' names are almost all the "usual suspects" of the period, only we're not used to hearing them writing in the intimate form of song. These are not really full-blown *Lieder*, as we'd expect from Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and the other Germans. They are more in the vein of parlor songs that the members of a well-cultured musical family might enjoy performing together on a winter's evening. They tend to be pensive and melancholy, though not really tragic;

and the thematic sameness makes the program rather monochromatic, though it is still enjoyable. You may not want to listen to it all at once—or if you're a bit depressed at the end of a bad day.

The songs you are most likely to recognize are the 3 by Tchaikovsky: 'None but the lonely heart', 'T'was in Early Spring', and 'So Soon forgotten', along with Rachmaninoff's 'Spring Waters'. Ms Toren-Immerman contributes the violin part of Ippolitov-Ivanov's 'Do not go Without a Farewell' and the viola part (originally written for cello) of Arensky's 'Lily of the Valley'.

Ms Briggs was born in Russia, lived in Australia, and now appears to be based in the US. She certainly handles the texts idiomatically, and the translations in the program booklet supplied by her are an absolute necessity for following this program. (No Russian transliterations, but let's not get greedy.) I'm debating whether her voice has a little too much Slavic acid for my taste or the effect is the result of her being too closely miked. When I dial back on the volume to keep the high notes from straining my ears, I lose the details of the accompaniment and the lower-volume singing of the soprano. This is not a huge problem, but more of a recurring annoyance.

HANSEN

Of Time and Love

Songs by Brahms, Bacri, Loeffler

Alta M Boover, a; John Alexander Madison, va; Mary Siciliano, p—Centaur 3980—57 minutes

This is a very satisfying program consisting entirely of songs for contralto, piano, and viola. It breaks down into 3 distinct sections: the 2 Opus 91 Brahms songs, 4 songs with texts from Shakespeare sonnets by contemporary French composer Nicolas Bacri, and the *Quatre Poemes* by Charles Martin Loeffler.

Nicolas Bacri was born in 1961, and he has amassed an output that includes 7 symphonies, 11 string quartets, 6 piano trios, and a variety of sonatas for solo piano, cello, and violin, as well as 2 operas. I have to admit I have never heard any of his music until now. He is represented here by settings (in English) of Shakespeare's sonnets 63 thru 66. These are among the gloomiest, most pessimistic works from the Bard's pen. Bacri is quoted about his setting of Sonnet

66 in the booklet: "If I put it to music, it's certainly less to ward off that part of me that's too inclined to think that 'everything-is-going-bad-and-there-is-no-hope' than for the immense tenderness that emerges from the last sentence, 'Save that to die, I leave my love alone', a real coup de theater that suddenly changes the perspective of the poem...." This pretty much sums up the mood of all 4 of these "world's going to heck" songs. They are by no means cheerful, but Ms Boover spins them out in ravishing tones with great depth and nuance.

Fortunately, the mood lightens up a bit in the Loeffler songs, including the delightful 'Dansons la gigue!' which brings much-needed brightness to these proceedings, ably conveyed by Ms Boover, who expresses *joie de vivre* as well as she expresses tragedy. The closing song in the Loeffler set veers toward the tone of the Bacri songs; but despite the bitterness of the text, it comes off as more melancholy than tragic.

Ms Boover presents superlative vocalism, expressive and sensitive to the words, ably accompanied by Ms Sicilian and Mr Madison. The limited space in the booklet is devoted to English translations of the texts and the indispensable comments of composer Bacri, as well as biographical notes on the performers. An entirely EXCELLENT production!

HANSEN

Rhapsody

Vocal arrangements of **ENESCO**: *Romanian Rhapsodies*; **BEETHOVEN**: *Moonlight Sonata*; **BARTOK**: *Romanian Dances*; **PACHELBEL**: *Canon*; **TRAD**: *Doina*

Teodora Brody; London Symphony/ Robert Ziegler—Signum 765—43 minutes

This one begs easy categorization. At the moment, words are failing me, which is kind of appropriate in this case because this album is three-quarters of an hour of vocalise added to arrangements of well-known orchestral works. It is so off-beat that I want to like it. I'm not sure if I do. The Romanian vocalist is the focal point of this production. Here's a bit from the album notes: "Teodora Brody initially trained in classical jazz and rose to prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s singing with legendary jazz pianist Johnny Raducanu. Acclaimed for her extraordinary vocal

power and creative vision, Teodora pioneered the fusion of jazz with Doina—Romania's improvisatory folk singing tradition—and is widely credited with introducing international audiences to this extraordinary, deeply emotive music." I'll consider myself introduced.

So this program is about merging improvised vocal techniques of Romanian folk music with pieces we know all too well. It certainly is different. The familiar music either makes it easier to get acquainted with a pretty obscure folk idiom or they are distracting because we keep expecting the music to go the way we're all too familiar with, only to have Ms Brody's vocalizations take us in a different direction. I suspect that trying to blend 3 very different genres—classical music, jazz, and folk music—leads to a rather confusing stew.

These are total rearrangements of the originals by Ms Brody and Calin Grigoriu, with jazzy orchestrations by Lee Reynolds. For example, Enesco's extremely famous Rhapsody 1 does not start the way you expect it to. I suppose it's not surprising that the Enesco and Bartok seems to work the best, as the music perhaps owes some of its ebb and flow to the Romanian language. The slow movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* is way overdone. The vocalizations and elaborate orchestration kill the simple, affecting beauty and emotional directness of the original. Pachelbel's Canon also seems rather miscast in this guise. The best number may well be the closing unaccompanied, solo 'Doina'.

I find the added vocals less distracting than the jazzy departures from the original orchestrations. By no means do I have anything close to perfect pitch, but there are times when the soloist and the orchestra seem to diverge considerably in the key they're playing or singing in, which is more than a little distracting. But this may be an element of the "Doina" style. I still got a kick out of listening to this—several times, because one has to give an album a fair chance when reviewing it. It is decidedly different from almost anything else I've reviewed for ARG, and if you are looking for something VERY different from the "same-old, same-old", you may want to give it a try, especially if you're ready to hear familiar music in a very unfamiliar guise!

HANSEN