



the impassioned and desperate writing with sufficient exactness, though he maintains simmering dramatic intensity. A listener can feel the narrator's pain in 'Die liebe Farbe', and Westervelt caresses the lilting phrases of the final song, in which the brook soothes the soul of its newest resident. Pianist McReynolds makes invaluable contributions throughout the cycle, establishing atmospheres with fine lucidity and providing subtle harmonic nuances to delineate the narrator's evolving emotional state. The piano reveals as much about the narrator and the situations as the text, and McReynolds is an equal partner to Westervelt in Schubert's transcendent story-telling process. **Donald Rosenberg**

## Young-Ah Tak

**Haydn** Piano Sonata No 60, HobXVI/50 **Kirchner**

Piano Sonata No 1 **Liszt** *Années de pèlerinage*,  
année 2: Italie, S161 - *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca*.

Concert Paraphrase on Verdi's *Rigoletto*, S434

**Schumann** *Carnaval*, Op 9

**Young-Ah Tak** *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1375 (69' • DDD)



### Southeastern Uni's professor in debut solo disc for MSR

According to the booklet-notes, pianist Young-Ah Tak has amassed quite a track record of chamber, concerto, solo and teaching experiences, not to mention her training at the Juilliard School, New England Conservatory and Peabody Institute. She's certainly a polished and serious-minded pianist among thousands of other polished, serious pianists.

Two quibbles in the first movement put Tak's otherwise pointed and well-characterised Haydn C major Sonata out of the running: her avoidance of the exposition repeat and a blatantly wrong note (an A flat instead of a G) at the cadence before the double thirds. Why didn't the pianist or producer Joseph Patrych catch this mistake? The lack of wide dynamic range and harsh, metallic tone in louder passages also renders Tak's Schumann *Carnaval* vulnerable to competition. Some of her fleet fingerwork impresses in the work's opening and closing movements, the breezy, impetuous 'Valse allemande' and the steel-edged 'Paganini' that follows. Yet most of the lyrical sections are underplayed and relatively bland ('Eusebius', for example) when measured alongside Freire (Decca) or Rubinstein (RCA).

While Liszt's 'Sonetto 104 del Petrarca' is technically all there, the singing impetus and sense of rhetoric that emerge from more emotionally engaging recordings by Perahia, Horowitz, Arrau, Bolet and many more largely are absent from Tak's foursquare, literal interpretation. However, superior timing and a



Seriousness and polish: Young-Ah Tak

stronger sense of melody/accompaniment foreground/background textures work to the *Rigoletto* Paraphrase's advantage, notwithstanding the aforementioned cramped sound and ugly tone. The latter lends itself to the thorny idiom of Leon Kirchner's Piano Sonata No 1, where Tak's animated pacing and sensitivity in the central slow movement contrast with the slower, austere concentration of Leon Fleisher's pioneering recording. But Fleisher's leaner, more insightfully accented spin through the motoric finale is a cut above Tak's blunter, heavier rendition. This disc's finest moments ought to make a persuasive calling card on Tak's behalf.

**Jed Distler**

## 'Still Sound'

**Bolcom** *New York Lights* **Chopin** *Nocturne No 1*,  
Op 9 No 1 **Gross** *Venturing Forth Anew - I; II. Dance of the Spirits. Changes. Reflections on Air* **Pärt** *Für Alina. Variationen zur Gesendung von Arinuschka*  
**Satie** *Gymnopédies - No 2; No 3. Gnossienne No 2*  
**Schubert** *Impromptu, D899 No 4*

**Bruce Levingston** *pf*

Sono Luminus © DSL92148 (56' • DDD)



### Third volume in Levingston's ambient piano project

'Still Sound' is the final instalment in Bruce Levingston's three-part series of 'intimate, gentle music' recitals for enterprising Sono Luminus. The programme features world-premiere recordings of Pulitzer Prize-winner William Bolcom's *New York Lights* (written for Levingston) and new works by Augusta Gross inspired by Satie and Pärt, plus two of the usual suspects by Schubert and Chopin.

As the goal for this release had been so clearly defined by its predecessors, and the results so uniformly successful if slightly, perhaps necessarily bland, it really is the cumulative power of the sequencing that represents the recording's greatest virtue, which Levingston himself describes in his booklet-notes as the 'magical, hypnotic qualities that lull the listener into a state of calm'.

Indeed, as if by magic, Levingston locates the pulse of each new track so unerringly and quickly that maintaining calm despite the lulling is easily done: The luminous, toy-like pieces by Pärt, interleaved with the measured formalisms of Gross (no wonder – she's an admirer of Gluck) and Satie, give way graciously to the core of Schubert, Chopin – both deeply poetic in a somnolent sort of way – and the unabashedly gorgeous lyricism of Bolcom's 'concert paraphrase' based on an aria from his opera *A View from the Bridge*, to a libretto by Arthur Miller, which played the Metropolitan Opera in 2002 after opening in Chicago at the Lyric Opera three years earlier. Ideally suited to be an encore, the music resonates lightly with Broadway and throbs with simple tonal beauty.

The recordings were made in two different sessions, in 2005 and 2009, and while a careful listener might hear differences in the two acoustic spaces, Levingston's consoling, careful phrasing is the same throughout. The pianist's booklet-notes, with their intimate personal connections, strike the perfect tone for really hearing the music as opposed to just having it on pleasantly in the background.

**Laurence Vittes**