

ALBUM REVIEWS

Reviews by **Colin Anderson,**
Peter Quantrill
and **Warwick Thompson**

MARTIN JAMES BARTLETT

Rhapsody: Works for piano and orchestra by Rachmaninov and Gershwin. London Philharmonic Orchestra/Weilerstein
Warner Classics 0190296434334

★★★



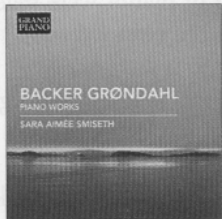
Martin James Bartlett rhapsodises on our behalf for some exhilarating if ultimately wearing listening, starting out with Rachmaninov's *Paganini Rhapsody*.

It's a belting opening without compromising orchestral detail, though the occasional dynamic change sounds contrived. A colourful performance of panache and vividness, overall (Variation 18 is opulent), if not without subtlety and piano/orchestra integration. The LPO's clarinetist makes much of the opening glissando to launch a reading of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* – using Ferde Grofé's 1942 symphony scoring – that tries a little too hard to be jazzy: overthought from the pianist and with the conductor exaggerating effects. The remaining tracks find Bartlett alone in short pieces by these composers (and a couple of Earl Wild's Gershwin Etudes): flamboyant and sensitive playing. **CA**

SARA AIMÉE SMISETH

Backer Grøndahl: Suite Op 20, Fantasy Pieces, Studies etc
Grand Piano GP902

★★★



A Norwegian Clara Schumann; a female Grieg, as regular *Pianist* readers will know for themselves from the Scores section, but Agathe Backer Grøndahl

had her own creative voice, by turns playful, angular and impressionistic, in the idiom of the Grieg Lyric Pieces. Her compatriot Sara Aimée Smiseth has cherry-picked from sets of sturdy folk dances and more developed suites to present a compelling portrait of Backer Grøndahl, bringing well sprung rhythms to the folk dances and a winning simplicity of line to the Op 24 *Idylls*. If only the recording weren't so claustrophobic, constricting dynamic levels while accentuating every tiny slip and hardness of tone. Played back at a low-ish volume, Smiseth is especially persuasive in tantalising excerpts from the Op 11 Concert Etudes, the Op 20 Suite and *In the Blue Mountain*. With precious little competition on record, anyone wanting to listen to (as well as play) Agathe Backer Grøndahl can start here with confidence. **PQ**

BORIS GILTBURG

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No 5 'Emperor'; Concerto No 0. Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Petrenko
Naxos 8.574153

★★★★



Boris Giltburg pairs a fine performance of Concerto No 5 with a delightful take on the charming but rarely-recorded Concerto No 0, written when Beethoven was

just 13. The latter work only exists in a manuscript which contains Beethoven's own piano reduction of the orchestral score, and performers often choose to use one of several reconstructions for the accompaniment. In typically independent fashion, Giltburg chooses to play the notes as written – solo and *ripieno* altogether – without orchestra, and in doing so, he makes an excellent case for considering the work as a sort of early sonata. His transparency of line, his extreme delicacy and evenness of touch, and his sense of fun reap heavenly rewards. His 'Emperor' is also very enjoyable, but without any of the ear-opening insights which one might have hoped for from such an idiosyncratic artist. **WT**

MARINA STANEVA

Slavic Roots: Vladigerov: XI Variations Op 3; Impressions Op 9; Tabakova: Modétudes
Chandos CHAN 20251

★★★★



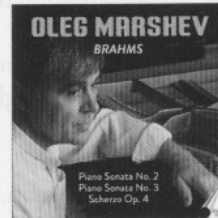
For her dazzling recording debut, the Bulgarian pianist and Young Steinway Artist Marina Staneva performs music by her compatriots Pancho Vladigerov (1899-

1978) and Dobrinka Tabakova (b.1980). She responds with passion and open-hearted freedom to the lush tonal harmonies and grand romantic gestures of Vladigerov's XI Variations on a Bulgarian Folksong Op 3 (written when the composer was just 16), and his equally lavish *Impressions* Op 9. The disc title is a little misleading, for aside from the use of folk tunes, Vladigerov's style is of that generalised turn-of-the-century sound-world of dominant thirteenthths and augmented chords you also find in, say, Cyril Scott or York Bowen. But it's still rather lovely, and with her fearsome technique and bravura emotionalism, Staneva makes a wonderful champion. The recital also includes a less-inspiring choppy little set of *Modétudes* (1998) by Tabakova, which recalls Book VI of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* a little too insistently. **WT**

OLEG MARSHEV

Brahms: Sonatas 2 & 3; Scherzo Op 4
Danacord DACOCD 900

★★★★



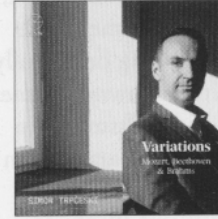
Oleg Marshev slightly underplays the heroic aspects of Brahms's F minor Sonata No 3, although his subtle broadening of tempo at the very end of the first (exposition repeated) and final movements is very effective. This generous, 77-minute release relays a big recorded sound, Marshev filling the acoustic space with grand gestures and feisty *fortissimos*, but he is notably tender in the second movement – lovely lyrical playing that flows with eloquence – and the succeeding Scherzo goes with a swing, its Trio very expressive. The stand-alone Scherzo Op 4 is also impressive, very revealing in fact, given Marshev's dynamic approach. He also offers much in the Second Sonata. Potentially its thickets of notes can prove a barrier to complete appreciation of this complex work. With confident and absorbed address, he works wonders with this sometimes-oblique music, not least in the longest movement, the finale, which carries much that is enthralling. **CA**

SIMON TRPČESKI

Variations by Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms

Linn Records CKD682

★★★★



Every Trpčeski album is a considered affair. How carefully he cuts his cloth to suit each composer, beginning with the silk of Mozart in the *Salve tu, Domine* set

based on a Paisiello chorus. Then the coarser, thicker wool of Beethoven's fingerwork on a dance by Wranitzky, supposedly Russian but sounding as Viennese as Mozart in Trpčeski's hands. After that the densely woven tweed of Brahms, again not in a repertoire staple such as the Paganini or Handel sets but a more searching and personal tribute to a theme from *Bunte Blätter* by his friend Schumann. If you don't re-programme the disc in chronological order (tempting!) Trpčeski retraces his steps through late Mozart – the *Come un agnello* Variations, in which his urge to invest every phrase with meaning sometimes drags the phrasing – to end up with the familiar C minor Variations which find mid-period Beethoven invoking the spirit of the Gothic sublime. All rewarding, highly replayable and recorded with a finesse to match the playing. **PQ**