

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

Ordway and other halls
Manchurian Candidate
Sibelius Sesquicentennial
Music Down Under
Bogota Festival

us \$7.99

July/August 2015



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ESTEP

Jade Duo

FAURE: *Violin Sonata 1*; **SCHUMANN:** *Sonata 1*; **BARTOK:** *Sonata 2*

MSR 1510—61 minutes

Jade Duo is violinist Shuai Shi and pianist Zhen Chen. Shi is a student of Pinchas Zukerman and is on the faculty of the Zhejiang Conservatory, and Chen has studied with Arkady Aronov. Both have won prizes, and together they were prizewinners in the Artur Balsam Competition for Duos and the JC Arriaga Chamber Music Competition.

What is remarkable about this recital, which I believe is their debut on CD, is not only the varied character of the music, but how effective they are in interpreting each piece. From the earnest early romanticism of the Schumann to the breezy lyricism of the Fauré to the knotty, mysterious modernism of the Bartok, they don't make a wrong step anywhere. I am especially impressed by the Schumann, as the most effective tempos elude almost everyone else.

My only criticism of Jade Duo is that they lack the last degree of intensity in the Schumann and Bartok. I like to hear these pieces played like a matter of life or death. Also, there is a little too much electronic gloss to the recorded sound. If you want all three of these pieces on one disc, though, this is definitely the one to get.

MAGIL

Russian Dreams

PROKOFIEFF: *Cinderella pieces*; **MEDTNER:** 3 *Nocturnes*; **ROSLAVETS:** *Adagio*; *Nocturne*; *Poeme Romantique*; **SCRIABIN:** *Reverie*; **TANEYEV:** *Fairy Tale*

Masha Lankovsky, v; Byron Schenkman, p
Cantaur 3352—48 minutes

This enchanting collection of musical fairy tales from Russia is imaginatively conceived and well played by violinist Masha Lankovsky and pianist Byron Schenkman. One misses Prokofieff's magical orchestration in *Cinderella*, but the violin-piano version, written under the supervision of the composer, is charming, especially 'Waltz' and 'Winter Fairy'. Medtner's *Nocturnes* are from a set of 38 fairy tales; I would love to hear the others, as these are songful and captivating. As one would expect with Medtner, the piano writing is colorful,

and Byron Schenkman has fun with it. Roslavets is the most obscure composer on the program—not surprising given his suppression by the Soviets—but his music is starting to get the attention it deserves. The three pieces here have a dark poetry and emotional depth that transcend the fairy tale genre. The haunting *Nocturne*, wondrously chromatic yet tuneful, is played with consummate subtlety. Scriabin's early 'Reverie', culled from an out-of-print soviet edition, is another delectable surprise, one Scriabin lovers will want to hear. The album closes with a Taneyev rarity called, appropriately for this collection, 'Fairy Tale'. Taneyev was a close associate of Tchaikovsky, and this piece is the most overtly romantic in the collection. The trills near the end are ravishing.

Masha Lankovsky's violin is silken and captivating. Byron Schenkman specializes in early music, which perhaps accounts for the no-nonsense clarity of his pianism, but he also has the sense of fantasy that the music requires. The recorded sound has a warmth and softness that also serve this repertory well.

SULLIVAN

Under the Stars

Charlie Siem, v; Munich Radio/ Paul Goodwin
Sony 78764—60 minutes

Isaac Stern once did a record like this (on LP): violin favorites with orchestra. But Charlie Siem makes a much more beautiful sound than Stern did, and he sounds more relaxed and "laid-back"—almost Central European. He was born in London and seems much too sexy and warm to be English.

The key is, do you want to hear this repertory for violin and orchestra? It's beautiful music, but some of it was certainly not written for violin and some were for violin with piano. I like it this way.

Spencer: *Underneath the Stars*

Bull: *Saeterjentens Sontag*

Debussy: *Clair de Lune*

Elgar: *Salut d'Amour*

Hubay: *Carmen Fantasy*

Dvorak: *Songs My Mother Taught Me*

Tchaikovsky: *Melody*; *Melancholy Serenade*

Brahms: *Hungarian Dance 4*

Shostakovich: *Romance from the Gadfly*

To those 12 pieces he adds his own piece, called 'Canopy'.

VROON