

CD REVIEW

YUJA WANG Piano Recital DG 00289 477 8140



Chopin Piano Sonata no 2 in B flat minor
Ligeti Etude 4 : Fanfares
Scriabin Piano Sonata no 2 in G sharp minor
Ligeti Etude 10 : The Sorcerer's Apprentice
Liszt Piano Sonata in B minor

This is an incredible CD, some of the most compelling and brilliant playing I have heard for a very long time. The control, the phrasing, the sensitivity, the virtuosity is all there and you are left with the assurance that nothing can go wrong. The Ligeti and the Liszt are, by far, the best pieces on this CD and the Liszt is the real masterpiece of piano sonatas and so it puts the Chopin and Scriabin in a much lower league. In fact, if there is a criticism of this disc, it would be that it would have been better if more worthy works than the Chopin and Scriabin were included.

One would love to hear her in one of the great Beethoven sonatas or expose the charm of Haydn but, perhaps, that will come.

The Chopin presents problem as to musical grammar. For example he uses F sharps when there is already a G flat in the key signature. The momentum in the first two movements is lost by slower sections often with 'feeble melodic nullity ' as one Chopin expert wrote. The onward drive of the opening scherzo is very exciting. The finale is very short, only 6% of the whole work, and is only unison until the final chord.

But we really must consider the funeral march, probably the best thing Chopin wrote for the piano. It is thematically satisfying with a middle section of a plaintive melody of great tenderness. There is something very personal and special about this performance. The sostenuto is admirably sustained, the grace notes are played with perfection, there is an impeccable tone, crescendos are observed and the playing is pure. She does not relegate the music into mawkishness.

This is not a performance. It is an experience.

The Scriabin is rather a pointless work, lacking direction, just note spinning and some of the chromaticism is crude. It is a meander, a muddle and underwent corrections by other composers including Liadov. The music seems to represent the weird character of the composer.

However, this must not take away from the performance. Yuja Wang copes with all the difficulties with ease and one can only marvel at the performance for its clarity.

The Ligeti studies are quite superb and the performances shows the understanding of these very great pieces. The virtuosity is there but not for virtuosity sake. The performances are well shaped and beautifully executed.



And so to the Liszt. Why does the sleeve notes identify it as in three movements? It is not. It is in one continuous movement.

I love this work and have many recordings of it... Claudio Arrau and Peter Katin are the best but Wang's performance is up there with them. There is something indefinably special about her performance. It speaks to each listener as if she were playing it just for you. It is truly spellbinding. It has the passion, the lyricism, the virtuosity, the overall structure, the coherence and logic. It is incredibly satisfying. After hearing it you feel therapeutically well and able to take on the world. I realise that these comments are not musical but her performance transcends musical language and usual parlance.

Watch her play on You Tube, not only her solo works but how she brings [Mendelssohn's First Concerto](#) to life... simply staggering. Watch her enjoying the piano part in [Mendelssohn's Sextet Op 110](#).

And she is still very young.

Look out world, we have a very bright star in our midst!

David Wright, DMus

