

CD REVIEW 47

FRENCH VIOLIN SONATAS

Debussy, Franck and Ravel.

Jennifer Pike (violin)

Martin Roscoe (piano)

CHANDOS CHAN10667 (60 minutes)



I remember when Jennifer Pike won the BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2002 when she was only twelve years old and she played the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E minor. She was the youngest ever winner. She was fortunate to have Andrew Davis as her conductor.

Since then, she has extended her repertoire and wisely not become involved in the business side of the serious music industry. She became a BBC New Generation Artist and has appeared in many radio broadcasts including Beethoven's Triple Concerto and Ravel's Tzigane. It is said that she has recorded the Violin Concerto of Rosza. The recording of her playing the Violin Concerto by the Australian Andrew Schultz is available on ABC Classics

She was born in Stockport on 9 November 1989 and attended Chetham's School of Music in Manchester. With her school orchestra, she played Haydn's Concerto in G and in June 2001, with the Halle Orchestra, played Saint Saens beguiling Havanaise.

I was not that inspired by the choice of programme for her first CD. In my opinion, none of these sonatas are top-drawer works; and Franck is French? I thought he was Belgian. I cannot say that I am espoused to his music and the main theme in his only Symphony is repeated far too often.

Debussy was a strange man. He had a passion for anything green because one of the loves in his life had green eyes. It is said that he was a shoplifter of anything that was green. La Mer was said to be an inspiration to him since the sea was often green. His other claim to being strange was that he did not value other composers and, in fact, hated Ravel.

Pike plays the sonata well with a good contrast, excellent intonation and her playing is not effeminate. One can understand and appreciate the logic of her interpretation. The music, like much of Debussy's music, is a fantasy and merely atmospheric without much, if any meat, in it.



I fail to understand why reviewers and musicologists relish in telling us if a work has a jazz element or popular style in it. The Ravel has a Blues movement --so what? It also has a Perpetuum mobile. Pike excels in this busy movement. I love the eeriness of her tremolos and she does justice to this sonata which is the best work on the disc. I wonder what happened to the movement of this sonata that Ravel put to one side which was to be the finale.

Franck's sonata is poor in my view. The second movement should have been the finale. The piano writing does not always suit the violin part although Martin Roscoe is, as usual, superb. He is an excellent pianist and has a enviable gift as an accompanist. Pike's playing is gorgeous and the finale has a satisfying feel about it despite what was said earlier.

The most notable thing about Pike is that she is not only a true violinist but an unequalled communicator.

Even though none of these works impress me, I had to listen just for the sheer artistry and impeccable playing of this young woman.

But I wish she had chosen a more interesting programme such as Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata, a Mozart sonata, a Wieniawski piece but, perhaps, it is considered that these works are well-represented on disc.

Do not allow my reservations about the music put you off from a disc of very fine violin playing.

There is so much more one could say. She plays with assurance and character and she has another endearing quality in that she has poise and presence. She does not have any affectations or indulge in any histrionics.

I understand that she is to record the Chausson Concerto for violin, piano and strings and has recently studied the sublime concerto of Brahms. I hope she knows the Ginette Neveu recording of this work which is unbeatable. I also hope she will record the Chausson Poeme.

I have no hesitation in saying that she is the best British violinist we have... and by many a mile.

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