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### FEATURE REVIEW by James Harrington

## SCHUMANN *Fantasia* in C, op. 17. BRAHMS *Klavierstücke*, op. 118: No. 2, *Intermezzo* in A. LISZT *Sonata* in b, S 178 • Shorena Tsintsabidze (pn) • ARS 38 358 (SACD: 73:22)

Published in 1839 and dedicated to Liszt, Schumann's *Fantasy* (*Fantasia* in German) is a large, three-movement, sonata-sized piece. Liszt's *Sonata*, equally large but a single-movement piece, was completed in 1853 and dedicated to Schumann. When a copy arrived at the Schumann's house in 1854, Robert had already entered a sanatorium. Clara found it "merely a blind noise" and never played it. She is the dedicatee of Brahms's 6 Pieces, op. 118 (1893). The title *Dedication* is perfectly chosen here.

There are literally dozens of recordings of all three of these works available from the greatest pianists of the past century or so, and many more have played them and not committed their interpretations to disc. Before recordings Liszt, one of the few pianists alive that could have met the demands of the *Fantasy* (especially the middle movement leaps) is said to have played it privately for Schumann. Rachmaninoff's Liszt *Sonata* was highly regarded but never made it to disc. New recordings of the two big works arrive for each issue. Clearly they define greatness in the mature Romantic piano idiom.

Clara Schumann began playing the *Fantasy* in 1866 and surely played Brahms's late pieces hot off the presses. She did play some Liszt, but was never taken much with his "Music of the Future" and relationship with Wagner. Liszt's *Sonata* took much longer to establish itself as one of the Everests of piano literature. Perhaps no single work has been as extensively analyzed and, based on today's concert programs, few are as frequently performed by both the big and upcoming names in the piano world. Schumann's piece ranks almost as high as well.

I have especially enjoyed the piano sound of this stereo/multichannel hybrid SACD. Tsintsabidze's Vienna Concert Bösendorfer 280 could not be more spectacularly recorded. This large 88-key instrument is in excess of nine feet long and weighs in at nearly 1,200 lbs. I would expect an instrument that retails for just over a quarter-million dollars to be one of the most beautiful pianos I have ever seen. Its clarity, brilliance, and thunderous power are all exploited by Tsintsabidze in repertoire all three composers would have been proud to have played on the earliest Bösendorfers—and they would have been amazed at the sound of this most recent model.

The pianist contributes an excellent booklet essay. Her interpretations, while a little slower than most, bring out a number of voice lines and harmonic emphasis that I found both interesting and enlightening. She has no technical limitations, and the perfect musical legato phrasing required

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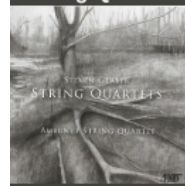
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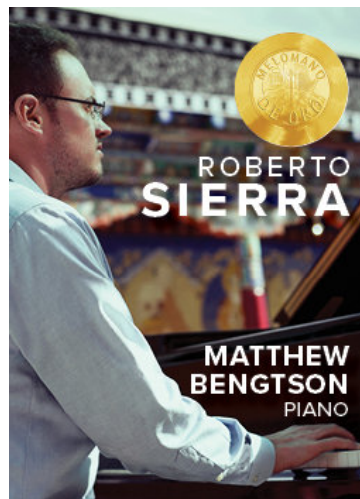
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for so many sections of all three pieces. Given the wide range of dynamics requested by the composers, especially Liszt, it is no surprise that Tsintsabazde's performances are impressive, not only for the extremes but for all the minute gradations in between. While most readers will likely have multiple recordings of these works, if you have a powerful stereo system with multi-channel capabilities this is a disc you should add to your collection. **James Harrington**

This article originally appeared in Issue 47:1 (Sept/Oct 2023) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

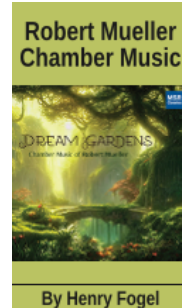
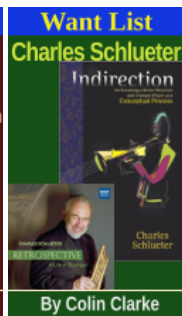
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