

## **SCHUMANN, R.: Fantasiestücke / Fantasie in C Major (Treutler) GEN 13272**

### **SCHUMANN: Fantasy, Romance 2; BRAHMS: Rhapsodies op 79; LISIECKI: Brahms Fantasy Dux 790**

Annika Treutler, a young German pianist and student at Hanover's Musikhochschule, makes her solo recorded debut with these evergreen Schumann works. Recorded at the Wolfsburg Movimentos Festival in the Volkswagen city, and underwritten by the Festival, this superbly produced recording has the advantage of the stunningly beautiful Annika—not ignored by the photographer, and performances to match in terms of fetching loveliness.

While the timing would have allowed for yet another Schumann work, no one will feel cheated on hearing what we have here. The eight-movement Fantasy Pieces, Op 12 is presented with panache, charm, and ravishingly beautiful tone. Not the least of its attributes is the hall acoustic captured so well by the engineers. For once there is a little space between us and the pianist.

While Treutler's ultra-refined playing finds her almost caressing the music, strong pieces like 'Aufschwung' (Soaring) and 'In der Nacht' are bold statements with plenty of power. 'Fabel' swings, and 'Traumes Wirren' displays in delightful fashion the evenness of her touch and her impressive technical ability. Ms Treutier has taken on the challenge of this oft recorded work and need have no fear from any of the competition.

The magnificent Fantasy is the work in common to both these recordings. Treutler is all romantic ardor, deeply expressive, and with a poetical dreamy quality that leaves behind forever the rigors of traditional classic structure. Her playing has a freedom and sweep that builds its climaxes and unleashes them in a most imaginative, improvisational, and intoxicating way. Lisiecki, at slightly faster tempos, seems less willing to wallow in sound and more determined to emphasize structure in the context of the new romanticism. He performs brilliantly, though I lean towards a greater emphasis on the fantasy invoked by Schumann's dual personality. Part 2 of this monumental work finds Lisiecki more willingly capricious, Treutier more powerful, though always seizing the opportunity to sharply differentiate the many contrasts. For me it's a toss up, and I readily accept the special qualities each player has to offer.

The exquisite closing section is deeply felt by both players (how could they not?). At a slightly slower speed, Treutier has the advantage of her creamy smooth sound. All is heartbreakingly lovely as touch, phrasing, and the special qualities of the hall acoustic make this one of the most ravishing performances on record. One might go on to indicate the top rung of recordings of Schumann's piano masterwork, but suffice it to say that both of these marvelous recordings would be included.

Lisiecki includes the composer's brief Romance Op 28:2 and two Brahms rhapsodies in his program. All are performed with style and, in the case of the rhapsodies, sweep and passion. That he deeply loves Brahms is obvious in both these terrific performances, from his own composition, Fantasy on a theme from Choral Prelude, Op 122:2, and by the subtitle of his disc: "Homage to Brahms".

The (Brahms) Fantasy, after stating the theme, goes off in directions inspired first by romanticism of the period. There is little to challenge the listener until he starts to pile on the chromatics as the music reaches a grand climax before settling down to a quiet close. It's an

interesting and enjoyable way to spend about six minutes, though few will be inclined to purchase the recording for that alone. Since the two rhapsodies must surely rank among the best recordings of these works, the meager timing has little relevance. All of the notes are well prepared, and the recordings leave little to be desired.

*Alan Becker*

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