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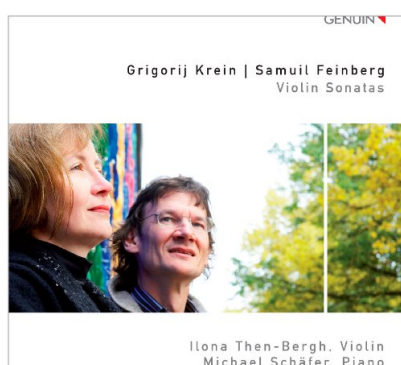
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CD Review by [Robert Maxham](#)

KREIN Violin Sonata. Poème. 2 Pieces on Yakutian Themes.

FEINBERG Violin Sonata • Ilona Then-Bergh (vn); Michael Schäfer (pn)

GENUIN 11203 (60:31)



[Violin Sonatas](#) [Audio CD](#) [Genuin](#)

Genuin has issued violinist Ilona Then-Bergh and pianist Michael Schäfer's collection of music for violin and piano by the early 20th-century Russian composers Grigori Krein and Samuil Feinberg as part of its "UN!ERHÖRT" series. Krein's Violin Sonata, from 1913, falls into two movements, of which the second, or fast one, lasts more than twice as long as the first, a sort of introductory Andante. Krein's idiom, ecstatic and mystical—perhaps hyper-romantic—derives, according to the notes by Hanspeter Krellmann, from Alexander Scriabin, although Krein studied in Leipzig with Max Reger. Then-Bergh produces from her instrument a strong but dusky and nuanced tone well suited to express the rhapsodic meanderings of Krein's first movement, with its surges to climactic passages; Schäfer possesses the strength for the music's thunder in the second movement (the slashing violin part provides the complementary lightning bursts at such moments). Krein's writing seems to cast the piano in an especially auspicious light, while it makes no particularly significant demands on the violin technically (tonally it demands a combination of strength and subtlety). The roughly nine-minute Poème, written about 1920, offers melismatic voluptuousness in both violin and piano parts, a sort of filigree that violinists will recognize from Joseph Achron's enduringly popular Hebrew Melody. The duo adopts a manner that conveys the work's sinuous hypnotic rapture. The Two Pieces on Yakutian Themes ("Melody" and "Yakutian Dance"), written in 1945, sound much simpler, similar in a way to the most ingratiating ethnic pieces by Belá Bartòk (like the Rumanian Dances). Then-Bergh and Schäfer make of them a sort of boffo encore.

Samuil Feinberg's sonata (Krellmann suggests that it comes from about 1960, near the end of the composer's life) consists of five movements, all but one of them bearing a title. The first, Praeludio,

might suggest a Baroque pastiche, but it's denser and more assertive than many of its earlier counterparts. The Scherzo, which includes several surprises that help justify its title, leads the instruments on a wild romp-like chase; the plaintive Intermezzo that follows bears little or no traces of exotic influences and ends with a brief cadenza for the violin, which Then-Bergh plays with typically aggressive command, before the fourth movement, which begins without pause. This strong-minded movement, with its sudden harmonic shifts, perhaps more than fleetingly suggests Sergei Prokofiev's violin sonatas (the work might have served as a vehicle for David Oistrakh). The concluding movement, Epilog, brings the sonata to a tempestuous conclusion.

Genuin's recorded sound, relatively close up (close enough to pick up very occasional breathing), creates a clear and clean impression of the authoritative vitality of both the music and its performances. Although those wishing to investigate the music of these composers should find the release especially rewarding, it deserves to be more widely recommended. Robert Maxham

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