



Sergei Prokofiev: Works for Violin & Piano

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It is tempting, for simplicity's sake, to describe Prokofiev's violin sonatas as polar opposites – at least in terms of mood. On the one hand you have the dark, ghostly First, often viewed as a lament for Stalin's victims. On the other there's the optimistic Second, packed with sun-soaked lyricism. But both works were written in the 1940s USSR, not long after the Great Terror, and share certain emotional strands. There's a danger, in outlining the differences between them, of overlooking their commonalities.

Happily, it's a danger that Franziska Pietsch and Detlev Eisinger both avert. This German duo bend over backwards to inject zest and propulsion into both works. Equally, they recognise that a certain acidity, even in the most lyrical, dreaming of passages, never lurks far from the surface. What emerges is a fully fleshed-out picture, simultaneously uplifting and unnerving, in which these sonatas become part of a coherent whole.

Yet their distinctive colours remain intact. Pietsch has a way of leaching the blood from her bow strokes that perfectly captures the First Sonata's shadowy atmosphere. Just listen to the opening movement's glissandos, which Prokofiev described as 'a wind in a graveyard'. Then, in the opening of the Second Sonata, her tone takes on an aching sweetness, underlined by Eisinger's spider-silk touch.

Their big problem is Alina Ibragimova. Her outstanding 2014 recording with pianist Steven Osborne is still too recent a memory and it's hard, during the First Sonata's spiky second movement or the Second Sonata's fierce finale, not to long for her no-holds-barred approach. And it's hard, in the alternately earthy and ethereal Five Melodies, which round out the disc, not to acknowledge that Ibragimova brings even more contrast to these works. Still, there's plenty to value here: a Lento of dreaming wistfulness; an Animato full of punch. Pietsch, who was brought up in Communist East Germany, claims an affinity with Prokofiev's music. This release neatly makes her point.