



Maurice Ravel: Piano Works

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EAN: 4022143925718



[Fanfare](#) (Peter Burwasser - 2009.11.01)

First of all, the young French pianist Romain Descharmes (b. 1980) is a very fine artist, possessed of not merely great dexterity, but exceptional style and taste. But more Ravel piano music? Really? The arkivmusic Web site lists 79 versions of the Sonatine, 96 of Gaspard, 100 of the Valse nobles et sentimentales, and, wait for it, 166 spins on the dance floor for La valse, more than half of them in the solo piano configuration. I love this music as much as anyone does, but must admit to no small degree of Ravel fatigue. Descharmes acquits himself well amidst the blistering competition, but as a nit-picking critic (that's why they pay me the big bucks), I must report some minor instances of over-mannered rhythmic manipulations, mainly in Valses nobles et sentimentales. The Gaspard is on the cool side, but this is not so much a criticism as a way to distinguish Descharmes's completely effective style from the more animalistic approach of, say, Argerich. The Sonatine is especially lovely, aglow with elegance and lucid texture.

If, by some chance, you need this material in your CD collection, you will not go wrong with this choice. As I have commented before, the Audite label produces some of the best piano sound in the industry, exquisitely balanced and with a natural (not too close) ambience. As for me, I look forward to hearing this promising new talent again soon, in more adventurous material.