



Edvard Grieg: The Violin Sonatas

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[Fanfare](#) (Jerry Dubins - 2016.02.01)

Immediately obvious from the above tables is that the son and mother team, Dmitri Sitkovetsky and Bella Davidovich, skip the first and third movement repeats in the early F-Major Sonata, considerably shortening their performance. For purists, of course, that's a deal-breaker. For me, it's less of an issue, considering that there's something strangely a-melodic about this sonata. It seems to proceed in fits and starts, with jerky folk-like rhythms and not a singable tune anywhere, leaving me to wonder why I would want to hear portions of it repeated.

But there's something else besides the omitted repeats that recommends against the Sitkovetsky version. Originally recorded in 1982 by Orfeo, it doesn't benefit from the best sound, and while Sitkovetsky plays in tune and doesn't hit any clunkers, he "smooches" some of his runs, and the performance has the quality of a dry run-through. That feeling tends to persist as well throughout the G-Major and C-Minor Sonatas, in which there are no repeats. Overall timings for Sitkovetsky and Davidovich are faster in all three sonatas. So, I'm going to eliminate their recording from contention.

Dumay has as his partner the wonderful Maria João Pires, one of my favorite pianists, and, as you can hear from the very outset of their F-Major Sonata, they bring a spring-like freshness and expressive charm to their reading that's completely absent from the Sitkovetsky. Dumay plays with such sweetness of tone, and Pires plays with such tender touch, that Grieg's listless melodies and limping rhythms suddenly come alive. It's amazing, really, to hear the differences between these performances.

Pietsch redeems herself in these readings with pianist Detlev Eisinger. Her casual approach to the printed score, as noted previously in her playing as a member of the Testore Trio, is gone. Interpretively, her view of these sonatas is quite similar to that of Dumay. Pietsch plays with fullness and warmth of tone, is responsive to Grieg's folkish, occasionally Hardanger-like fiddle tunes, and she has in Eisinger a sympathetic partner. Technically, I'd have to say that Pietsch is not quite as dexterous or articulate as Dumay, nor is Eisinger quite a match for Pires, who is a piano virtuoso of the first order. Then too, Dumay and Pires have teamed up for a number of outstanding recordings; they seem a bit more comfortable with each other, and they're a dream team that's hard to beat.

I guess if I were recommending a recording of Grieg's violin sonatas, I'd have to give the edge to Dumay and Pires, but it's a slight edge at that. Pietsch and Eisinger are very, very good, and succeed in making this music speak to me in a way that others I've heard don't.