



Schubert: Piano Sonata in G Major - Liszt: Piano Sonata in B Minor

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American Record Guide (Bruno Repp - 2020.03.01)

Jimin Oh-Havenith (b 1960) is Korean but has been living and teaching in Germany for many years. She is clearly a serious and accomplished musician. For this recording she has selected two great masterpieces of the repertoire that make very different demands on technique and expression. The Schubert sonata is better than the Liszt sonata. I first listened to the Schubert played by Gilbert Schuchter (J/F 2018) whose interpretation is magisterial—slow and serious, with meticulous articulation and dynamics as well as judicious rubato to add just a hint of charm. Oh-Havenith's approach is rather similar, only the rubato is almost totally absent, and with it the charm. Only in the Trio of III does she relax a bit. Some isolated notes in I seem a bit too short to me, and loud parts can get severe and heavy. (Do I hear an extra note at 1:28 in III? Perhaps an editing mistake.) This is a somewhat rigid and austere rendition of the sonata, but it commands respect. Schubert can live without rubato. But Liszt cannot. She displays the same seriousness and careful articulation, and she has more than sufficient technique, but there is not much excitement or lyricism. Her touch is rather hard, and she takes difficult passages at a deliberate pace, which robs them of momentum. The fugal section, too, is rather academic, not Mephistophelian. The beginning and end of the sonata lack mystery. The lyrical sections are stiff, almost metronomic. Short notes are sometimes hacked. For comparison I listened to a recording by Andrei Vieru (IMV 25) whose performance is fairly standard but for that reason alone preferable to Oh-Havenith's, and to a recent concert performance on BBC Radio 3 by a talented young Georgian, Mariam Batsashvili, who made the sonata really come to life (but had to pay the price for some risk-taking). Of course, there are many outstanding recordings by great pianists of the past and present. So, at best this release is worth getting for the Schubert. The recorded sound is excellent.