Edvard Grieg: Lyric Pieces

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Fanfare (Peter Burwasser - 2008.07.13)

New recordings of this lovely music continue to appear apace. I would have thought that by now, some Lyric Pieces fatigue might have kicked in, both on the part of this intrepid scribe as well as the public at large. This is not, after all, music with the depth and complexity of Chopin and Brahms, for example. I can't speak for everybody, but I'm still enjoying it, although my last review sample offered an unusual break from the routine by featuring an accordion soloist, Mie Miki, blasting away at this very durable music. This latest release, too, offers some novel attractions, which work synergistically to make for an alluring product.

Harada, a Japanese native who finished her training in Stuttgart, Vienna, and Moscow, plays with a tonal polish and technical élan that emphasizes the prettiness of the music (which is there aplenty), but her readings are not superficial; and she can dig in and reveal grit as the material demands. This is all good, because her playing is very much under the microscope, sonically speaking. To put it simply, this is one of the most beautiful sounding piano recordings I have ever heard. The German label Audite is new to me, but it is now highlighted on my radar screen. A techie note: I have been auditioning this SACD on a funky system—juice is from a Fi single ended triode amp, sound from homemade Fostex driver-based speakers. Source is a cheapo Sony SACD deck. Color, tonal shading, and dynamic range are amazing. The sound is not quite as delicious on my more expensive upstairs rig, centered around Spendor speakers and Quad electronics, but is still exceptionally involving. Audite has an interesting philosophy; they are not trying to recreate a concert hall experience, but, rather, are conceding that the sound of a good home system has its own unique qualities, notably intimacy and privacy. All of which would be for naught if not for the beauty of the music and the excellence of the performance.

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