



Béla Bartók: Piano Works

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 2009.11.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Effective and elastic Bartok from a pianist who's always alive to colour

Two of the pianists who Nicolas Bringuier has learnt from in masterclasses are Dimitri Bashkirev and Oleg Maisenberg, gifted colourists whose influences seem to find their way into this tonally varied and musically strong recital. The two Romanian Dances are relatively early works, the first and most Lisztian in spirit assertive and improvisatory, the second more like a playful burlesque. Bringuier's brightly buoyed performances are bang on the nail whereas his subtle sense of colour works well in the Four Dirges, again early works, the second of them better known in its orchestral guise as one of the Hungarian Sketches. There were times when I found Bringuier's approach to Out of Doors – one of Bartok's mature masterpieces – a little too free, the pounding "Pipes and Drums" of the opening losing something through excessive flexibility though the murmuring "Night Music" fourth movement, which is sustained at a fairly slow tempo, is hypnotically effective.

Bringuier is at his best wherever Bartok cues rubato, as he does on two occasions in the Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs (the third and seventh variations). The monolithic Piano Sonata refuses to slip OTT, although there's a strong musical argument for taking a more measured than usual approach to the opening Allegro moderato. The work emerges as less granitic than in the hands of some others, its bald central movement more sostenuto than pesante (heavy, weighty), though the motorised "folky" finale goes very well. What we get here is a more elastic, less relentless Bartok than has become the norm in recent years, thoroughly enjoyable on its own terms, but with Kocsis, Sandor, Jando and – hopefully before long via reissues – Foldes on the books, not a front-runner.