



AUDIOPHILE AUDITION

10 DECEMBER 2014

“Bach & Beethoven: Mostly Transcriptions 2” = BACH: Prelude and Fugue in D, “The Great” (Busoni); Prelude and Fugue in a (Liszt); Adagio from Sonata No. 5 in f (Siloti); Chorale Prelude “I Cry to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ”, (Busoni); BEETHOVEN: An die ferne Geliebte (Liszt); Piano Sonata No. 32 in c – Tien Hsieh, piano – MSR

Interesting transcriptions, but the Beethoven Sonata will knock your socks off.

“Bach & Beethoven: Mostly Transcriptions 2” = BACH: Prelude and Fugue in D, BWV 532, “The Great” (Busoni); Prelude and Fugue in a, BWV 543 (Liszt); Adagio from Sonata No. 5 in f, BWV 1018 (Siloti); Chorale Prelude “I Cry to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ”, BWV 639/177 (Busoni); BEETHOVEN: An die ferne Geliebte, Op. 98 (Liszt); Piano Sonata No. 32 in c, Op. 111 – Tien Hsieh, piano – MSR 1531, 71:13 [* * * *]

This is volume two—we must have missed volume one, which is a shame if true as this is some pianism of the highest caliber. Taiwanese pianist Tien Hsieh came to the United States at the age of nine and completed her studies at the University of Houston and then the Manhattan School of Music. She displays a delicate yet firmly in control touch with great dexterity and a lot of tonal finesse.

I’m not one normally big on transcriptions—they were done for a very utilitarian purpose in their day, either to expand and demonstrate the talents of the transcriber or to propagate the composer when suitable “normal” forces were not available. The pieces on this disc fall into the former category, but even here there are beauties to be found for those who revel in transcriptions as their own unique art form, and they certainly give an idea of the fecundity of the Romantic imagination. I generally find that Busoni’s Bach is more effective than that of Liszt, and truer to the composer, but Liszt transports us into a world that circles around him, and the results can be quite engrossing. This does not discount the lone wolf here, Alexander Siloti, one of Russia’s most competent instrumentalists, and the one who lived the latest.

But all of this hardly prepared me for the wondrous and simply radiant performance of Beethoven’s last sonata. Hsieh has an innate understanding of the work and navigates its many pitfalls with barely a second thought. It is energetic, propulsive, and well-knitted, easily one of the best I have heard on record, and that is quite a crowd! If there is a downside to this recording it is because the Beethoven made me completely forget about all that came before, and had me hankering for an all-Beethoven issue from this consummate artist. The sound is very good.

STEVEN RITTER

<http://audaud.com/2014/12/bach-prelude-and-fugue-in-a-liszt-adagio-from-sonata-no-5-in-f-siloti/>