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## FEATURE REVIEW by Jerry Dubins

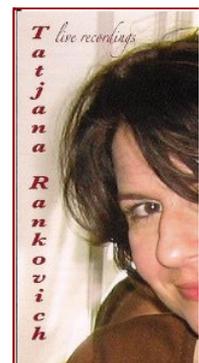
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**MOZART** Piano Sonata in a, K 310.<sup>1</sup> **RAVEL** *Valse et sentimentales*.<sup>1</sup> **SCHUMANN** Fantasy in C<sup>2</sup> • Tatjana Rankovich (pn) • IBOX No number (59:58) Live: <sup>1</sup>Mannes C Music, New York 2/22/1997; <sup>2</sup>Mannes College of Music, Ne 5/31/2005

**BACH** Partita No. 6 in e, BWV 830.<sup>1</sup> **MOZART** Piano in F, K 332.<sup>2</sup> **RACHMANINOFF** *Etudes-Tableaux: in c* 39/1, in b, op. 39/4; in e<sub>b</sub>, op. 39/5.<sup>3</sup> **SHOSTAKOVICH** Concerto No. 1<sup>4</sup> • Tatjana Rankovich (pn); <sup>4</sup>Bojan Sudjic, c <sup>4</sup>Novi Sad CO; <sup>4</sup>Mladen Djordjevic (tpt) • IBOX No number (Live: <sup>1</sup>Juilliard 2/15/1985; <sup>2</sup>Belgrade 5/24/1995; <sup>3</sup>Merkin Hall York 3/13/1996; <sup>4</sup>Novi Sad Synagogue, Serbia 10/2/2003

**BACH** Toccata in c, BWV 911. **SCHUMANN** Kreisler **RACHMANINOFF** Prelude in E<sub>b</sub>, op. 23/6. *Moment m* b, op. 16/3. **CHOPIN** Ballade in f, op. 52/4 • Tatjana Rankovich (pn) • IBOX No number (61:05) Live: Weill Recital Hall, Car 11/5/1989

As is clear from the triple headnote, these are all live performances spanning a period of 20 years in the artist's career, from her Juilliard solo recital in 1985 to her appearance at the Mannes College of Music in 2005. On *these* three discs, at least, Tatjana Rankovich's repertoire is core keyboard literature, with Bach and Mozart representing the mid to late 18th century; Rachmaninoff, Ravel, and Shostakovich representing the early decades of the 20th



century; and Chopin and Schumann representing the 19th-century Romantics. Her performances of contemporary American fare are not documented here, but are available at ArkivMusic and at CDBaby. The three CDs under review, however, for whatever reason, do not show up at ArkivMusic, but are listed by CDBaby.

Disc 1: Mozart, Ravel, and Schumann. With nearly 100 available versions, Mozart's A-Minor Sonata, K 330, comes close to being the composer's most frequently recorded work for solo piano. While choice, in moderation, is a good thing, abundance in such excess can lead to a state of indecision and paralysis brought on by confusion. Of Richard Goode I said in *Fanfare* 29:1, "His Mozart is modest but absent any pretense to chastity. It is Mozart as Mozart, rather than Mozart as prelude to Beethoven." Much the same may be said of Rankovich's Mozart. Her technique is impeccable, and her way with dynamic shading, pedaling, and phrasing is responsive and sensitive to the music while avoiding any suggestion of the coy or fussy affectation that can turn Mozart into a pantywaist. For many, Lili Kraus remains a Mozart interpreter of special merit among an earlier generation of keyboard artists, just as for many, Mitsuko Uchida is favored among more recent pianists for her perhaps more modern view of Mozart. For consistency in stylishness, my personal preference has been for Maria João Pires, but Rankovich is easily her equal in matters of tonal beauty and musical intelligence.

The waltz genre intrigued Maurice Ravel, but his fascination resulted in a large number of works—the apotheosis of which came with the public premiere in 1919 of *La Valse*—that one might legitimately call hideously defective. Work on *La Valse* had actually begun as early as 1906, but it was completed 13 years later, Ravel published his suite of eight *nobles et sentimentales* for solo piano in 1911; its orchestral version followed a year later. At its first performance, the piece was met with boos and whistles, with many in the audience being disturbed by the music's dissonance and "acerbic palette." They could hardly have anticipated Ravel's *La*

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come. For much of its 14-plus minutes, the *Valses nobles et senti* sounds like sausage made from ground-up bits of Schubert and Jc Strauss Jr., flavored with seasonings from d'Indy's Schola Cantor Six, and French Impressionism. What I like about Rankovich's p is that she's not afraid to get her hands bloody kneading the raw r doesn't try to sanitize the music, but plays it for what it is and for worth. The only other version I know that matches Rankovich fo foulness is Martha Argerich's Deutsche Grammophon recording, high praise indeed, though another close contender I've always li Cécile Ousset on EMI. In each case, I hate the music, but I love tl

Schumann's C-Major Fantasy is another one of those popular pia favorites that has flooded the catalog with well over 100 recordin does one choose between the cultured and patrician Perahia, the r but penetrating Pollini, the untamed wildness of Wild, and the fri bristle of Biss, extolled by Peter Burwasser in 30:3? The good ne doesn't have to because these, and many, many more, like puppie pound, are just waiting to be adopted and taken home. How adop Rankovich? Very, I'd say. Her approach to the piece has a symph and sweep to it that I find quite attractive. This is Schumann writ closer to Wild in its abandon than it is to Perahia or Pollini.

Disc 2: Bach, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich. While I reservations about Rankovich's performance of Bach's C-Minor ' (see below under disc 3), I have no qualms about her E-Minor Pa Voicing is beautifully balanced with each melody line clearly and defined, tempos are well chosen, and texturing is tastefully applic exaggeration or any quirky mannerisms. Rankovich's Bach is "m the way that many of today's best post-Gould pianists' Bach is m thinking of Hewitt, Schiff, Craig Sheppard, and Freddy Kempf. C they all have in common is the sensible instinct to avoid apologiz fact that the piano is not a harpsichord, and to use their instrumen resources and capabilities to the full. Rankovich proves, along wi of them, that this can be done while still respecting the composer intentions. Thus does she endow the notes on the page with a gre communicative power, albeit through a different medium.

As with her performance of Mozart's A-Minor Sonata heard on d Rankovich's F-Major Sonata, K 332, heard here, exhibits all of th strengths, plus one, and that is her exceptionally touching reading Adagio, which, for me, is one of the composer's most poignant r

From Rachmaninoff's second set of *Etudes-Tableaux* Rankovich the first, fourth, and fifth numbers. The first, in C Minor, is a tech exercise of enormous difficulty that pits right-hand velocity agair behavior in the left hand, all the while demanding that inner detai

to and brought to the fore. Rankovich is fully up to the task. It is : Rachmaninoff was much influenced by Scriabin and Prokofiev in 39 set, which was published in 1917. Those influences are strong the Prokofiev-flavored B-Minor Etude (No. 4) and in the very be. Scriabinesque E $\flat$ -Minor Etude (No. 5). Rankovich displays a rea these pieces, and I would hope someday to hear her in the whole

To close out disc 2, we have the one concerted work in this entire collection, the Piano Concerto No. 1 by Shostakovich. One of the recent tapings, the recording leaped from my speakers with startli presence. The piece is one of the composer's most winning, with twice the number of listed entries as his much later second piano It's a delightful, tongue-in-cheek raucous romp, its wit punctuate frequent pithy and sarcastic interjections from a very prominent t My longtime favorite recording has been the one with Argerich a on Deutsche Grammophon, which features the outstanding trump of Guy Touvron. But I think this version with Rankovich now tak place. It's really quite stunning, with brilliant trumpeting by Mlac Djordjevic and strong support from conductor Bojan Sudjic and t Sad Chamber Orchestra.

Disc 3: Bach, Schumann, Rachmaninoff, and Chopin. Somewher review, I mentioned that Bach's Toccata in C Minor, BWV 911, h special place in my affections as a result of a little vaudeville act on it by an instructor I had in a college counterpoint class. He set demonstrate that Bach's fugue subject was so indestructible it cou treated to any stylistic approach without being damaged. And of piece has had many stylistic treatments on both piano—Schnabel Slenczynska, Horowitz, Argerich, and Angela Hewitt—and harps —Kenneth Gilbert, Anthony Newman, Bob van Asperen, and Co While I generally favor Bach on harpsichord, I have expressed th regard in these pages for Hewitt's exceptional Bach on piano. I w say the same here for Rankovich's reading of the C-Minor Toccat has to be one dud among the many outstanding performances on discs, I'm afraid, in my opinion, this is it. The problem, quite sim from one or two clunkers she hits, is that the piece seems to get a her, and like a train that has lost its brakes, it keeps getting faster until derailment appears imminent. It's a credit to Rankovich's te that disaster is averted, but by the time the end is reached, the me going a click or two faster than when it started, and Rankovich sc not quite frantic, at least stressed.

With Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, the pianist is back on form. But c again the choices: Perahia, Schiff, Cynthia Raim (whose Brahms about in 33: 2), Kissin (weird but wonderful in its own way), Poll

my favorite, I think, Radu Lupu. Once again, as in the C-Major F disc 1, Rankovich takes the big, bold, symphonic approach, and i amazing results, as great waves of sound wash over you. But ther moments of moonlit delicacy and intimacy to counterbalance the tides. Very effective and very satisfying.

The two short Rachmaninoff pieces—the E $\flat$ -Major Prelude, op. 2 the B-Minor *Moment musical*, op. 16/3—are beautifully done. Ra readings come closest, I think, to the classic performances by Ru in their thoughtful balance between romantic effusiveness and ca attendance to formal shaping.

Like the housekeeper who says, “I don’t do windows,” as a *Fanf* contributor I really ought to say, “I don’t do Chopin.” Much as I l Romantic piano repertoire, there is something about Chopin’s mu tends to depress me and put me in a funk, which is most regrettab where would the piano be without him? Maybe the sadness is wh music is meant to be about. If so, the F-Minor Ballade, op. 52/4, 1 and the fact that Rankovich’s playing of it succeeds in thoroughly dispiriting me is testament to the music’s and her effectiveness. S reading is among the most polished and poetic I’ve heard, which include those by Ashkenazy, Horowitz, Moravec, Ohlsson, and, c the inimitable Rubinstein.

Rankovich comes close to batting a thousand on these CDs. Ther question but that all three of them deserve the strongest recomme  
**Jerry Dubins**

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