

"Mazurka sopra un tema popolare," begins with an unassumingly rustic melody that quickly takes on good-humored dissonant ornamentation. The finale is a stylish, hectic waltz with moments of dark low-bass rumblings and noisy janglings. This is a stunning work, and I would recommend this collection on the merits of both this sonata and de Larrocha's performance of it alone even if I were not taken with the rest of the recording.

I have only one complaint about the recording, and it is somewhat significant. I suspect that de Larrocha's playing is slightly banged in some of the louder passages, and this is greatly exacerbated by the limitations of 1950s mono recording technology. Some of the loud notes, especially in the upper treble, are shrill and almost painful to the ear. Likewise, louder bass passages, for example the climactic rumbles toward the end of the Esplá, are muddy. But this is an important collection and I recommend it highly. **Myron Silberstein**

**ANAMORFOSI** • Yannick Van de Velde (pn) • ALIUD 093-2 (64:13)

**CHOPIN** Polonaise, op. 40/1 ("Military"). *Fantasia-Impromptu*, op. 66. *Waltz*, op. 64/2. **RAVEL** *Jeux d'eau*. *Miroirs*. *La valse*. **DOUCET** *Chopinata*. **SCIARRINO** *Anamorfoosi*

Here's an impressive debut recording by a young Belgian pianist, Yannick Van de Velde, whose playing is deft and full of contrasts and color. The bulk of the selections are by Ravel, with whose music Van de Velde has a clear affinity. All three familiar Ravel pieces receive highly satisfying performances. Highlights are "Noctuelles," the moody opening movement of *Miroirs*, played with a gossamer touch, and "La vallee des cloches," done with gorgeously gauged voicing. The water pieces, "Une barque sur l'ocean" and *Jeu d'eaux*, are suitably glittering, and Van de Velde handles the *La valse* transcription, a competition staple, with the technical brilliance of a prizewinner, which he is.

With *Chopinata*, a short piece by Léon Clément Doucet (1895–1950), a Belgian composer and stride pianist, it becomes clear why Van de Velde has programmed the three Chopin warhorses—with the Polonaise receiving the most characterful performance of the three—that open the disc. They are delightfully quoted in this witty, jazz-styled send-up. Likewise, the Ravel selections are followed by *Anamorfoosi* by Salvatore Sciarrino, a brief *tour de force* that intertwines *Jeux d'eau*'s configurations with the melody of *Singin in the Rain*, with a few other Ravel quotes cleverly thrown in. If you enjoy Bruce Adolphe's "Piano Puzzlers" on NPR's Performance Today, you'll love this. I recommend this well recorded, unusually programmed disc. **Paul Orgel**

↓ **IMPROMPTUS** • Shai Wosner (pn) • ONYX 4172 (74:36) Reviewed from an AAC+ download: 64 Kbps

**SCHUBERT** 4 *Impromptus*, D 935. **IVES** 3 *Improvizations*: Nos. 1 and 3. **DVOŘÁK** *Impromptu in d*, B 129. **GERSHWIN** *Impromptu in Two Keys*. **CHOPIN** 3 *Impromptus*. **LISZT** *Impromptu*, S 191. **BEETHOVEN** *Fantasia in g*, op. 77

A bits-and-pieces program of 10 impromptus, two improvisations, and a fantasy runs the risk of becoming a miscellany unless countermeasures are taken. In this new release the theme of the impromptu is self-evident as a cohesive element, as the title indicates. Shai Wosner has chosen to separate the four pieces in Schubert's second set of *Impromptus*, D 935, two of Charles Ives's *Three Improvizations*, and three of Chopin's four *Impromptus*, scattering them throughout the program (Chopin's *Fantasia-Impromptu* from 1834 isn't included). It can be argued that Schubert didn't intend for his *Impromptus* to be considered an integral set to be performed together, and Chopin's entries come from three different years. Yet Wosner's recital needs a strong musical thread if you consider, as I do, that breaking up these sets is a minor drawback. (You can always change the order of pieces around by programming your CD player, but three decades into the digital era, I still don't know how to do that.)

The musical thread is improvisation, at which Beethoven and Schubert were famous in their lifetimes. At parties Schubert regularly improvised German dances and waltzes, by the hundreds apparently, and nearly every calling-card visitor to Beethoven's apartment expected and asked for him to improvise on the piano, which he increasingly refused to do as his deafness deepened. In the right mood, however, he would dazzle them with improvised music-making that might run far into the night. On the face of it, the term "impromptu" doesn't describe a defined musical form but rather an air of momentary spontaneous inspiration. This looseness in the definition allowed the Romantic imagination the same freedom of expression as other amorphous terms like fantasy, ballade, intermezzo, and caprice. The fact that com-

posers as diverse as Dvořák and Gershwin used the term is almost a happenstance.

I don't mean to quibble, and if the first entry on the program, Schubert's Impromptu No. 1 in F Minor, shifts with a lurch into the third of Ives's dissonant *Three Improvisations*, that's what Wosner intends. The effect is actually more piquant than jarring. My main interest here was the Schubert, which finds Wosner on home ground—his two previous Schubert CDs were well received at *Fanfare*. Both sets of Schubert Impromptus begin with a profoundly moving piece in a minor key, and his playing of the F-Minor Impromptu, although a bit restrained, is sensitive and inward-looking. He doesn't linger over the adorable melody in Impromptu No. 2—I wish he would—but there's no feeling of briskness. No. 3 boasts a famous Lied-like tune that is handled elegantly here. Vivacious No. 4 ends the program in a suitably lively, at times forceful, reading with pointed accents; Wosner's interpretation is his most original of the four.

Up to now, on disc at least, Wosner hasn't been known for Chopin, who was also a famed improviser. He didn't relegate his spontaneous inspirations to informal private performances but placed improvisation at the heart of his compositional style. Or I should say "seeming improvisation," since considerable work and revision went into the music. Wosner is slightly neutral and objective in his Chopin but still sensitive and musical. His way with the Impromptus is marred only slightly by not loosening up enough in the climaxes where inspiration is meant to take wing. Nothing is wanted, however, for poetry, delicacy, and finesse.

The longest work on the program, at almost 10 minutes, is Beethoven's Fantasia in G Minor, op. 77, from 1809, valued as one of a handful of compositions where his style of improvisation was written down. Considered original to the point of being bizarre (a favorite term applied by critics of the time to Beethoven's inventiveness), he doesn't disappoint in the wild contrasts that begin right off the bat with a brash, dizzying downward scale that has no connection to the gentle lyrical theme slammed up against it. Varied segments of the Fantasia last only a few seconds at times, and constantly dramatized changes of tone continue to the end. Wosner is so convincing at capturing every mood swing and musical gesture that I hope he records more Beethoven in the future—this vies to be the best performance on the disc.

The remaining pieces are neither fillers nor throwaways, but in their respective output, these miniatures by Liszt, Dvořák, Ives, and Gershwin are pretty incidental. As a refreshing change of pace, the Ives and Gershwin are a nice touch, and they fill out the picture Wosner is painting of how improvisation changed across the years. It's not an earth-shaking point to make, but the results are very enjoyable nonetheless. The pianist's natural, relaxed swing in Gershwin's gentle *Improvisation in Two Keys* gives evidence of another idiom he might give us more of. The easy way Gershwin elides into the first Chopin Impromptu bespeaks the care Wosner has taken to provide both continuity and contrast.

Altogether, this is a lovely recital of intriguingly selected repertoire and joins Wosner's consistently strong discography. He's one of the most imaginative programmers around and so far hasn't dropped a stitch. Critical admiration is high, although I don't know what the marketplace is saying, given how conventional and safe most record buyers tend to be. Onyx's recorded sound is lifelike and easy on the ear. **Huntley Dent**

**OPERA TRANSCRIPTIONS** • Michele Santi (tpt); Marco Arlotti (org) • TACTUS 850003 (69:45)

Works by **ARBAN, CACCIAMANI, FORESTIER, ROSSINI, SPIGA, VERDI, ZANICHELLI**

This release is one of those wonderful sleepers that comes from out of nowhere and really grabs you. Most of the pieces featured here are not, despite the disc title, merely transcriptions, but rather are fantasias or theme and variations sets, written on "hit tune" arias from the operas of Bellini (*I puritani*, *Norma*), Donizetti (*Don Pasquale*), Rossini (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *La cenerentola*), and Verdi (*La traviata*, *Rigoletto*) by now largely forgotten 19th-century composers, singers, and brass instrument players. Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban (1825–1889) remains well known due to his still standard trumpet method book from 1864 (as a student I was schooled in the 1936 adaptation of it for trombone by Charles Randall and Simone Mantia). As for the others, trumpeter Raniero Cacciamani (1827–1881) also authored a widely used trumpet method book in 1853; Joseph Forestier (1815–1881), a French horn and cornet player at the Paris Opera and a teacher at the Paris