

## HISTORIC RECORDINGS



**Idil Biret: Archive Edition 19**  
**Ravel Miroirs; La valse; Le tombeau de Couperin**  
 Idil Biret (pf)  
 IBA 8.571404

This celebrated Turkish pianist studied under Nadia Boulanger and Alfred Cortot, and was a lifelong disciple of Wilhelm Kempff. Throughout her distinguished career she has played under all the great conductors and carried off every conceivable award; her discography is huge. She still performs and is now releasing dozens of her recordings on her own label, in particular those which are no longer available commercially. Recent releases include a majestic treatment of Brahms' variations on Handel and Paganini, sonatas by Prokofiev, and folk dances by Bartók. In this new release of music by Ravel you can sense her pedigree in every bar.

In her hands 'Noctuelles' is delivered with breathless excitement and becomes evanescence incarnate; her 'Oiseaux tristes' is an expression of exquisite mourning. Her playing in *Le tombeau de Couperin* seems to come over in confidential close-up, 'Forlane' with sly humour, 'Rigaudon' with sunny exuberance, and 'Toccata' with impressive muscularity. A superb release.

MICHAEL CHURCH

## SOLO REPERTOIRE



**Clementi Complete Piano Sonatas – Volume 1**  
 Giacomo Sciarando (pf)  
 Sony 1907593482 – 2 CDs

Although the booklet notes' claim that 'Clementi's music is barely known today' is hardly true, this cycle does seem to be asking for a reappraisal of his music. The latest to champion Clementi is Italian pianist Giacomo Sciarando, who starts, appropriately enough, with the six brief sonatas of Op 1, 'for harpsichord or piano', five out of six of which are in two movements. There is something of Haydn's wit here (the finale of Op 1/2); but the cleanliness and simplicity of the writing is all Clementi. Sciarando's articulation is on point, and he seems to think orchestrally.

The Op 7 sonatas are fuller, and certainly more satisfying. The drama of Op 7/1 signifies a leap forward. Sciarando is stylish here, the *Mesto* quasi-Beethovenian. The opening movement of Op 7/2 really sings, balanced by a quirky finale. The second disc brings greater profundities in the *Largo e sostenuto* of Op 13/6, the internal turmoil of Op 13/6 and the magnificent *Didone abbandonata* Sonata Op 50/3. Sciarando is a most musical exponent, and in the latter piece allows the angst to unfold unhurriedly. All this is not enough, however, to topple Howard Shelley from top recommendation in this repertoire.



**Schumann Complete Piano Works – Volume 13: Charakterstücke II**  
 Florian Uhlig (pf)  
 Hänssler HC17039

This release oozes integrity, both in musicological and performance terms. Right from the off, Uhlig offers revelatory Schumann playing. It is as if in these shorter pieces we encounter the composer at his purest: the opening gesture of 'Lied ohne Ende' from *Albumblätter* Op 124 is full of hope and sweet yearning. Uhlig flexes his performance credentials fully in the *Fantasiestück*, one of those terrifically difficult, agile, flighty pieces.

The multivalent *Marches* Op 76 are wonderfully varied, and Uhlig is never self-indulgent. The disc offers a stack of shorter pieces preludial to the three main works. The well-known *Bunte Blätter* is given a beautifully burnished performance, perfectly shaped in the

'Eintritt', with moments of real magic. 'Einsame Blumen' glows from within and 'Vogel als Prophet' is replete with mystery.

The *Fantasiestücke* are given all the space they need, a superb performance. But the true joy of this disc is the (pardon the pun) *unsung Gesänge der Frühe*, one of Schumann's finest piano works. Uhlig's performance is the result of deep contemplation. Andsnes has championed this piece previously; Uhlig is just as fine.



**Schubert Piano Sonatas – A minor D845; G major D894; C minor D958; B-flat major D960**  
 Shai Wosner (pf)  
 Onyx 4217 – 2 CDs

We are spoiled with two excellent Schubert releases this month. Heard in isolation, Llyr Williams (see page 72) is a solid recommendation, but put their accounts of D958 head-to-head and Wosner comes out top. The Israeli-born pianist offers a visceral reading of Schubert's struggle in this most dynamic of all his sonatas. Wosner memorably describes the first movement as 'Sisyphean', relating the build-ups and collapses of tension to the myth of Sisyphus. Whereas with Williams in the *Adagio* we remember the singing cantabile, here we remember the soul's anguish.

Wosner has the ability to enable the tranquil length of the G major's first movement to unfold naturally; the finale rejoices in joyful staccato and natural flow. D845 here is a towering interpretation. Wosner's absolute insistence on crisp, clean attacks a major factor. How unutterably intimate is the opening of the finale, subsequent contrasts brilliantly drawn. The great D960 is balm for the soul, notable for its thoughtfulness: that famous bass trill lacks contained menace until the exposition repeat, for example. Wosner also underlines the modernity of Schubert's writing. The *Andante sostenuto* is a beautifully still yet not distended journey; the tolling octave bell of the finale is sonorous and potent.

This excellent twofer complements Wosner's earlier recording of D859, also on Onyx.