

reworkings of compositions for solo cello, harpsichord and violin.

Undeterred by their somewhat hazy provenance – outlined in some excellent accompanying notes – Evangelina Mascardi produces consistently idiomatic performances on three agreeably resonant copies of lutes by a contemporary of Bach. The 'Suite for the lute by JS Bach' presented first is a creative arrangement of the Fifth solo Cello Suite. Mascardi's qualities as a player are clear from the start: convincingly improvisatory in the introduction and superbly fluent in the subsequent *Allegro* while making light of the additional chords added in the lute version. Her command of the ebb and flow of such pieces as the first movement of the 'Prelude for the Lute' is underpinned by a convincing, understated control of the rhythmic structure and makes for continuously satisfying listening. Where virtuosity is called for, as in the prelude to the Partita BWV 1006a – best known in its version for solo violin – it is unforced and matched by an understated delicacy in the dances. If not quite flawless, these well recorded performances are abundantly rewarding. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

JS Bach

Solo Violin Partitas Nos 1-3

Linus Roth (violin)
Evil Penguin EPRC 0040 81:54 mins



Whereas the majority of players tend to focus on the pseudo-contrapuntal nature of Bach's solo violin music, often snatching at multi-stopped chords and even gently fading out the lower note in sustained double-stops – in fact anything to help sustain the illusion of the 'long line' – Linus Roth positively relishes the harmonic implications of Bach's structural plan. Multiple stops are gently cosseted and double-stops sustained with golden-toned purity as moments to savour the effect of where the music has arrived harmonically and where it is heading. More than ever, the famous opening of the D minor *Chaconne* sounds like an organ mapping out the music's harmonic continuity.

The other thing that marks out Roth's playing is its Henryk Szeryng-like consistency of dynamic and tonal-intonational purity. If the modern tendency is to almost exaggerate the music's potential for dynamic contrast and varied articulation, Roth sustains his flawlessly smooth, luxuriously toned sonority, so that each movement emerges in terms of its majestic formal perfection, undistracted by interpretive ticks and quirks. Few players can resist turning the brilliant opening *Preludio* of the E major Partita into a bit of a showpiece, but Roth

transmutes the temptation for rapid string-crossing bravado into longer-term rewards. *Julian Haylock*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Chopin

Scherzos Nos 1-4; Polonaise No. 7, 'Polonaise-fantaisie etc

Valentina Lisitsa (piano)
Naïve V7700 64:10 mins



It was with Chopin that Valentina Lisitsa launched herself as a YouTube star, when her 2007 set

of the *Etudes* reached the number one classical spot on Amazon. Her career since then has been marked by both musical and political controversy, and much of the Lisitsa 'phenomenon' is encapsulated by this latest recording, spanning early to late Chopin. The disc's opening is little short of grotesque for the way in which she launches herself at the Scherzo No. 1 in B minor – its first bars sounding brittle and taken as fast as possible, the haunting Polish carol that supplies contrast sounding slow and sentimentalised. Overall, the performance is incoherent, and the other Scherzos suffer similarly from Lisitsa's erratic approach. She also can surprise, and in the *Polonaise-Fantaisie* finds – after a bad-tempered opening – something to say. The more straightforward *Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante* receives a spirited performance, and she makes impressively light work of the *Fantaisie-Impromptu*'s flurries.

Having been dropped by Decca, Lisitsa is now recording prolifically for Naïve: though artistic judgement can be questioned, the bad timing of this release is probably no one's fault. Back in 2014 the pianist, who usually identifies as Ukrainian-American, was a vocal supporter of Putin's invasion of Crimea, but in this recording's booklet she stresses some Polish roots through her maternal grandfather. That hardly guarantees authentic Chopin, but she proves that there is no one way of playing this music. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Rachmaninov

Piano Sonata No. 1; Moments musicaux, Op. 16 etc

Steven Osborne (piano)
Hyperion CDA68365 72:12 mins



Trust Steven Osborne to cast candlelight on the distant voices and supernatural happenings

others often miss in Rachmaninov. This may not be the most consistently sonorous interpretation of the massive First Piano Sonata – for that, turn to Lugansky (Naïve) or Hayroudinoff (Onyx) – but I suspect that Osborne is pacing himself, and us, across the course of the vast opening *Allegro moderato*, and when he pulls the full stops out, it's awe inspiring (try the mid-point for the full dynamic range, from huge *fortissimo* to mysterious becalming). The ultimate build in the finale is astounding, too. Disquiet continues in the utterly original D minor *Prelude* Rachmaninov wrote, but never saw published in his lifetime, in 1917, with Osborne providing a segue into the 'Fragments'; the oddly-named 'Oriental Sketch' makes a good third movement to a very odd *Sonatina*-like sequence, also not without its creepy moments.

I didn't know that Rachmaninov had made a piano version of the Nunc Dimittis in the *Vespers*, the tenor-and-wordless-chorus movement performed at his funeral; it's the only truly calm stretch of the recital. As Osborne presents them, the innocuously-titled *Moments musicaux* are half phantoms retreating into darkness and pausing for obsession before finally melting into ever-more-brilliant day; the full sequence is vital. Again, the haunting is absolute, the final pounding C major chords stunning. A little more brilliance in the treble wouldn't have gone amiss – that may be to do with the recording – but the sound suits the enigmatic quality of so much here rather well. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Black Renaissance Woman

Works by Bonds, Hagan, Holt, Jackson King, and Price

Samantha Ege, John Paul Ekin (piano)
Lorelt LNT145 63:43 mins



Lorelt (Lontano Records) is a musical *salon des refusés* set up in 1992 with the aim of promoting

important repertoire neglected by major labels. And this is its



Golden tone:
Linus Roth shines
in Bach Partitas