

allows the ostinatos more resonant breathing room. He similarly takes more time over the marimba-like patterns of 'Galamb borong', while the motoric writing of 'Fém' murmurs rather than revs up. The undulating inner rhythm Driver conveys in 'Vertige' justifies a slow tempo that's antipodal to Yuja Wang's brighter, suppler traversal (DG, 8/09). I've heard more shimmering renditions of the 'warped music box' 'En suspens', yet Driver's resolutely clear background ostinatos in 'Entrelacs' rightly evokes soft mallets as opposed to cushy clouds. And because Driver doesn't stampede through 'Coloana infinită', for once you can hear the actual pitches in those murky chordal pile-ups. The four Book 3 Études are no less detailed and vocally informed via Driver's polished fingers and mindful musicianship. These qualities find a literary counterpart in the pianist's informative, caring and well-written booklet notes. In essence, Driver's Ligeti Études complement rather than compete with Aimard and Ullén, and that's high praise. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparisons:


Aimard (1/97) (SONY)  SK62308


Ullén (1/97, 8/99) (BIS) BIS-CD783, BIS-CD983

Huelmer (NEW!) FCR269

Nørgård · Ruders

Nørgård Solo Cello Sonatas – No 1; No 2, 'In due tempi'; No 3, 'What – is the Word!' **Ruders** Bravourstudien (L'homme armé Variations)

Wilhelmina Smith 

Ondine  ODE1381-2 (62' • DDD)



Wilhelmina Smith moves from the Finland of Salonen and Saariaho (5/19)

to the Denmark of Nørgård and Ruders, two composers interested in variation, metamorphosis and the idea of big structures wrought from small ingredients. The American cellist brings much to the works here but the most admirable quality of all is an extreme clarity that suits the music. She manages to maintain it even when her lone cello is wearing multiple masks at once.

Per Nørgård's First Sonata dates from the 1950s, when the composer was corresponding with Sibelius and trying to find his own way of responding to the Finn's particular way with thematic metamorphosis. Nørgård's theme is shape-shifting from the get-go, transforming itself even within the three distinct movements including a finale in which the cellist appears to be engaged

in a multi-layered Bartókian conversation with herself.

The Sonata No 2 is a classic Nørgård yin-yang: two broad movements, the first an intimate arch based on a hymnlike theme and the second a restless exploration of a tiny cell in which you can almost feel the composer approaching the personal breakthrough that led to the Infinity Series. No 3 is a set of three miniatures extending Danish music's obsession with the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, exploring his quote 'What – is the Word!' The little puzzles may be complex but Smith explains their rubric as clearly as possible, which serves the bigger structure. The accuracy of her intonation, here and everywhere, is uncanny.

It's a neat idea to end with Poul Ruders's 1976 variations on the ubiquitous medieval folk tune 'L'homme armé', *Bravourstudien*. All his style, wit and cheek and, yes, bravura are present, not least in the wry airing of the theme only at the end. In the nine neo-Baroque variations that lead up to it Ruders proves that he can be almost as chameleonic with a single instrument as he can with a full orchestra. Yet again, that's partly down to Smith, who, when faced with her own extraordinary range of technical and expressive abilities, still errs towards a less-is-more approach – truly an honorary Scandinavian. **Andrew Mellor**

'Rapa Nui Odyssey'


JS Bach Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV903

Chopin Barcarolle, Op 60. Nocturnes – No 1, Op 9 No 1; No 19, Op 72 No 1. Scherzo No 1, Op 20 **Handel** Suite No 5, HWV430 **Liszt** Ballade No 2, S171. Vallée d'Obermann, S160 No 6

Rachmaninov Moment musical, Op 16 No 4

Scriabin Prelude and Nocturne, Op 9

Traditional I hē a Hotumatu'a (arr JM Tobar)

Mahani Teave 

Rubicon   2 RCD1066 (103' • DDD)



Occasionally a recording appears with a backstory so extraordinary

that its intrinsic musical merit risks being overshadowed. The 1946 Columbia release of Chopin played by Maryla Jonas, a Polish war refugee who had been 'rediscovered' by Arthur Rubinstein in Brazil a year earlier, is one example. The sensational 1977 International Piano Archives recording of the 75-year-old Ervin Nyiregyházi playing Liszt is another. The story behind 'Rapa Nui Odyssey', a recital by pianist Mahani Teave, is no less surprising.

In spring 2018 David Fulton, a former software designer and Microsoft executive, who now collects instruments and produces films in Seattle, visited Rapa Nui with his wife. Like all tourists, Fulton writes in his introduction, they had come to marvel at the giant *moai* sculptures and enjoy the beauty of the island and its native culture. Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, one of the most remote inhabited islands on earth, is a special territory of Chile, with a 2017 population of fewer than 8000 people. On a side-trip, the Fultons were taken to a music school near Hanga Roa, far south on the island's western coast, where they were charmed by the performances of the young students. But charm turned to astonishment when Teave seated herself at an old battered upright and began to play. On the basis of this performance the Fultons invited Teave, her husband and young daughter to visit them in Seattle and there to make a recording. 'Rapa Nui Odyssey' is the result.

Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*, not perhaps the latest word in Baroque stylishness, is nevertheless a model of clarity, beautifully paced and deeply felt. The Liszt B minor Ballade has characteristic breadth and grandeur, moving easily between contrasted poles of heroic rhetoric and caressing lyricism, its taut narrative moving inexorably towards its triumphant denouement. The same feel for Liszt's characteristic rhetoric permeates the more familiar 'Vallée d'Obermann', the spirit of which Teave enters into wholeheartedly but without histrionics or excess of any kind.

The E major Handel Suite is neatly contrasted with the Bach Fantasy and Fugue, revealing a secure grasp of the two masters' stylistic fingerprints. Teave's Chopin-playing inhabits a world all its own, almost painterly in its subtle colours and marked everywhere by an exquisitely poised *cantabile*. After a luxuriously sensual Barcarolle, the febrile desperation of the B minor Scherzo provides vividly apt contrast. A splendidly Italianate Op 9 No 1 is paired with a desolate E minor Op *posth* to create a sensitive diptych of genuine eloquence. Works by Rachmaninov and Scriabin bring other flavours and moods to this varied programme, which concludes with a touching encore of traditional Rapa Nui music.

As fulfilling and enriching the musical culture of Rapa Nui surely must be, one hopes that Mahani Teave will somehow find a way to share her beautifully wrought, heartfelt pianism with audiences beyond her remote island. **Patrick Rucker**