

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Kirill Gerstein*

The pianist discusses recording two Mozart duet sonatas, K497 and K521, with his mentor Ferenc Rados

Ferenc Rados is known primarily as a great teacher – can you describe some of the ways in which working with him has influenced your playing?

I have had the fortune of interacting with Mr Rados ever since first meeting him at the IMS Prussia Cove over 15 years ago. Gradually, every aspect of my playing and thinking about music has been transformed through his influence. It is impossible to reduce true teaching to just a few keywords. Perhaps one precept of Rados's teaching is responding to situations contextually: not using canned responses to musical or personal situations, but endlessly trying to understand what the moment actually is and what it asks for.

What was it like working in the recording studio with someone so deeply self-critical?

When playing chamber music, I feel that Mr Rados switches from the role of a teacher and becomes a colleague. We were both aiming for the common goal of gaining and realising some understanding of these incredible pieces. Self-critical he certainly is, and there were indeed times when Mr Rados suggested that I really ought to take him to the airport as 'the whole thing is hopeless'.

Then I tried to play an optimist and convince him to continue. On listening to our performances, there might be moments when he would say that something is 'understandable', 'pleasant' or 'amusing', but then comes the next instance of (self-) dissatisfaction and he suggests turning the recording off. For him concentration is always on the piece and on making some sense out of it. And that is an endless process with only temporary results.

What made you record these two sonatas?

Actually, the choice came easily. When I first suggested to Mr Rados we play together in concert, he incredulously asked: 'If this were possible, what would you even want to play? A Mozart F major or ... C major?' I seized on that thread and suggested we play both. In another context, Mr Rados did say that a particular choice of a piece is not crucial, as 'it gives a chance to follow some general musical trends'. I understand what he means. For example, a Mozart work is filled with his musical gestures, ideas, surprises – and the amusement that comes from touching that substance isn't limited to a particular piece. And so many of them are truly great works.



There is an unselfconscious ease and naturalness to the playing, a complete lack of ego and a wonderful rapport – are these things that develop over time?

I am glad if that is the impression. Of course, 15 years of working with Mr Rados – learning through his ideas and examples and developing a common language – brings about a sense of togetherness that can't be replicated by anything more short-term. As for a lack of ego – well, hopefully. Some years ago, in a lesson, Mr Rados looked at me with a gentle, sarcastic smile and said, 'Mr Gerstein, leave your vanity somewhere else'. Memorable advice!

Danse caractéristique; No 18, Scène dansante.
Nocturne, Op 10 No 1. Romance, Op 5
Barry Douglas *pf*
Chandos © CHAN20160 (79' • DDD)



The third volume of Barry Douglas's 'Tchaikovsky Plus One' series matches its predecessors (12/18, 12/19) for inspired programming and noble musicianship alike. Many pianists sectionalise *Dumka* by milking the lyrical parts and whipping up the virtuoso repeated sequences. However, Douglas's moderation allows for more dynamic and expressive variety in the long run; by not pressing forwards when the *giocoso* motif occurs (bar 64), the *brillante* leaps eight bars later convey more scintillation and sense of surprise. Douglas pursues a straightforward trajectory in making the big Op 51 No 5 Romance's

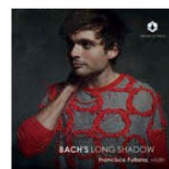
expressive points and carefully builds the climaxes. Dancers wishing to choreograph the 'Danse caractéristique' and 'Polka peu dansante' will find Douglas's lilting tempos ideal. By contrast, the bar lines float freely on account of Douglas's subtle rubato in the 'Valse sentimentale'. And his deft balancing of the scurrying *détaché* chords in 'Scène dansante' conveys a vibrant impact.

The colour, character and rhythmic focus that Douglas divines from the *Romeo and Juliet* pieces leads me to believe that this pianist has thoroughly absorbed and digested Prokofiev's original orchestral scoring, not to mention its balletic origins. Sample the Folk Dance's finely honed timbral distinctions between registers, the elegantly handled dynamic gradations in the Minuet or the processional flow in 'Montagues and Capulets' and you'll hear what I mean. Douglas does not play 'The Young Juliet' at a tempo beyond a dancer's capabilities, and he shapes the dissonances of 'Masks' without a trace of percussive

harshness. The breadth and intensity that Douglas brings to the finale impart a strong and sustained sense of tragic summation. One of the finest recordings Barry Douglas has made: don't miss it. **Jed Distler**

'Bach's Long Shadow'

Albéniz Suite española, Op 47 – Asturias
JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006
Kreisler Recitativo and Scherzo-caprice, Op 6
Tárrega Recuerdos de la Alhambra (arr Ricci)
Ysaÿe Solo Violin Sonata, Op 27 No 2.
Sonata for Two Violins, Op *posth*^a
Francisco Fullana, "Stella Chen" *vns*
Orchid © ORC100165 (58' • DDD)



Francisco Fullana is hardly the first young violinist to choose Bach for a debut solo album. But not everyone does it with the degree of personal distinctiveness that this

holds the *cantabile* line aloft. His use of rubato is subtle and apt. The pulse of the F sharp major Nocturne, Op 15 No 2, can vary but its support of the rhetoric seems perfectly natural. The alternating thirds and sixths of the superb G major Nocturne, Op 37 No 2, flow and cascade in a quicksilver legato. It is this free yet grounded rhythmic sense, combined with his healthy, varied sound at the instrument, that gives Lisiecki's playing its undeniable sensual allure.

While Lisiecki uses a modern piano, Planès plays an 1836 concert grand by Pleyel, Chopin's preferred instrument maker. One of the more remarkable features of this particular instrument is a 'double soundboard', with an upper one of pine glued to a lower one of mahogany, their grains running perpendicular. This design aimed at creating an instrument as resonant as the more robust English pianos of the day. Moreover, Pleyel pianos of this vintage still retain the distinct registers – including a light, silvery treble, a rich mid-range and a distinct and resonant bass – typical of earlier instruments.

Planès grounds his interpretations in what we know about early 19th-century performance practice. Chopin, according to those who heard him, seldom played a piece the same way twice, always varying details of his performance according to his mood and the circumstance. He freely interpolated ornaments and cadenzas into his own works and those of other composers, which Lenz described as 'miracles of good taste'. One of the clearest instances of this approach is in the E flat Nocturne, Op 9 No 2, where Planès begins ornamenting the theme as early as its second iteration and goes on to employ other expressive devices such as subtly asynchronous melody and accompaniment. Elsewhere, when Chopin's ornaments are abundantly evident from the score, in the F sharp major, Op 15 No 2, or the exquisite D flat, Op 27 No 2, Planès is strictly adherent to the notation.

Despite the relative unfamiliarity of the Pleyel's distinctive sound and the use of expressive devices that no longer inform mainstream pianism, Planès's interpretations speak with a nuance and integrity that is impossible to resist. **G**

US-based Spaniard has achieved across his programme centred around Bach's Solo Partita No 3 in E and the overall legacy of Bach's music for solo violin.

I love the fact that Fullana has opened not with the Bach itself but instead Ysaÿe's Solo Sonata No 2, written for his violinist friend Jacques Thibaud, with the opening movement 'Obsession' poking fun at Thibaud's penchant for warming up with Bach's E major Preludio. It's a piece of exceptionally convincing, resonant storytelling, brilliantly played by Fullana.

Move on to Bach's E major Sonata itself, for which Fullana has swapped to gut strings and a Baroque bow, and beyond the lightness and grace of his attack, again what's striking is the impression of dance – and also of naturalness. Especially if you skip to the Gavotte, which has a wonderful folksy insouciance to both its rhythm and to its limited but effective ornamentations.

As for the shorts, Albéniz's 'Asturias' (arranged by Patrick Loiseau and Fullana himself) and Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (Ruggiero Ricci's arrangement) are delicately, precisely, simply articulated, Fullana once again bringing the dance rhythms to the fore, with the resultant gossamer sound genuinely and enjoyably redolent of the guitar; the Tárrega in particular. Then, after a sultry Kreisler *Recitativo and Scherzo-caprice*, Stella Chen joins for a stellar encore: a glowing, slenderly, tenderly silvery reading of Ysaÿe's Sonata for two violins, notable for the finesse of its liquid flow and their tonal matching.

Those who enjoy this one may also like to know that there's a digital-only accompanying EP for which Fullana has paired the Bach Partita in D minor with a warmly impassioned reading of Joan Valent's modern-day ciaccona, *Punta campanella*, that's equally well worthy of your time. **Charlotte Gardner**

'Camino'

Falla Homenaje, 'Le tombeau de Claude Debussy'. El sombrero de tres picos - Danza del molinero **José** Guitar Sonata - Pavana triste **Mompou** Cançons i danses - No 6; No 10. Suite compostelana **Poulenc** Sarabande **Ravel** Pavane pour une infante défunte **Satie** Gnossiennes - No 1; No 3. Gynnopédie No 1 **Sean Shibe** gtr Pentatone PTC5186 870 (56' • DDD)



The album cover shows Sean Shibe shorn of his luxuriant locks; photos inside

catch him in the act itself, wielding clippers. It's all very lockdown. Thankfully, unlike the biblical Samson's, Shibe's powers appear unimpaired.

'Camino' is the Scottish guitarist's first recording for Pentatone and follows a string of acclaimed releases for Delphian on which he explores music as diverse as John Dowland's *Forlorn Hope Fancy* (9/17) and Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* (A/18). This time his attention turns for the most part to the music of that most elegant and introverted of Spanish Catalan composers, Federico Mompou.

Shibe's ability to command a wide dynamic range within a relatively restricted compass naturally comes to the fore. And though his monk-like appearance may sway the imagination somewhat, his exquisite sense of space and unfolding invites comparison with late conductor Sergiu Celibidache's Zen-influenced performance practice.

The album's title is a reference to Mompou's homage to Santiago de Compostela, *Suite compostelana*. I can't recall ever hearing the opening Preludio beginning like this: *lontano* ahead of a crescendo leading to such fluidity and firmness. Nor, at 38 seconds into 'Cuna', such an exquisitely veiled, whispered quality.

This ability to make you really lean in and listen is another feature of Shibe's playing you'll encounter *passim*. Take the *morendo* at the end of Satie's *Gnossienne* No 1. Or the pianistic rendering of the harmonics in Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte*.

The recital opens not with a whisper, though, but with a bang. Falla's 'Danza del molinero' is a perfect example of that aforementioned sense of space, coupled with confident shifts in dynamics, tone colour and dramatic momentum. It is the ideal complement to Falla's *Homenaje*, an impeccable performance of which is also included. There are innumerable other riches on 'Camino', a release that considerably enhances Shibe's reputation for having one of the most discriminating ears in the business. **William Yeoman**

