

A later recording would have made a fascinating comparison.

The highlights of the set are the two concerto recordings. Chopin's Second is superbly nuanced, full of character and interpretative surprises. In some works, I had begun to feel that Schein's rubato was slightly formulaic and predictable, but none of that is evident in this recording. She was clearly not a thundering virtuoso but her dynamics are kaleidoscopic below *forte*, and her playing below *mezzo-piano* has tremendous intensity, resonance and subtlety. The same qualities are evident in Rachmaninov's Third Concerto. Schein learned this when she was 15 and gave more than 100 performances of it during her career, which is perhaps why this is the most fascinating of these recordings. Her playing is quite unlike almost every version of this work I can think of – completely lacking the neurotic, gladiatorial histrionics often encountered in this high-octane display. That's not to imply that Schein lacks pianistic mettle – far from it; her technique is more than adequate for even the most challenging passages – but it is her focus on the wonderful melodic lines and interplay with the orchestra that makes her performance so interesting and so intensely musical. There are a few chordal passages where one might wish for a little more power but you will have to listen to a great many versions to find the same level of clarity and tonal beauty.

Based on these recordings there is no question that Ann Schein could have had a much bigger international career had she wanted it. During the 1960s she made her debut in Carnegie Hall, played for President Kennedy at the White House, performed in more than 50 countries and between 1963 and 1970 played six times at the BBC Proms in London. But instead of the life of an international concert artist – although she played and taught almost to the end – I suspect Schein chose a happy home life with Earl Carlyss, raised a family, became a dedicated 'quartet wife' and a beloved teacher at the Peabody Conservatory, the Aspen Festival and the Mannes School of Music in New York, leaving an indelible impression on all she worked with. These early and unfamiliar

Kapp recordings therefore don't mark the end of her performing career but perhaps – to paraphrase Churchill – the end of the beginning. As always with APR the notes and engineering are superb.

JONATHAN DOBSON



'Ad nos – Organ Works Arranged for Piano'

Alkan Andantino, Op 64 No 11 (arr Vianna da Motta) **Brahms** Herzlich tut mich verlangen, Op 122 No 10 (arr Busoni) **Franck** Chorale in A minor (arr Hough) **Liszt** Fantasia and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam', S259 (arr Busoni) **Reubke** Sonata on the 94th Psalm (arr Stradal) **Rubbra** Prelude and Fugue on a Theme of Cyril Scott, Op 69
Thomas Kelly pf
Rubicon RCD1132

'Ad nos' is a remarkable debut disc from the 28-year-old British pianist Thomas Kelly – beautifully produced and recorded by Rubicon. Kelly doesn't use his debut recording as a vehicle to display musical and technical versatility in an engaging and well-balanced recital; instead he makes a bold and uncompromising statement of intent, choosing big organ works in transcriptions by Busoni, Vianna da Motta, Stradal and Stephen Hough. It's certainly grown-up repertoire: Liszt's icy and glittering *Fantasia and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam'* from Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* in one of Busoni's most challenging and virtuosic transcriptions, a late organ chorale prelude by Brahms, *Herzlich tut mich verlangen*, also transcribed by Busoni, August Stradal's arrangement of the *Sonata on the 94th Psalm*, one of only two works completed by Reubke, a highly gifted Liszt student who died of TB at the age of 24, and the superb transcription of Franck's A minor Chorale

by Stephen Hough. The only work originally written for piano is Rubbra's *Prelude and Fugue on a Theme of Cyril Scott*, although ironically it's often played as an organ piece.

In spite of Kelly's superb playing, this album is not an easy listen – the density and complexity of this repertoire demands time and concentration, and perhaps doesn't give Kelly sufficient opportunity to give a fully rounded profile of his playing. Nevertheless, his wonderfully rich, organ-like sonority, effortless virtuosity, interpretative 'rightness' and confidence to choose a measured tempo, as in the opening of the Rubbra, all suggest a major artist in development.

JONATHAN DOBSON



'America/Beautiful'
76 new piano works by
American composers
Min Kwon pf and friends
Delos DE3629 (5CDs)

Five discs comprising 82 tracks with 76 premiere recordings and over five hours of music, all centred on a patriotic song, 'America the Beautiful'. Min Kwon has not done things by halves when compiling an anthology that, launched at the outset of the Covid pandemic, has gone on to encompass just where American music and, by extension, culture finds itself a quarter of the way into the 21st century. Invidious though it may be, those items discussed here afford a viable overview of the stylistic variety encountered throughout its course.

Many of these pieces are provocative in their take on the source: hence Leila Adu-Gilmore's exploring textural and dynamic extremes, and Timo Andres's gradual journey towards sonic meltdown. Jonathan Berger contributes a scintillating yet unpredictable study, while Theo Chandler's is a succinct clarinet trio of disarming

poise and Stewart Copeland's a violin duet playful in its didacticism. Sebastian Currier's 23 variations tease out much of this song's equivocation, then Justin Dello Joio proffers a toccata of jagged impulsiveness and Michael Gandolfi a bagatelle of ominous acuity. Fred Hersch adeptly interweaves his quartet of contrasts and Huang Ruo conveys an oasis of limpid eloquence; Vijay Iyer's 'nocturne' is affecting in its moodiness, while Aaron Jay Kernis's understatedthrenody is a sure highlight.

How typical of George Lewis to elide between change and repetition this artfully, whereas Jessica Meyer poignantly evokes certainties past then Paul Moravec expounds a succession of unexpected beginnings and unforeseen endings. Scott Ordway's dislocated gestures seem likely at odds with his title (*You Are Welcome Here*) but Paola Prestini's fraught emotions correspond all too precisely to hers, and who would have expected Terry Riley to contribute this infectious medley of dance-numbers under the earnest heading *Endure*? David Sanford conjures up adjacent places with appealing wit, and the late Paul Schoenfeld's allusiveness is engaging. Juri Seo pointedly keeps musical speculations close to his chest, whereas Augusta Read Thomas opts for a study in tensile integration and Trevor Weston a fantasy that feels almost Classical as regards its formal objectivity. Judith Lang Zaimont ranges over much the same ground, albeit with her more rhetorically inclined musical syntax, and Samuel Zyman rounds off the main sequence with an insouciance the more telling in its overall succinctness.

The entire project is initiated with Samuel Adler's transcription of Samuel Ward's song and concludes with Kwon's own arrangement sung fervently, though not a little histrionically, by Stephen Costello. Confidently played, stylishly presented and thoughtfully annotated, this is a significant release, impressive not least for the sheer diversity of encore material it has created for inquiring pianists everywhere. That in itself is surely more than justification for 'America/Beautiful', aside from whether it should have a bearing on the wider issue of national identity.

RICHARD WHITEHOUSE



'Celtic Nocturne'

Works by Douglas and Field,
and traditional Irish melodies
Barry Douglas pf

Chandos CHAN20365

In her book *Nocturnes and the Fascination of Night Music* (Yale University Press: 2026), pianist Susan Tomes defines the genre as 'a peaceful, slow piano piece of a few pages with a melody line in the right hand and a rippling arpeggiated accompaniment in the left hand ... The harmonies are simple, focusing on the home key and the dominant key ... The atmosphere is gentle and thoughtful'. Barry Douglas has largely honoured this format in his 'nocturnisation' of traditional Irish melodies, where pretty folk tunes are tucked up on a water bed that gently rocks the sleeper ('The Snowy-breasted Pearl'; 'The Bard of Armagh'). There's the odd lump in the mattress: a contrapuntal 'Cockles and Mussels' is punctuated with some dramatic chords; 'Bataille des Celts' is pacy enough to disturb slumber, while Chopinesque harmony creeps into 'Celtic Waltz'.

As with 'Celtic Reflections' (Chandos, 2014) and 'Celtic Airs' (2016), Douglas eschews whizzy motivic development to allow the core themes space to breathe. The result is somewhat formulaic ('Madame Cole', 'Song of the Sea'), particularly when paired with Field nocturnes: No 1 glints like a jewel under a loupe; No 9 twirls quietly; No 10 is a masterclass in broken chords. While not neglected as such, Field's nocturnes have always been eclipsed by those that came afterwards. Douglas adds his considered recordings to a select library, which Alice Sara Ott (DG) recently enhanced with her pearlised account.

CLAIRE JACKSON



'Spectrum'

Works by Auerbach, JS Bach,
Balakirev, Beethoven, Chopin,
Debussy, Einaudi, Gershwin, Handel,
Liszt, Moszkowski, Ravel, Schubert,
Sibelius and Silvestrov

Esther Birringer pf

Rubicon RCD1133

Ranging from familiar standards to Einaudi, Gershwin, Sibelius and Silvestrov, this warmly recorded anthology amounts, Birringer says, to 'a prism revealing the infinite facets of our basic human emotions'. In its nuances and 'unexpected points of contact', it's an album 'that doesn't explain, asking instead to be experienced. And that sets a clear direction of travel – inwards'.

Birringer's musicality is impressive. Einaudi's *Primavera* (quicker than the composer), Silvestrov's Op 1 No 1 Bagatelle (somewhere between Lubimov and Grimaud) and Lera Auerbach's D major Prelude cast hypnotic spells. Schubert's A flat Impromptu, D899 No 4, suggests an affinity worth exploring further, as do Moszkowski's *Étincelles* and Gershwin's *The Man I Love*.

Not everything is so embracing. Projecting Chopin's Fourth Ballade as a mosaic of developmental moments (urging forwards) and studied rubato (holding back) comes conceivably at the expense of structural and organic tension. If Sibelius's *Valse triste* seems perfunctory it's not just down to the slow-route vendors of this piece. Like *Jesu, joy of man's desiring* (the opening number), it's not easy to bring off. In a bristlingly competitive arena Ravel's 'Alborada del gracioso' (from *Miroirs*) goes through the motions without particularly standing out. But then, to close, Balakirev's *Islamey* overcomes threatening turbulences to loosen Caucasian glitter and Tartar glow.

ATEŞ ORGA