



17.02.2017

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

### *Emotions*

#### **César FRANCK (1822-1890)**

Mélancolie in E minor [4:14]

Andantino quietoso Op.6 [5:40]

Sonata in A major for violin and piano [27:36]

#### **Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)**

Sonata No.2 in G major for violin and piano [17:58]

Tzigane [9:57]

Kirill Troussov (violin)

Alexandra Trousova (piano)

rec. Konzerthaus der Abtei Marienmünster, Germany, August 2016

Reviewed in surround.

Notes in English, French and German.

**MDG 903 1984-6 SACD [65:29]**



This magnificent disc should be on the shelves of every lover of the chamber repertoire. The cover and the appellation *Emotions* suggest a sort of celebrity recital but this is far more. The quality of the music is of the highest and the playing matches it all the way. A little over half the programme is by César Franck and the rest by Maurice Ravel. The producers have arranged the pieces just as they would in a concert: a romantic first half consisting of a pair of short works preceding the main sonata, all by Franck; then (after the interval) music by Ravel - a sonata followed by a readymade encore.

Kirill Troussov and Alexandra Trousova are brother and sister and have been playing together since they were children. Throughout this disc they play as if joined at the hip, especially in the wayward sections of the Ravel sonata where, with often almost unrelated musical lines to play, opportunities to miscalculate are legion. The Blues movement is a superb display of jazz-inspired composition with a performance to match. The Perpetuum mobile finale is breathtaking. The Tzigane was written for violin and luthéal but given the failure of that adapted-piano to catch on it is almost always played on a normal piano or in its orchestral version. This, beyond anything else on the disc gives Kirill Troussov a chance to show what he can do with the 1702 Stradivarius he uses (once owned by Adolph Brodsky, the first performer of the Tchaikovsky concerto). When, half way through, sister Alexandra joins in, the excitement reaches a peak. These two are touring parts of this programme during 2017 and I suspect they are going to wow their audiences.



No less impressive are the pieces by Franck. I had never heard either the *Mélancolie* or the *Andante quietoso* before and was very impressed by two intensely beautiful creations. The Sonata is of course very well known and was a wedding present for the composer and virtuoso Ysaÿe. It is a superbly integrated composition on a large scale, its four movements lasting close to half-an-hour. Like his justly famous *Symphony in D minor* this sonata, written at the same time, finds Franck at his most inspired and demands the utmost concentration and coordination from the performers. It gets both here and I was swept up with the intensity of their playing.

Much is made in the notes of the 1901 Steinway used by Alexandra Trousova. It seems this instrument was discovered in a rather dilapidated condition in Schriesheim, Baden-Württemberg. Extensive rebuilding took place under the guidance of Steinway's top experts and the result was a very beautifully restored, rosewood-veneered piano, pictured both on the MDG website and in the booklet. It is different in two respects from a modern Steinway first it is not 'piano-black' and second, if the recording is as accurate as it seems to be, the sound is softer-toned whilst losing nothing in dynamic range. Certainly the restoration under the guidance of Manfred Bürki must have respected the qualities of the original and the substitution of modern parts would have been as limited as possible. Inevitably glues and lacquers will be modern and maybe some longer lasting nylon parts were approved, but basically we are talking wood, wire and felt. To my ears this rich sounding instrument is a real treasure and MDG are right to be proud of it.

The recording places the violin left of centre whilst the piano, placed slightly further back, fills out the soundstage from centre to right. The lovely spacious hall of the *Konzerthaus der Abtei Marienmünster* gives nice sense of space thanks to some wellpositioned microphones. MDG make much of the care they apply to sound quality and it shows up well in the higher resolution SACD surround layer of this disc. What we are supposed to do to audition the 2+2+2 format is place some speakers to give height to the image. I confess to hav no crane with which to raise my large Quad ESLs up and down, nor the space, so I stuck to 5channel surround in one plane. It was adequately immersive enough to gain my approval. The notes are well written and informative. They cover first the composers and their music, then the artists, then the splendid old Steinway - all in three languages and all with good colour photos, even the piano.

***Dave Billinge***