



Schumann Fantasy in C major Op. 17;
Kreisleriana Op. 16; Arabeske in C major Op. 18
Yeol Eum Son (pf)
Onyx ONYX4202

Two fine Schumann players this month, with Korean pianist Yeol Eum Son also offering high-level interpretations. Although the one piece that is not shared between the two pianists, it is the Fantasy that points to the differences between them: Min's grasp of Schumann's inner-voice machinations is the greater. Son is a touch clumsy in the Fantasy in this regard, although there is much to titillate the ear, especially in her projection of upper-voice melody. Son foregrounds beauty, as can be heard in the opening of the second movement, and yet balances it with intellectual rigour. The harmonic darkenings of the finale are superb, though some of the lines feel rather studio-bound.

Son's *Kreisleriana* is markedly less involving than Min's. Most successful is the *Arabeske*, which flows beautifully. Son's booklet notes are both informative and charming.



Pasternak by Manuscript
Music by Scriabin and Pasternak
Marina Primachenko (pf)
Arco Diva UP0213

While this is not the first coupling of Scriabin and Pasternak – Ludmilla Berlinskaya has done something similar on Berlin Classics – Primachenko includes Pasternak's B minor Sonata, a substantive work.

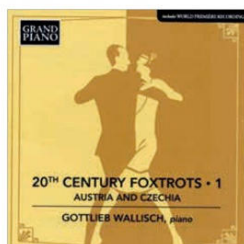
Throughout the ravishing Scriabin Etude in C-sharp minor Op 2/1 and the Etudes

Op 8 one finds an interpreter of great strength. Primachenko's way is decidedly Russian (she is bathed in the history, from Neuhaus to Zak and Naumov) so can be low on pedal. She is technically exemplary, and her realisation of the Scriabin is up there with the finest: if she lacks the final element of the incendiary realisations we hear in Sofronitsky, she remains utterly compelling.

Primachenko's Scriabin Second Sonata ('Sonata-Fantasy') is affectionate and incendiary by turns. When the music flows, it does so with easy inevitability. Scriabin's wispy prestos fly by with similar extremes of gossamer lightness and volcanic outburst, yet never sacrifice detail.

Coupling Scriabin with Pasternak is logical – Scriabin brought his Op 8 Etudes first to the Pasternaks. Primachenko also has access to Pasternak's manuscripts, imbuing her performances with real authenticity. The three Pasternak pieces (sonata plus two preludes) share a certain headiness with the Scriabin. Performed with real warmth and conviction, they are far more than curios.

COLIN CLARKE



20th Century Foxtrots Vol 1 – Austria and Czechia

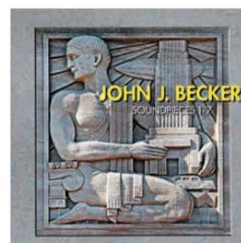
Works by Benatzky, Bittner, Eisler, Grosz, Hába, Ježek, Jirák, Krauss-Elka, Krenek, Martinů, Mittler, Petyrek, Schulhoff and Weinberger

Gottlieb Wallisch (pf)
Grand Piano GP813

In the 1920s Jazz Age, 'jazz' – like 'ragtime' before, and 'rock' after – became a general term for the most popular music of its time, viz. commercial dance-band music often with a minimal jazz influence. Classical composers, notably Stravinsky and Weill, were intrigued by what they understood as jazz. Berlin-based pianist Gottlieb Wallisch has released an album of shimmies, foxtrots, tangos and Charlestons by fine composers Eisler, Krenek, Martinů and Schulhoff, plus lesser figures. He's researched enough material to make this Austrian and Czech edition the first of a series.

('Czechia' is the official name of the Czech Republic, anachronistic for this period – maybe Wallisch intends a Slovak edition too?)

The jazz craze was epitomised by Krenek's opera *Jonny spielt auf*, an overnight sensation in 1927. The album opens with Jenő Takács's arrangement of a potpourri from the opera, including an affecting 'Blues'. Krenek later admitted that when writing the opera, he 'had only very vague conceptions about real jazz ... primarily influenced by ... Paul Whiteman and other groups.' (There are enduring issues about the portrayal of Johnny, who was originally a performer in blackface.) My favourite is the very entertaining 'Thannhauser-Foxtrot' by Leopold Kraus-Elka (c1921), a nice example of jazzing the classics. But the whole album is very entertaining.



John J. Becker Soundpieces 1-7
Joseph Kubera, Adam Tendler (pfs),
Conrad Harris (vln), Vasko Dukovski (cl),
Margaret Lancaster (fl), FLUX Quartet
New World Records NW 80816 – 2 CDs

John J. Becker (1886-1961) is the Midwestern and least-known member of 'the American Five' – with Ruggles, Cowell, Riegger and Ives. Like the 'Russian Five' and 'Les Six', they sought to establish a national music with progressive tendencies. Becker developed Charles Seeger's style of 'dissonant counterpoint': 'Dissonance', he commented, 'replaced consonance as the norm', a modernist simulacrum of Classical style.

Joseph Kubera, stalwart of the experimental scene, is a fine interpreter, who appears on four of the seven *Soundpieces*. These are abstract chamber works of diverse instrumentation, on the model of one-movement sonatas, and several appear here in their first commercial recording. The acidulous *Soundpiece* No 3 (1936) features Kubera with Conrad Harris (violin). In *Soundpiece* No 5 (solo piano, 1937), premiered by Ernst Krenek in 1943, Becker deploys Cowell-like tone clusters, including black keys against white.