

**Sibelius: Piano Works, Volume 2** *Valse triste* Op 44/1; 3 Sonatinas Op 67; 6 Bagatelles Op 97; 5 *Characteristic Impressions* Op 103; 4 *Lyric Pieces* Op 74; Sonata in F major Op 12

**Joseph Tong** (pf)

Quartz QTZ2123, 73 mins

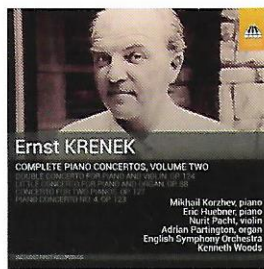


Joseph Tong's first volume of Sibelius piano music was a varied, refined collection. His playing was poised and attractive, albeit without displacing Annette Servadei, the non plus ultra of Sibelius piano music interpreters. Her five-CD survey is not currently available, however, and while Erik T Tawaststjerna and Folke Gräsbeck (both BIS) have cycles in place, neither fills the gap. Tong's survey is therefore a welcome addition to the catalogue.

Volume 2 focuses on more abstract pieces, including the three Sonatinas (1912), *Bagatelles* (1920) and the dramatic early Sonata of 1893. I have always felt the Sonata to be an unduly neglected piece, not least by Sibelius himself, and it is a matter of regret that he did not add further works in the genre. Tong has the measure of its 18 eventful minutes in a reading of boldness, midway in tempo between the slower Servadei and tad-quicker Tawaststjerna.

Compared with both Servadei and Tawaststjerna (who also recorded the complete transcriptions for piano), Tong's interpretations are on the swiftish side, for example in the Allegro first movement of the First Sonata. I find his choice of tempo here – and, indeed, throughout – the most natural. The sonatinas are nicely done; full of light and shade, and this same sensitivity is found time and again in 4 *Lyric Pieces* (1914) and 5 *Characteristic Impressions* (1924). Tong opens with the still-ubiquitous *Valse triste*, again nicely judged if a little slow in the outer sections. Quartz's sound is rich, the acoustic resonant and warm. Recommended.

GR



**Krenek: Complete Piano Concertos, Vol 2**

Piano Concerto No 4 Op 123; Concerto for 2 Pianos Op 127; Double Concerto for Violin & Piano Op 124; Little Concerto for Piano & Organ Op 88 **Mikhail Korzhev** (pf), **Eric Huebner** (pf), **Nurit Pacht** (vn); **Adrian Partington** (org); English Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Woods  
*Toccata Classics TOCC0392*, 64 mins



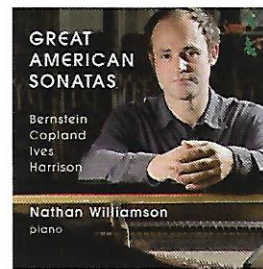
A year after the tremendous success of the first volume of Krenek's Piano Concertos (Nos 1 to 3; TOCC0323), which I reviewed last year, the concluding volume has now appeared with the same performers (and three additional soloists), featuring the Fourth and final Concerto of 1950, plus three double concertos partnering the piano with, respectively, an organ (1940), violin (1950) and a second piano (1951).

Krenek's Fourth Concerto is the most traditional in format of all the concertos, the only one in the standard three movements – two short, vigorous Allegros enclosing a profound Molto adagio of considerable intensity. This slow movement is the heart of the work, taking almost half its length. The Fourth which, like Nos 1-3, fuses serial techniques with Viennese forms, is the largest of the works in Volume 2, with a running time of nearly 23 minutes.

Yet the other concerto couplings are no mere makeweights. Krenek's compositional style grew more concentrated with time: the brevity of the concertos for violin and piano and two pianos reflects a distillation of means. The *Little Concerto* with organ, as its name implies, is of a lighter nature.

Once more, Mikhail Korzhev shows himself at one with Krenek's music, capable of handling the most demanding writing – as are his soloist partners Huebner, Pacht and Partington. Woods draws exemplary accompaniments from the English Symphony Orchestra, all concerned with relishing the rediscovery of this forgotten titan. Terrific sound makes this a thoroughly recommendable disc for adventurous listeners.

GR



**Great American Sonatas**

Bernstein Piano Sonata **Copland** Piano Sonata (1939-41) **Harrison** Piano Sonata No 3 **Ives** *Three-page Sonata* **Nathan Williamson** (pf)  
*SOMMCD 0163*, 78 mins



This superb recital shines like a beacon, illuminating the differing styles of Copland, Bernstein, Lou Harrison and Ives. And although the Copland Sonata and Ives' *Three-page Sonata* have not lacked for recordings, the Bernstein Sonata (composed in 1938 when he was 19) and Lou Harrison's Third Sonata are rarities. More obvious choices (notably the Barber Sonata) are avoided.

If Gershwin is the voice of urban America, then Copland is the voice of rural America, of vast open spaces and the great outdoors. (How Nadia Boulanger must have loved his austere neoclassicism: Copland spent three years studying in Paris at what became affectionately known as 'the Boulangerie'). Here severity and economy alternate with hyper-activity (the central *Vivace*) in one of Copland's supreme masterpieces. Bernstein's less ambitious Sonata is more easily accessible yet again his overall austerity and rarified idiom repay frequent listening; a far cry from the manic chatter of, say the Piano Concertos of Peter Mennin or John Corigliano.

Lou Harrison's studies with Schoenberg, Henry Cowell and John Cage are subsumed in a more refined style, while Ives' instantly recognisable soundscape, coming from a wild jumble of sources, derives from an endearing desire 'to knock the mollicoddles out of their boxes and to kick out the softy ears: The *Celestial Railroad* ends with what I can only describe as sublime, unresolved chaos.

All these works are given by Nathan Williamson with unerring mastery. Finely recorded, few more impressive discs of American piano music exist.

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