

SIBELIUS **Piano Works, Vol. 1** Joseph Tong (pn) QUARTZ 2111 (69:38)

Kyllikki, op. 41. **5 Pieces**, op. 75, "The Trees." **5 Pieces**, op. 85, "The Flowers." **5 Romantic Pieces**, op. 101. **5 Esquisses**, op. 114. **2 Rondinos**, op. 68. *Finlandia*

Joseph Tong is an English pianist who is perhaps best known as part of a piano duo with Japanese pianist Waka Hasegawa. He is the brother of pianist Daniel Tong, who has also recorded for Quartz. Here Joseph Tong plays a selection of Sibelius's most familiar piano music, if the term "familiar" can be used at all for a repertoire that is mostly neglected.

Kyllikki is a minor character from the *Kalevala*, a maiden abducted by the hero Lemminkäinen. The brief, three-movement work based on her legend is dynamic and colorful, among the best and most pianistic of Sibelius's keyboard works. The inevitable comparison is with the recording by Folke Gräsbeck in his complete traversal of Sibelius's piano music on BIS; Tong is more expansive, with more strongly etched dynamics. In the nature pieces of opp. 75 and 85, Tong is generally quicker than Gräsbeck, and his playing has somewhat greater contrasts. The aphoristic *Esquisses*, op. 114 are among Sibelius's last works, dating from 1929; the transcription of *Finlandia* is the composer's own.

The recording is excellent, with a full-sounding piano that is brighter in the upper registers than Gräsbeck's. Quartz tells us that Tong plans to record a second disc of Sibelius, but there's no indication that this will be a "complete" edition. In that regard, Gräsbeck remains indispensable; however, the present CD is as attractive a one-disc survey of Sibelius's piano music as there is. **Richard A. Kaplan**