

qualities to Cesar Franck and reminds me a lot of Ernst Chausson. It is a well-organized, substantial, and serious work that sometimes turns the piano into the musical equivalent of a menacing beast. Haguenaer plays the beast role well, sounding beastly in only the sections that call for him to be.

Although the String Trio was published in 1934 and written for the Trio Pasquier, this is the first time that it has been recorded. It is a relatively light and thoroughly delightful French piece that uses constantly changing string textures and a harmonic palette that reminds me a bit of Roussel to make a lively dialog for three that I imagine will make its way into the standard string trio literature soon.

As much as I like the Piano Trio and the String Trio, my favorite piece on this recording is the *Prelude, Marine, et Chanson* written in 1928 and scored for flute, harp, and string trio. Ropartz borrows voicing from Debussy (the Sonata for flute, viola, and harp) and Ravel (the Introduction and Allegro), which he uses to make this piece ring with that special *je ne sais quoi* that makes French music from between the wars so special.

All the playing is marvelous, and I am extremely impressed by the flute and harp playing as well as the string playing in the *Prelude, Marine, et Chansons*.

FINE

ROREM: *Piano Sonatas* (3)

Thomas Lanners—Centaur 2874—44 minutes

Ned Rorem's three piano sonatas are, like his three symphonies, early works—from the late 1940s and early 1950s. The symphonies are rather saccharine and dull, as Ian Quinn pointed out in his review of Naxos 559149 (Jan/Feb 2004). The piano sonatas, though in much the same Gallic-inspired language, with long, flowing melodies over luscious, enriched tonal harmonies, their insouciant or vivacious allegros set off by nostalgic andantes, are far more alluring. Their clarity, sparkle, wit, sentiment, brio, and idiomatic pianism are a continual pleasure. Listen, for instance, to the First Sonata's central theme-and-variations movement. The theme is beautifully shaped, lovingly harmonized, dewy-fresh, with an almost Coplandesque simplicity and directness. The variations that follow uncover the theme's hidden beauties with a marvelous inventiveness—variation 3, suspending crystalline arabesques in the piano's high tessitura, is absolutely magical—as the mood of tranquil purity is deepened but never violated. The sonata is topped off by a glittering and bravura toccata finale that positively scintillates. "Clear, fast, and

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hard" is Rorem's designation, but this is the hardness of a faceted jewel.

Why these sonatas have so seldom been recorded I can't imagine. They are virtuoso showpieces that couldn't fail to delight concert audiences, yet their lapidary craftsmanship and formal perfection will please the most discriminating connoisseur—moi, for example. I know of only two recordings. Sonata 1 was on an Orion LP, and Sonata 2, played by Julius Katchen, was on a monaural London LP and later reissued on CD in Philips's "Great Pianists of the Century" series. As far as I'm aware, Sonata 3—in some ways the most searching and individual of the three—has never before appeared on a commercial recording.

So it's especially pleasing to have all three of Rorem's sonatas on one disc, superbly played by Thomas Lanners, and in clear, vivid sound. Lanners's informative and enlightening notes are models of graceful writing, too. Anyone who cares about mainstream 20th Century piano music should seek out this superlative recording.

LEHMAN

ROSSINI: *Piano Pieces* 8

Paolo Giacometti

Channel 24907 [SACD] 60 minutes

Piano Pieces 8

Stefan Irmeler—MDG 6181448—80 minutes

The MDG recording must be great value for the buck, since it contains more than 80 minutes of music. Each of these releases completes a series, but there is little matching of contents, with only the brief *Prelude* from *Musique Anodine*, and 'Une Rejouissance' showing up on both. (Earlier ARG reviews: M/J 2000, J/F 2003, S/O 2003, J/F 2005.) Since both pianists are well suited to this charming repertoire, you can start with either until you add all eight volumes. Should you be a CEO of one of America's giant corporations you can easily afford to get both, and should do so without additional thought. If you happen to be a reviewer fortunate enough to review the series, that would be another way of adding them to your collection. Unfortunately, several went to another reviewer so this writer must raid his funds originally earmarked for chameleon habitat restoration.

There is yet another series on Chandos, with Italian pianist Marco Solini. That one, however, has just gotten off the ground and may take several years to complete. Giacometti's 1858 Pleyel is an ideal instrument for experiencing these pieces, but Irmeler's 1901 Steinway D also has a bright and appropriate sound—perfectly suited for these charmers.

Giacometti's selections concern food and contain the *Quatre Hors d'Oeuvres* as well as