

## CD Review

**Piano two ways: new recordings by Alexander Schimpf and Jenny Lin**

by Daniel Hathaway



On February 1, shortly after his appearance with the Akron Symphony this weekend, 2011 Cleveland International Piano Competition winner **Alexander Schimpf** will release his new CD on the OEHMS Classics label. Simply titled “Ravel, Scriabin, Schubert” and recorded at the Munich studios of Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Radio) not far from Schimpf’s home in Würzburg, the album is devoted to three works: Ravel’s *Le tombeau de Couperin*, Scriabin’s *Five Preludes*, op. 74, and Schubert’s *Sonata in B-flat*.

Though Schimpf confesses in his thoughtful liner notes that “the only determining idea for this CD” was “recording works that are particularly dear to my heart”, once his program was chosen, he noticed interesting bits of connective tissue between the pieces. They happen to be each composer’s final compositions for the piano, “late works” even for those who, like Schubert, died young. For Scriabin, op. 74 was the last music he wrote. Additionally, Ravel and Scriabin’s pieces date from 1914, “a highly charged period in Central Europe in every respect — socially, artistically and philosophically.” And the “dance-like elements” in Ravel’s suite “also determine large sections of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> movements of the Schubert Sonata.”

Schimpf brings clarity of touch and a fine sense of form and texture to his understated interpretations of these works. You can actually believe that the Ravel suite is a modern reworking of the baroque keyboard suite; the highly cerebral theories behind the Scriabin pieces dissolve under Schimpf’s lyrical voicings; and his Schubert — especially in the long, opening *Molto moderato* — sounds as if the composer himself were improvising, making things up as he goes along and being continuously surprised by the music that’s coming out of his fingers.

The celebrated New York pianist **Jenny Lin**, who has distinguished herself in recent recordings of music by Shostakovich, Mompou, Silvestrov, Seeger, Bloch and Montsalvatge, has gone an entirely different direction with her latest CD on the Steinway label. *Get Happy* is a selection of “virtuoso show tunes for piano” by Berlin, Gershwin, Loewe, Rodgers, Porter, Sondheim, Raskin and Arlen arranged by Dick Hyman, Earl Wild, Stefan Malzew, Alexis Weissenberg, Cy Walter, Christopher O’Riley, Stephen Hough, André Previn, Marc-André Hamelin, David Saperton, Greg Anderson and Stephen Prutsman.



In her liner notes interview, Lin expresses her admiration for pianists who both play and compose. “They are our present-day Liszts and Busonis”, she says, adding the practical note that “pianists know what pianists can do.” That means a lot of fancy-fingered virtuosity in the case of Earl Wild's Lisztian rhapsodies on Gershwin's *I got rhythm* and *Fascinating rhythm*. At the other end of the spectrum fall such quiet jazz meditations as André Previn's *Blue Moon* and Marc-André Hamelin's *Laura* (technically a movie theme). In between lie classy arrangements of Richard Rodgers tunes by Stephen Hough (*Carousel*

*Waltz*, *March of the Siamese Children*, and *Hello, young lovers*) and much more, including *Eliza in Ascot*, an imaginative set of variations on *The Ascot Gavotte* (*My Fair Lady*) by Stefan Malzew.

Jenny Lin, who remembers hearing many of these tunes as a child in Taiwan, is predictably impressive at the Steinway, tossing off cascades of pure pianism as easily as she finds the depth and subtlety in the slower, more introspective tunes.

In a sense, this album is where the worlds of the piano bar and the post-piano recital encore happily collide. The arrangements and the playing are delightful. The only missing element is the clink of glassware or the cheers of an admiring audience to give the music context.

*Published on clevelandclassical.com January 15, 2013*