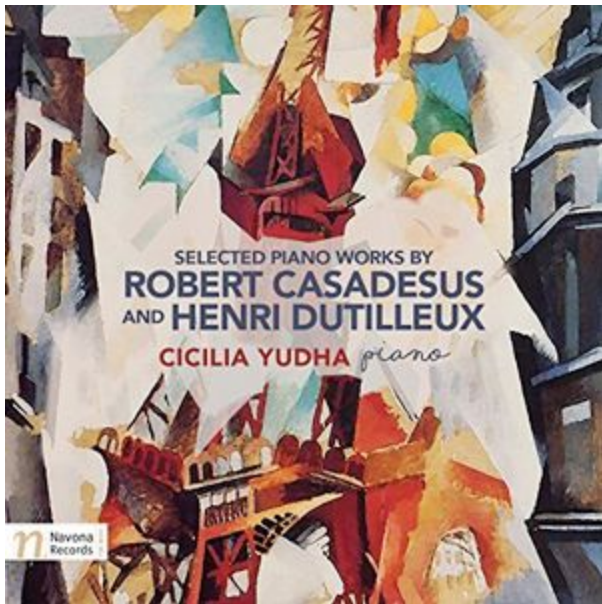


CD Review

Selected Piano Works by Casadesus & Dutilleux Cicilia Yudha, piano

by Jeremy Reynolds



In addition to being the founder of one of the premiere piano competitions in the world — the predecessor of the Cleveland International Piano Competition — Robert Casadesus was one of the finest pianists of the 20th century, as well as a prolific composer.

In December of 2016, Indonesian-born pianist and Youngstown State University piano professor Cicilia Yudha released an album of selected works for piano by Casadesus and his contemporary Henri Dutilleux.

Yudha has good reason to pair the two composers on the same disc. She wrote her dissertation on the music of Casadesus, and her teacher Slamet Abdul Sjukur, whom she calls the founder of Indonesian contemporary music, studied with Dutilleux in the 1960s.

It's a masterful album. Her playing is crisp, versatile, and engaging, from the exactness of her articulations in the opening of Casadesus' *Sonata No. 3* to the abrupt and dramatic shifts of character that permeate Dutilleux's *Sonate pour Piano*. Particularly impressive is her take on Casadesus' *Toccata*, Op. 40, a five-minute, non-stop barrage of sixteenth notes. Such perpetual motion pieces have a tendency to sound like technique exercises in less skilled hands, but Yudha employs a wide palette of sounds and colors, differentiating clearly between the various thematic ideas of the piece.

She handles Casadesus' *Sonata No. 3* with a similar range of character. The opening is anxious without feeling rushed or out of control. The slower second movement is lethargic, though Yudha never lets it drag. Her performance of the finale, a whirlwind of

jocularly, is delightful.

In the album notes, Yudha explains that both French composers developed their voices independently of the serial and modernist movements of the era. Their music sounds very French, with flowing melodic strains and ambiguous tonality. It's certainly not neoclassic, but nor is it quite like anything their contemporaries were producing.

But there's contrast between their music as well. Dutilleux is more dissonant and punctuated: *Blackbird* is interrupted constantly by staccato interjections. Casadesus is more consonant and flowing — even in a piece like his toccata there is much lyricism.

Yudha plays Dutilleux's *Au Gré des Ondes: 6 Petite Pièces pour Piano* with the same care and exactitude as the Casadesus on the first half of the album. The dreaminess of the third movement ("Improvisation") is exquisite, and the shifting metric emphasis in the fourth movement (another "Mouvement Perpétuel") is pleasantly disorienting and fun. The album ends with an excellent performance of Dutilleux's *Sonate pour Piano*.

Yudha's personal connection to the music on this impressive debut album is evident, as is her meticulous study and careful preparation. All of which combines for a thoroughly engaging listening experience.

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