

**CD Review*****Nikita Mndoyants: Davidsbündlertänze*  
Steinway & Sons 30075**

by Daniel Hathaway



Russian pianist Nikita Mndoyants chose 29 short works — the longest just over four minutes — for his debut recording on the Steinway & Sons label, proving that sublimity can be achieved in very small stretches of time. The composers would agree. Beethoven's Op. 126 *Bagatelles*, Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, and Prokofiev's *Sarcasms* were highly thought of by their creators, even though their formats left little room for the development of ideas.

The *Bagatelles* were Beethoven's last piano work, an achievement he bragged about to Schott, his publisher. Though only infrequently played as a set, the six pieces are cleverly related by key, feature numerous contrasts in affect and dynamic, and allow the composer to throw out bits of inspiration without doggedly having to develop them into larger forms.

Schumann's musical bipolarity is reflected in the 18 Dances dedicated to his fictional musical storm troopers who were committed to moving music in progressive directions. The dreamy Eusebius and the mercurial Florestan reign over nearly equal regions of this music, and the stark contrasts between those personalities keep the listener's interest piqued throughout the set.

And coming at the end of the program, Prokofiev's *Sarcasms* throw open a window into the early 20th century with in-your-face gestures as well as sudden bursts of sheer genius.

Mndoyants began his Carnegie Hall debut in June of 2017 with the Beethoven and Schumann works, adding one of his own compositions and finishing with a different

Prokofiev work. This recording gives the listener a taste of that occasion, but sticking to the idea of miniatures was a brilliant move.

It allowed the winner of the 2016 Cleveland International Piano Competition to show as much of his musical personality as possible in slightly over an hour. That personality is rich and varied, as any listener will agree after hearing this engaging album.

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