



Costa Poemas do Monte Op 3
Artur Pereira *pf*
Sonoris Causa 004

Memorably described in the booklet as 'a window into the 1920s rural atmosphere of northern Portugal', these pieces may also have been influenced by the great José Vianna da Motta's *Mountain Scenes* Op 14. Luiz Costa (1879-1960) studied under Busoni in Germany; later, he showed a penchant for French composers (particularly Ravel, as can be heard in his 1934 Piano Trio).

Poemas do Monte (Poems from the Mountains) is a sequence of 12 descriptive, pastoral pieces: 'Loading the herd', contented and delightful, could be a sister piece to Liszt's countryside pieces from his *Années de pèlerinage* ('Eclogue', for example). All of Costa's titles are highly evocative and he displays an easy way with harmony, whether oscillating between major and minor or employing modal touches. Eight of the 12 pieces receive first recordings here.

In true Romantic fashion, there is a fountain piece, No 4 'Murmurios des fontes', while the fifth (Mist in the Valley) is lyrically flowing. No 9 'Sobre os montes desce a paz' (Peace descends upon the mountains) is a song without words, its melody beautifully projected by Pereira.

A compelling showcase for music worthy of excavation, performance and listening.

COLIN CLARKE

PIANO CONCERTOS



Liszt Piano Concertos: No 1 in E-flat major S124a, No 2 in A major S 125a; Piano Sonata in B minor S178
Alexander Ullman *pf* BBC Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Litton
Rubicon RCD1057

Alexander Ullman's debut album, released in 2019, featured suites from ballets by Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Stravinsky (Rubicon RCD1029) but it is entirely appropriate that he has now switched his attention to Liszt, having won two International Franz Liszt Competitions, in Budapest (2011) and Utrecht (2017). As is clear from these performances, Ullman is a natural-born Liszt interpreter, with a wonderfully fluid range of touch and strong sense of structure – both of which are essential in this repertoire.

Ullman's accounts are engaging and thoughtful, seeking out the poetry in Liszt's writing. He certainly has the technical arsenal to meet the challenges in Liszt's virtuosic writing and successfully teases out the lyrical elements while keeping a firm hold on momentum. In this he is partnered by Andrew Litton, one of the finest concerto accompanists on the podium, who leads the BBC Symphony Orchestra on sparkling form in a beautifully natural recording from London's Henry Wood Hall.

Ullman's coupling, placed centrally, is the Sonata in B minor, completed 1853. It took me a while to attune to his interpretation, which lets the music create its own sense of epic rather than having a spurious one imposed on it by the pianist. Ultimately, this is a deeply poetic reading and provides the perfect foil for Ullman's first-rate versions of both concertos.

GUY RICKARDS



Grieg and Enescu: The Piano Concertos & Solo Works Including: Grieg Concerto in A minor Op 16 Enescu Concerto in D minor
Luiza Borac *pf* National Radio Orchestra, Bucharest/Nicolae Moldoveanu
Hänssler Profil PH21039 – 2 CDs

Luiza Borac's renown as a champion of the music of her compatriot, Georges Enescu, has somewhat overshadowed her interpretations of non-Romanian music. Yet her prowess as a Grieg interpreter should come as no surprise given that she is a former prizewinner of the Grieg Competition in Oslo.

This recording of the Grieg Concerto was made in Bucharest in 2019 and is beautifully nuanced and full of life, revealing Borac's innate feeling for the music. Likewise, her delightful selection of *Lyric Pieces*, recorded live at a variety of locations between 2004 and 2007: one will need to go a long way for finer modern accounts of 'Wedding Day at Troldhaugen', 'Erotikon', 'Butterfly' and 'March of the Trolls'.

Enescu's concerto dates from 1897, a year before he composed the engaging *Phantasy* for piano and orchestra (available with Borac as soloist on CPO 555487-2). Only the first movement of the concerto was completed but it makes a perfectly viable single-movement work in its own right. It is serious music, full of invention, with a rather Brahmsian character to its main theme, robustly performed here.

Borac rounds off proceedings with more Enescu: the marvellous Third Sonata and two movements from the Third Suite, including the magical 'Carillon Nocturne'. Overall a wonderful selection from this brilliant pianist – heartily recommended!

GUY RICKARDS

