

YOUNG PIANISTS

Bryce Morrison listens to a handful of young artists making their recorded debuts in music ranging from Bach to Rachmaninov



Sodi Braide brings 'unforced eloquence and integrity' to Schubert on his new disc

Here on five CDs are examples of rising stars, a young generation prompting several token observations. The overall standard is too high to think competitively and yet I have to say that pride of place goes to **Sodi Braide**, Paris-trained but of Nigerian background. Schubert has become his ultimate joy, a magically evolving presence in his life, reflected in performances of such familiar fare as the D899 Impromptus and the B flat Sonata, D960. Here, without recourse to idiosyncrasy or preening mannerism, everything is made movingly unfamiliar, and this is particularly true of what I have called the 'Hamlet' of sonatas, music of subtle and infinite musical demands. Braide's strong but unforced eloquence and integrity exceed the playing of many other celebrated ('celebrity') names. Always he allows Schubert his own unimpeded voice. The performances of the Impromptus are of similar calibre. Braide was born to play Schubert and, I suspect, much else besides.

Now we turn to Chopin's 27 Etudes, that cruelly exposed Parnassus of the repertoire. In **Irina Bogdanova** you hear a pianist of daunting proficiency, able to play all the notes impressively (no mean feat in such demanding fare). But crossing the Rubicon from pragmatism to poetry is always an elusive challenge and what I missed was an acute, less generalised response, particularly in the slow études

where the test becomes more richly varied and less exclusive than elsewhere. I doubt whether Chopin would have cried out, 'Ah, mon patrie!' after hearing Bogdanova in Op 10 No 3. You may be happy to miss, for example, the circus element that mars Cziffra's scorching bravura accounts; but on the other hand too little 'takes wing' (Philippe Entremont on Cortot). More positively, Bogdanova is at her most poised in the *Trois Nouvelles Etudes*, though even here her way with the A flat study (placed third) would hardly have prompted Liszt to be lost in wonder at Chopin's ineffable poetry.

Then there is **Audrey Vigoureux** in Bach and Beethoven who, according to the booklet-note, shows 'a solar interiority, a refined violence, an implacable and supple drive; an earthly mysticism, a fleshy limpidity; raging crystal'. More intelligibly, her playing is brisk and cool-headed. Fleet and dexterous, she suggests 'time's wingèd chariot hurrying near' (I imagine Martha Argerich is among her favourites), but the rapidity of her responses means that in both Beethoven's Op 27 No 1 and Op 110 sonatas she fails to generate sufficient stature or intensity. Nonetheless, her unfaltering assurance is highly impressive and extends to two Bach Fantasias and Fugues, where she realises their startling modernity through understatement rather than overemphasis.

Alexander Schimpf, who has received 'stimuli from Cécile Ousset and Janina

Fialkowska', is memorably attuned to the bittersweet melancholy of late Brahms (Op 119) and, sensing a foretaste of Debussy's Impressionism and most intimate confidences, continues with a selection from *Images*, Book 2. Here he evokes a world where natural phenomena are endowed with mystery and enigma, their 'inscape' (Gerard Manley Hopkins) creating a poetry that is 'golden' rather than 'brazen' (Philip Sidney). There is a timeless sense in 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' of bells tolling from All Saints' to All Souls' Day, and this is followed by a no less memorable *L'isle joyeuse* celebrating Debussy's new-found happiness with his second wife Emma Bardac on the island of Jersey. Beethoven's Op 111 Sonata represents more than a sea change but here, in the first movement, Schimpf's fleetness becomes a soft-focus alternative to a more elemental outpouring. The Arietta, however, is given with an unclouded musical grace.

Finally, **Olga Georgievskaya**, who opens and closes with two chaconnes, the first by Bach-Busoni, the second Vitali's in G minor (originally for violin and continuo, and heard here in Georgievskaya's own arrangement). In between come Rachmaninov's Second Sonata (played, sadly, in the now fashionable truncated 1931 rather than the original 1913 version) and two more settings by the pianist of Rachmaninov songs. The performances are of an all-Russian grandeur, with a sumptuous tonal resource ranging from a whispering *pianissimo* to the grandest *fortissimo*, a reminder that pianists who play without the fullest emotional commitment cut little ice in Russia. Georgievskaya ends in a blaze of glory that could only produce a storm of applause in her native land. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Schubert Impromptus, D899. Pf Son No 21, D960 Sodi Braide
Solstice (P) SOCD309



Chopin Etudes. Trois Nouvelles Etudes Irina Bogdanova
Quartz (P) QTZ2109



JS Bach, Beethoven Piano Works Audrey Vigoureux
Evidence (P) EVCD010



Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy Piano Works Alexander Schimpf
Oehms (P) OC1820



Bach, Rachmaninov, Vitali Chaconnes & Songs Olga Georgievskaya
Odradek (P) ODRCD318