

that the actual character is Elena or Paolino. But perhaps this consistent omission adds to the fun and reminds us that we are hearing a work of theater, where things (as in life, as well) are not always what they seem.

LOCKE

MEDTNER: *Mood Pictures; 6 Fairy Tales, op 51; 5 Forgotten Melodies, op 39*
Frank Huang, p—Centaur 3852—72 minutes

The “Solo Piano Works of Nikolai Medtner, Vol. 1” is a title I have seen before. There have been a few Vol. 2 and even Vol. 3. Geoffrey Tozer completed 8 volumes on Chandos (1992-2005), including all of the sonatas, but passed away before completing the series. Hamish Milne’s 7CD box set (Brilliant 8851, May/June 2009), coupled with two 2CD sets on Hyperion (*Skazki*, 67491, Nov/Dec 2007) and (*Dithyrambs and Other Short Piano Works*, 67851, July-Aug 2012) mark the most nearly complete set (even though Milne’s big box includes two sonatas never recorded by Milne and played by Tozer). Those recordings were made over more than a 30-year period. I am not sure that there has ever been a completed set (in the sense of Leslie Howard’s 100+ CD Liszt series, which still is missing a few pieces that are known to exist, but in private hands and unavailable).

Frank Huang makes a great start on his projected 9CD series here. With two degrees from Juilliard and a DMA from the Cleveland Institute, his extensive performing and teaching credits seem just right for such a demanding project. He has an intense desire to bring all of Medtner’s still unfamiliar music to a wider audience. His excellent program notes touch on the close friendship between Rachmaninoff and Medtner. Certainly Rachmaninoff was one of Medtner’s strongest supporters. Rachmaninoff said that Medtner’s first published pieces were so good that it would be hard for him to match them in later life. He also said that no one tells tales like Medtner (after hearing him play his *Fairy Tales*, Op. 51). While Rachmaninoff did not perform any of Medtner’s sonatas, he did include a number of shorter pieces in his concert repertoire. He also helped arrange a US concert tour for Medtner in 1924 and dedicated his Piano Concerto 4 to him.

The 8 *Mood Pictures* are varied and a perfect beginning. Whether serene or tempestuous, melancholy or festive, agitated or elegantly graceful, every aspect of Medtner’s compo-

sitional abilities is shown over the 20-minute group of pieces.

The composer used the title *Skazki* (Fairy Tales) for many piano pieces. This group of 6 is dedicated to Russian folk characters like Cinderella and Ivan the Fool. The second group of *Forgotten Melodies* is a set of 5 pieces that have melodic and thematic relationships. It ends with the big single movement *Sonata Tragica*.

Huang clearly has the requisite technique and musical intellect to bring all of these works off in convincing fashion. He faces such formidable competition as Hamelin in the *Forgotten Melodies* and holds his own quite well. Centaur’s recording is very good.

HARRINGTON

MENDELSSOHN, A: *Songs*

Julianne Baird, s; Ryan de Ryke, bar; Eva Mengelkoch, p—Naxos 579093—68 minutes

Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1874-1936)—grandson of Felix Mendelssohn, grand-nephew of Fanny Hensel, and son of Felix’s eldest son, Karl, a historian—was a political scientist and legal scholar specializing in international law. He served as one of Germany’s observers to the Treaty of Versailles negotiations in 1919. Later in life he remarked that he would have loved to become a professional musician but instead gave in to family pressure and studied law. He thought of himself, nevertheless, as a musician and referred to himself in a short professional note as “grandson of Felix Mendelssohn and a composer of songs”.

At the peak of his law career as a professor he developed a close relationship with his student Magdalene “Lena” Schoch, who became his trusted colleague, confidante, and muse. The 28 songs of this album, “Songs for Lena”, are mostly love songs, which she brought to the US after fleeing Nazi Germany. They were found in a box in the basement of her house in Arlington, Virginia years after she died.

This seems to be the only recording available of any of his compositions and includes settings of some of the same texts Felix and Fanny set a century earlier. His style is an extension of the post-romantic era, occasionally breaking from his essentially conservative tonal language (as in ‘In der Nacht’). His seven *Knaben Wunderhorn* settings and several Ruckert settings deserve a hearing.

This is the first time I’ve heard the excellent lyric baritone Ryan de Ryke, who sings 22