

MEDTNER Piano works, Vol 1 (Frank Huang)

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Frank Huang first caught my attention through his 2017 Centaur release devoted to the jazzily inventive piano music of Jack Gallagher. The pianist's exuberant virtuosity and innate musicianship gave me high hopes for the first instalment of a projected nine-disc project encompassing Medtner's complete solo piano output.

As the *Eight Mood Pictures*, Op 1, proceed in succession, it appears that Huang emphasises colour and nuance over projecting the music's linear trajectory, yet he conveys a wide scope of textural variety in the process. Huang's superior rhythmic exactitude imparts more character and contrasts to No 6's quirky mood shifts. Indeed, its tango-like section sounds all the wilder due to Huang's shoe-horning the decorative passagework within a relatively strict basic tempo. No 5's flurries of rapid right-hand figurations emerge smoother here than in other recordings, while the left-hand chords that drive Ekaterina Derzhavina's recording (Phoenix, 3/09) here take on a muted, mysterious quality that suggests a distant drummer. Huang's hair-trigger articulation and accurate alignment of No 7's rhythms vivify the music's energetic unrest all the more.

In the Op 51 *Tales*, the pianist playfully relishes the glissandos and hemiolas, while nimbly and elegantly navigating No 5's swirling triplet patterns. Huang's conversational *cantabile* in No 2 matches the composer's own recording, yet he caresses the *Allegretto* to more magical effect.

That Huang can hold his own next to Marc-André Hamelin's standard-setting *Forgotten Melodies* cycle (Hyperion, 10/98) is no small achievement. While Huang's fleet fingerwork in No 3 yields to Hamelin's drier scintillation, the younger pianist's more literal, less volatile approach to the *dolce legatissimo* section of the 'Sonata tragica' (starting at 1'44") somehow creates a sense of longer lines imitating one another in different perspectives.

Centaur's mellifluous and full-bodied sound might be rather over-reverberant for some tastes but it does justice to Huang's meticulous and well-considered interpretations, while the pianist provides his own informative booklet notes. Huang and Medtner are made for one another, and I look forward to further volumes.



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(8) Stimmungsbilder

(6) Fairy Tales

Forgotten Melodies, Set II

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