



Rachmaninov's *Russian Rhapsody* gets a solid performance, despite the pianists slightly bogging down in the thicker textures. Unfortunately, there's nothing idiomatic about their fussy *Rhapsody in Blue*. Following a draggably paced opening section, the duo gain momentum and eloquence in the Liszt Second Rhapsody's *Friska*, where Admory's original cadenza decorates the *Lassan*'s main theme with inventive chromatic filigree. I couldn't locate a credit for the person who wrote this release's brilliant booklet-notes.

Jed Distler

'Rhythms & Blues'

Barber Excursions Rubin American Progressions for Piano Scherzinger When One Has the Feet of Wind Adams China Gates Bolcom The Garden of Eden - Four Rags for Piano Jelly Roll Morton Finger Buster Swigger Afterword Jocelyn Swigger *pf*

Con Brio Recordings © CBR21046 (71' • DDD)

Just the right amount of swagger from Swigger, with a brave coda to boot



This imaginatively programmed recital begins with Samuel Barber's *Excursions*, where pianist Jocelyn Swigger's tenderly phrased Allegretto and

incisive melodic projection in the Allegro Molto finale stand out. Although an improvisatory impulse hovers over Amy Rubin's *American Progressions*, a palpable sense of form and balance governs the music's open-hearted eclecticism and rich harmonic resources. While Rubin's own performances dig deeper (a funkier Blues movement and punchier accentuations in the concluding Pascolette), Swigger's easy command of the notes is nothing to sneeze at. It takes some time for Martin Scherzinger's rhapsodic *When One Has the Feet of Wind* to find its bearings and I like the piece's rapid gospel-tinged section the best. While Swigger conveys marvellous characterisation and rhythmic verve in William Bolcom's rag cycle *The Garden of Eden*, she doesn't consistently sustain the rapid tempo she sets in Jelly Roll Morton's *Finger Buster*, where her right hand dominates to a fault (Dick Hyman's 1974 CBS recording remains the best modern-day version). At the end of the recording sessions, Swigger found herself "hungry for dissonance and simplicity" and improvised four little pieces. True, they're not memorable, yet give Swigger credit for being brave. After all, has Maurizio Pollini ever improvised freely on disc? Has Murray Perahia? Lang Lang? Alfred Brendel? Get my drift?

Jed Distler



The Icicle Creek Piano Trio: a gorgeous sound

Icicle's spreading WARMTH

Shostakovich given a bittersweet emotional charge

Shostakovich • Haydn • Turina

Haydn Piano Trio Hob XV:28 Turina

Círculo - Fantasy for Violin, Cello and Piano

Shostakovich Piano Trio No 2 Op 67

Icicle Creek Piano Trio (Jennifer Caine *vl*

Sally Singer *vc* Oksana Ezhokina *pf*)

Con Brio Recordings © CBR21048 (53' • DDD)

Elegance absorbed in this new take on Shostakovich's highly charged Trio



Curiously tucked away on a disc that begins with innocuous Haydn and some marvellous Turina, the Icicle Creek Piano

Trio's performance of Shostakovich's increasingly iconic Piano Trio uses elegance of tone and grace of line and texture to give the composer's bitter music, written on the death of his close friend Ivan Sollertinsky, a bittersweet emotional charge.

The famously treacherous and vividly expressive harmonics, which open the

piece, instead of being ghostly let alone eerie, are played with a transforming sweep of gossamer beauty. No less absorbing is the merging of the strings with the throbbing lines of the Moderato. After a gloriously healthy Allegro non troppo, in which pianist Oksana Ezhokina is spotlighted in her beetle-like pursuit of Shostakovich's endless semiquavers, the Largo is strong and forthright in an oddly sexy way and the Allegretto struts, swaggers and soars as only the Russian soul dares, more affirmation than tragedy, more human love and less political context.

The trio takes its name from the Icicle Creek music centre in Leavenworth, Washington, one of those Shangri La-cum-Northern Exposure wilderness places. The wonderful sound, rich and powerful low down and spreading warmth as the frequency and dynamic ranges grow, was recorded not in Leavenworth but at Butterfly Productions in Seattle. The sound in the Turina, which is particularly gorgeous, loves lots of volume.

Laurence Vittes