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This is a wondrous disc. Yevgeny Sudbin has not been alone in championing the piano music of Nikolay Medtner: in recent times Marc-André Hamelin, Steven Osborne and Hamish Milne have all brought their special insights into a composer who can perhaps on occasion seem problematic and somehow remote. Sudbin, however, seems to have an exceptional affinity with Medtner's language. He brings both his heart and his head into play when performing these pieces. His head tackles and illuminates textures and harmonies that might seem opaque and knotty on a first study of the scores; his heart is then harnessed to convey the extraordinary sensibility, passion and thoroughly individual cast of melody that courses through the music. As usual with Sudbin's series of BIS discs, he also writes his own booklet-notes in a lucid way that testifies both to his enthusiasm and to his understanding.

'Once you have become mesmerised by the harmonies,' he says, 'time stands still and you are completely absorbed in the moment.' Such is also the feeling that comes over the listener when hearing him play this selection of seven pieces, which – presumably purposely – illustrates the range of emotion that Medtner could distil into his music. There is, for example, the ostensible serenity of the miniature *Fairy Tale*, Op 26 No 1, but it is a serenity in which the smooth surface of the music is ruffled by animated motifs and coloured with strange harmonies and sonorities. As Sudbin says of another *Fairy Tale*, the Op 51 No 3, it becomes 'progressively more interesting as more detail [emerges]. This is a particular trait of Medtner's oeuvre: repeated listening enhances one's appreciation of his music greatly.' The same is true of the *Fairy Tale*, Op 26 No 1, and indeed could be said of all the pieces in Sudbin's set. It is fascinating to follow Medtner's line of thinking through the *Sonata-Reminiscenza* especially when its intriguing contrasts are elucidated with such coherence and spellbinding magic as they are here.

Medtner's natural companion on this disc is his intimate friend, Rachmaninov, from whose Preludes Opp 23 and 32 Sudbin draws six pieces. Even the well-known G minor, Op 23 No 5, comes up with a new exhilaration in Sudbin's hands; the F minor, Op 32 No 6, acquires a terrifying, angered intensity. But in all six of these preludes Sudbin deploys a luminous spectrum of timbre, a clear interpretative focus and a finely tuned imagination to encapsulate their very essence.

Author: Geoffrey Norris



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(8) Stimmungsbilder, No. 1, Prolog Andante cantabile

(6) Fairy Tales, No. 3 in A

Forgotten Melodies, Set I, Sonata reminiscenza

(2) Fairy Tales, No. 1 in B flat minor

(4) Fairy Tales, E flat

Forgotten Melodies, Set II, Canzona matinata

Forgotten Melodies, Set II, Sonata tragica

(24) Preludes, D, Op. 23/4

(24) Preludes, G minor, Op. 23/5

(24) Preludes, G, Op. 32/5

(24) Preludes, F minor, Op. 32/6

(24) Preludes, G sharp minor, Op. 32/12

(24) Preludes, D flat, Op. 32/13

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