

**Schoenberg Piano Music and His 17 Fragments.** Yoko Hirota, piano. Oakville, Ont.: Phoenix Records PHX65122, 2005. \$19.99. 1 compact disc (53:41). Contents: Three Piano Pieces, op. 11 – Five Piano Pieces, op. 23 – Two Piano Pieces, op. 33a, op. 33b – Fragments 1-17. Order from the distributor: Gillmore Music, 10 Ashall Blvd., Toronto, Ontario, M4B 3C1. E-mail: [info@gillmoremusic.com](mailto:info@gillmoremusic.com). Online orders are also accepted by Phoenix Records (<http://www.phoenixrecordsltd.com/>).

Many of Arnold Schoenberg's piano works were written at important turning points in his compositional career. The Three Piano Pieces op. 11 (1909) demonstrate his early use of free atonality; the Five Piano Pieces op. 23 and the Suite for Piano op. 25 (both completed in 1923) were written as he was developing his twelve-tone system and demonstrate its earliest applications. As a body of work, this music reveals much about Schoenberg's ideas and approaches. This is especially apparent in this recent recording by Yoko Hirota. The CD includes performances of the Three Piano Pieces op. 11, the Five Pieces op. 23, the Two Piano Pieces op. 33a and op. 33b and the first Canadian performance of the Seventeen Fragments. Although the title of the CD suggests that this is a complete recording, the Six Little Piano Pieces op. 19 and the Suite for Piano op. 25 are not included.

The liner notes, written by Hirota herself, amply demonstrate the relationships between the fragments and the published works. The first four fragments, written early in Schoenberg's career, demonstrate his indebtedness to Brahms. The next four were written around the time of the op. 11 and show the increasingly atonal nature of Schoenberg's harmonic language. Fragments nine to eleven were written shortly before opp. 23 and 25, fragment

12 stands between opp. 25 and 33, and the final four fragments date from around the time of op. 33. In each case, Hirota discusses Schoenberg's interest in timbre and sonority, especially in the importance given, articulations, register, and phrasing. She offers detailed examples that suggest the innovative ways Schoenberg was striving for colouristic effects in the fragments. Although the information on the fragments is insightful and interesting, there is no mention in the liner notes of the published pieces. Even her reasons for choosing opp. 11, 23, and 33 at the expense of opp. 19 and 25 would be welcome. Do the fragments reveal more about the former group than the latter? Do these pieces hold a more significant place in the composer's oeuvre?

Performances and recordings of fragments tend to make for an odd listening experience. The brevity of the pieces, their incomplete nature, and the often abrupt endings can jar the listener, leaving him or her unsatisfied. Still, while generally unsuitable for casual listening, fragments can nonetheless offer valuable insights into a composer's completed works. This is certainly the case here. Although most of these fragments are, as expected, short and incomplete (the shortest, no. 16, is a mere sixteen seconds), they reveal much about Schoenberg's published works and much about his development as a composer. With this in mind, I would

have preferred a different ordering on the CD. Instead of placing all of the fragments together at the end of the disc, I feel a chronological ordering, in which the fragments were placed close to the completed works with which they are associated, would have better demonstrated the relationships and reinforced Hirota's comments in the liner notes.

The CD cover and booklet, although uncluttered, give the information on the track listings in an awkward and frustrating fashion. Instead of identifying the piano pieces opp. 11, 23, and 33 by their familiar titles (Three Piano Pieces op. 11; Five Piano Pieces op. 23), the tracks are listed by opus and number only. Furthermore, when the common titles *are* given, within the prose of the liner notes, they are misspelled (Klavierstücke, the German word for piano pieces, appears alternately as Klavierstucks and klavierstucke). These, however, are small quibbles and they do not detract

from the music or its performance on this recording.

Hiroko's performance of this music is bold and thoughtful. Her interest in the composer's use of timbre and sonority, as demonstrated in the liner notes, is easily apparent in her playing. There is careful attention to nuance, to articulation, and to the wonderful range of sonorous effects in the music. All of this is made audible by the ambiance of the recording which is close and dry. Although this results in a harsher sound at louder dynamics, there is also a transparency that allows the subtleties of her playing and of the music to emerge. Not everyone will appreciate a recording in which half of the pieces are fragments, but for listeners who wish to know more about Schoenberg's development as a composer and who seek fresh insights into his completed works, this disc is highly recommended.

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