

TEMPO

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BARBER: 2 Interludes; Sonata, op.26; *Fresh from West Chester*; 4 *Excursions*, op.20; *After the Concert*; Nocturne, op.33; 3 *Sketches*; Ballade, op.46. Lilia Boyadjieva (pno). Solstice SOCD 145.

BARBER: Sonata; Ballade; Nocturne; *Excursions*; *Souvenirs*; Interlude. Leon McCawley (pno). Virgin Classics vc 545 2702.

Lilia Boyadjieva's disc claims to be the 'premier enregistrement intégral' of Samuel Barber's piano music, but unlike Leon McCawley she omits the *Souvenirs*, perhaps because they were originally composed for four hands. In other respects her coverage is certainly the more complete, including even such unpublished pieces as the Second Interlude and the jazzy diptych *Fresh from West Chester*.

Neither pianist is Horowitz, for whom the Sonata was composed and who made the benchmark recording (still available on RCA, still the first choice if you just require Barber's most substantial piano work). Boyadjieva - Bulgarian by birth, Moscow-trained, Paris-domiciled - seems the more at ease with this fact of life.

McCawley's technique is strong, his approach big-boned, bordering sometimes on the barnstorming: exhilarating, but a little deficient in finesse. Boyadjieva too has all the necessary muscular power for the big moments of this assertive, sometimes truculent piece, but she brings more delicacy and fluidity to the perhaps more characteristically Barberian soulful and expressive passages. It's a lyrical, mercurial reading, as well as a strong one.

McCawley is as fleet-footed as she is in fast music, but there's a certain literalness to the way he despatches the *Souvenirs*, *Excursions* and the Sonata's scherzo. Boyadjieva is more alive to the smaller pieces' charm and intimacy, always important ingredients of Barber's musical appeal. Her lilt and rhythmic suppleness in the third and fourth *Excursions* are a delight, and she is more atmospheric, too, in the Nocturne, a darker reverie in her hands.

Honours are more even in the sombre, restless Ballade, Barber's last piano work and undoubtedly one of his finest. Here McCawley's more agitated approach seems a completely viable alternative to Boyadjieva's elegiacally meditative one. The other pieces are minor yet all contribute some nugget of lyricism or humour: the generalized recollection of 'standard repertoire' in *After the Concert* is very witty.

Both discs are very well recorded; McCawley has slightly greater definition, with consequent hardness of tone, Boyadjieva's the more natural relaxed sound. On balance, her recital is the one to go for if you want nearly everything Barber wrote for piano. I doubt if Disques FY et d Solstice have a regular UK distributor, but it's well worth seeking out.

Calum MacDonal

Traduction en français des éléments principaux :

"... Lilia Boyadjieva a aussi toute la force musculaire nécessaire pour les grands moments de ce morceau assuré, parfois truculent, mais elle apporte plus de délicatesse et de fluidité aux passages sentimentaux et expressifs qui sont, peut-être, plus caractéristiques de Barber. C'est une lecture lyrique et changeante, autant que puissante."

"...sa cadence et sa souplesse rythmique dans la troisième et la quatrième "Excursion" sont un vrai délice et, aussi, elle est offre plus d'atmosphère dans la "Nocturne", qui devient une rêverie plus sombre sous ses doigts. ..."