

'A lyricist in a thousand', Lupu has, naturally, placed Schubert at the centre of his repertoire and conjured from a seemingly recalcitrant black-and-white instrument a range of vocal colours and nuances that even a Souzay or Fischer-Dieskau might envy. Heard at his greatest in the sombre A minor Sonata, D845, he recreates a place where even the most outwardly genial phrase is troubled and despairing. Then turn to the A major Sonata's finale (D664) and you hear a pianist who can change from blazing defiance to a delectable lightness and vivacity. In the shorter, less familiar sonatas, too, Lupu makes you aware of Schubert's tirelessly fecund imagination, of his experimenting with ideas and procedures far ahead of his time.

Then there is his Beethoven where a thousand tiny details are momentarily caught rather than strenuously highlighted. His performances of the concertos are magical, showing the most concentrated thought; it would be hard to imagine more deft or finely shaded performances of Nos 1 and 2. In the Third Concerto's *Largo* his typical trancelike state is a far cry from the more robust eloquence of a Schnabel or Serkin and Lupu's legendary lyricism is an ideal match for the Fourth Concerto, where his way of qualifying Beethoven's vigour with a restraining hand is wholly characteristic. In the Fifth Concerto, too, Lupu's self-effacement allows Beethoven his own voice and in doing so accentuates the composer's greatness as well as creating a unique poetic aura and ambience.

In Brahms's Op 117-19, music like 'the golden lustre of parks in autumn, and the austere black and white of winter walks' (William Ritter), Lupu draws you into his

confidence in Lupu's h: flickering h: bittersweet: greatest of will find hir: progressio: Rachmanir: F major Pr: qualified b: throughou: into a crep: resource tl: into the of:

For Lupu language. and how wonderful it is when profound musicianship is backed by such a transcendental technical sheen. These records (given Lupu's recent and regrettable decision) are a reminder and a remembrance.

**Bryce Morrison**

## Berg • Schoenberg

**Berg** Piano Sonata, Op 1. Piano Sonata Fragment (*Wozzeck*) **Schoenberg** Suite, Op 25. Klavierstücke – Op 11; Op 19; Op 23; Op 33a; Op 33b. 17 Fragments of Piano Pieces – Piano Piece (1931): 35 bars; Piano Piece (1931): 17 bars

**Roland Pöntinen** *pf*  
BIS © BIS-SACD1417 (75' • DDD/DSD)

## D'Ascoli finds turmoil in the usually comfortable world of the Nocturnes

EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Chopin

Complete Nocturnes

**Bernard d'Ascoli** *pf*

Athene Minerva © 2 23 201 (105' • DDD)

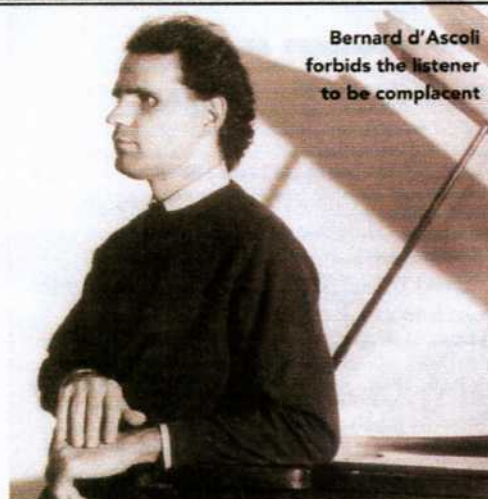
Selected comparisons:

Pires (10/96) (DG) 447 096-2GH2

Rubinstein (601) (NAXOS) 8 110659/60



Let me say at once that even in a heavily competitive market place this ranks among the most remarkable of Chopin Nocturne recordings. Courting controversy at one level yet burningly sincere at another, Bernard d'Ascoli goes his own heartwarming way unburdened by tradition. From him, the Nocturnes are not a world of sweet dreams but possess a troubled and assertive life. True, simplicity is hardly his byword (in Nos 1, 6 and 11, his intense *rubato* often tugs against the music's natural line) yet such bold and declamatory playing is never less than enlivening, positively forbidding the listener to sink into complacency or repose. An impetuous thrust given to the D flat Nocturne's long-breathed Italianate lines,



Bernard d'Ascoli forbids the listener to be complacent

and the sudden plunge into darkness at the end of Op 32 No 1, are two among many examples of performances of a living, breathing presence, the reverse of studio-bound.

The two extra posthumous Nocturnes are added for good measure and the ever-popular Op 9 No 2 comes complete with flashing variants authorised by the composer. The recordings are vivid and immediate and the outstanding notes (a provocative side-swipe at Fauré notwithstanding) are by the pianist himself.

Lovers of a personal but more customary Chopin style will turn to Maria João Pires and most of all to the elegant and silken-toned Rubinstein whose inimitable readings are available on Naxos. But, hopefully, d'Ascoli's most stimulating Chopin series will continue.

**Bryce Morrison**

A revelatory, probing disc from Bernard d'Ascoli. Anyone who thought of the Chopin Nocturnes as comfortable, even somnolent music must think again. D'Ascoli unflinchingly plumbs the underbelly of these works, finding a deliberately uncomfortable sense of bleakness. Many have recorded these pieces, but d'Ascoli proves that there is still more to be said. And, at the same time, announces himself as a top-flight pianist.

Roland Pöntinen breaks that mould by playing the early sonata fragment that Berg later used in *Wozzeck*'s final orchestral interlude, as well as an expendable pair of Schoenberg fragments from 1931, the first sounding disconcertingly like a cadenza for a 19th-century concerto.

Pöntinen underlines the romantic undertow to Schoenberg's densely contrapuntal style but that doesn't mean he sells the music's often fevered dramatic spirit short. In the *Klavierstücke* Op 11 No 3, much of Op 23, and Op 33a it is this spirit that counts for most. In the more restrained sound world of Op 11 Nos 1 and 2 the romantic aura seems a shade heavy-handed, the phrasing smooth to a

Murray Perahia and (more recently) Pierre-Laurent Aimard, this performance – expansive and impassioned without self-indulgence, the recording admirably uncluttered – deserves a high place among current recommendations. **Arnold Whittall**

## Cage

'The Works for Piano 6'  
Seven Haiku. Music of Changes.  
Suite for Toy Piano

**Martine Joste** *pf*

Mode © MODE147 (54' • DDD)

Music of Changes – selected comparison:

Schleiermacher (D.ABR) MDG613 0786-2