



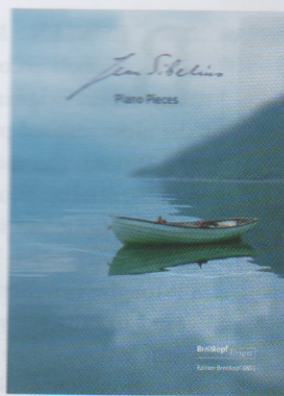
Chopin Ballades and Nocturnes

Study Edition by Alfred Cortot
Salabert Editions SLB 5922
ISBN 979-0-04-806034-0

In our Urtext-dominated era the fashion for performance guidelines and subjective opinions from editors has somewhat waned. This is to the great loss of student pianists: many older editions, particularly those published during the 'golden age' of piano playing, contain inspired, subjective and often revelatory guidelines from some of the greatest pianists of all time. Alfred Cortot is a case in point. As well as being one of the greatest interpreters Chopin, he was a prolific editor. Following on from the recent re-issue of Cortot's edition of the Chopin Études (one of the most important editions in the entire repertoire), it is wonderful to see this present re-issue of his famous edition of the Ballades, intriguingly packaged alongside the 20 Nocturnes. Cortot's all-encompassing approach to editing means so much more than musicological exactitude. The introductory remarks for the Ballades evoke inspiration from poetry and extramusical association, notably in the third Ballade, in which Cortot compares the musical development with the myth of Ondine.

As for the text itself, nothing is left to chance. The music is heavily annotated, with controversies over accidentals and differences between older editions carefully recorded. Cortot's pedalling and fingering is always fascinating and intriguing, even if neither should be used generically by every player on every occasion.

What makes this edition so special is that it is saturated from first Ballade through to final Nocturne with practising hints and suggestions for technical development. It is as though we have a detailed course in the art of making exercises out of repertoire for pianists to learn from. Those who find the



exercises and suggestions in Cortot's edition of the Études too exhaustive and extensive will be relieved to discover far fewer 'satellite exercises' here. Nonetheless, there is still a need to be selective and careful in the choice of what is used, and that is where guidance from an experienced teacher could come into its own.

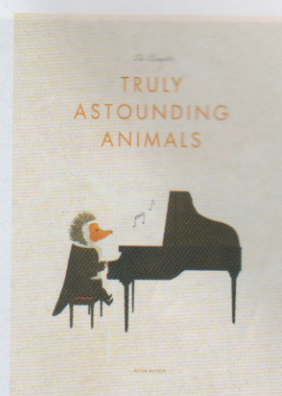
MURRAY MCLACHLAN

Sibelius 18 Selected Piano Pieces

Breitkopf & Härtel EB8855
ISMN 979-0-004-18445-5

Jean Sibelius wrote over 150 piano pieces and although they have been championed by great artists, including Glenn Gould, they have never quite managed to make a significant impact or retain a firm place in the standard recital repertoire. Breitkopf are to be applauded not only for this new selection, but also for recently regrouping and publishing the complete Sibelius piano music in four volumes – a project that marks the 150th anniversary in 2015 of the composer's birth.

Sibelius himself was evidently somewhat ambivalent towards the piano. Though he wrote a substantial and convincing sonata, it stands as something of an isolated triumph. And of course there is no Sibelius piano concerto. What we do have, however, is the equivalent of five CDs worth of beautiful miniatures. On the evidence of this attractive cross-section of 18 of them (made by Kari Kilpeläinen and Anna Pulkkis, the editors of the complete edition), the neglect this music has so far received is to our loss. Certainly many of them disprove Sibelius's assertion to one of his students that the piano 'cannot sing,' for there is an abundance of melodic charm, *cantabile* and *dolce*. Take the exquisite Impromptu Op 5 No 6 for instance. This is music that you immediately want to sing out loud. They may not be the most



individual of miniatures, but they are extremely user-friendly and should be welcomed by young pianists in search of recital repertoire for concerts and competitions.

Overall there is an admirable consistency of writing which embraces idiomatic pianism as well as an understanding of how the instrument can evoke orchestral colours and sounds. Space forbids mentioning every piece, though it is particularly useful to have the evocative 'March triste' and persuasive 'Au crépuscule' available as they are without opus number and deserving to be known. Worth exploring. MM

Peter Rudzik Truly Astounding Animals

Digital Print Publishing
Available from www.sheetmusicplus.com

Prizewinning Polish pianist Peter Rudzik is based in Calgary where he has a private teaching practice as well as a position on the faculty of the conservatory at Mount Royal University. His natural understanding and empathy with young pianists is immediately impressive in the charmingly persuasive set of 12 miniatures entitled *Truly Astounding Animals*. Whilst the level of difficulty never wavers from Grades 2-5, the melodic interest and sense of characterisation means that even more advanced players will warm to the music. I adore Rudzik's ability to vary mood, texture, colours and tonality. The influences of Prokofiev and Khachaturian (both of whom wrote their own sets of impressive children's pieces) may be strong, but the wit and imagination in evidence in numbers such as 'March of the Centipedes', 'Happy Grasshopper' and 'Tarantula's Tarantella' makes comparison inconsequential. Strongly recommended not only as recital pieces for young players, but also for light relief and quick study practice for experienced players. MM