



Written for Joseph Kubera and Sarah Cahill, and played here by Kubera and Marilyn Nonken with great control and command, the *Three Pieces* move procedurally along their glacial and (mostly) algorithmically generated lines, coming to exquisite and eventually orgasmic life in the 17-minute third movement. For something entirely different, try the 15 minutes of fancifully named, delightfully cartoonish *k-toods*, reflecting Polansky's 'experiences and musings' as a father, sequenced between a deconstructionist take on Ruth Crawford Seeger's piano arrangement of the traditional American cowboy song 'I ride an old paint' and two concluding, inspirational *pianotoods* inspired by American Shaker and Lutheran hymns.

While the playing by all six pianists involved in this enterprise is outstanding, Tobin Chodos and Ittai Rosenbaum steal the show with their enthusiastic handling of the five *k-toods*, in particular 'one thing at a time', which has a endearingly nerd-like, hypnotic energy. Ironically perhaps, in light of the mathematical processes Polansky employs, the net effect of what Michael Winter describes in his booklet-notes as the composer's 'constant re-examining, questioning, reformulating, and mixing of ideas' is of thoughtful musical poetry that sounds written by a very human hand.

Laurence Vittes

## Poulenc

Intermède. Thème varié. Trois Mouvements perpétuels. Valse-improvisation sur le nom de BACH. Fifteen Improvisations. Badinage. Mélancolie. Trois Pièces

Aleck Karis *pf*

Bridge ③ BRIDGE9459 (64' • DDD)



My colleague Bryce Morrison aptly described Poulenc's piano music as having 'a sweet and intense or sharp and acidulous fragrance'. Representing a good cross-section of Poulenc's creative life, Aleck Karis's excellently programmed recital addresses these paradoxical qualities, albeit with variable success.

He heightens the contrasts between the *Intermède*'s opening unison octaves and droll march-like sequences, as well as the oddly contrasting chorale sections that bookend the whimsically dancing central episode of the 'Hymne'. The almost Scriabin-esque 'Pastorale' that precedes this 'Hymne' in the *Trois Pièces* (1918-28) benefits from Karis's



Aleck Karis brings 'intelligence and integrity' to Poulenc's piano works

steady gait and the same intense, bass-orientated vantage point that gives him the edge over Charles Owen's comparably touching reading of the *Hommage à Edith Piaf* (Somm, 6/04). This piece concludes the group of *Fifteen Improvisations* (1933-59) at the heart of Karis's programme, where the pianist is consistently clear and contentious. Still, Gabriel Tacchino's generally faster tempi and lighter touch make these miniatures and the wonderful 1951 *Thème varié* truly sparkle (EMI/Warner/Erato).

By taking the *Valse-improvisation sur le nom de BACH* deliberately, Karis allows the slithering counterpoint more room to breathe, although Tacchino's flippantly faster rendition scores points for irony. If Tacchino's brisker, brasher and more dynamic *Trois Mouvements perpétuels* makes other recordings sound elephantine by comparison, you have to admire Karis for giving every note and every rhythmic nicety its due with minimum help from Poulenc's

beloved sustain pedal. And Karis's full-bodied traversal of *Mélancolie* also stands out for his impeccably controlled trills. The intelligence and integrity that typify Karis's pianism also apply to his insightful booklet annotations. **Jed Distler**

## Scriabin

Etude, Op 2 No 1. Two Impromptus, Op 14. Three Pieces, Op 45. Two Pieces, Op 57. Poème, Op 32 No 1. Preludes – Op 2 No 2; Op 11

Klara Min *pf*

Steinway & Sons ③ STNS30045 (63' • DDD)



Collectors familiar with Klara Min's stretched-out, compulsively detailed Chopin Mazurkas (Delos) will find her Scriabin less idiosyncratic, yet ripe with subjectivity and colourful nuance. Although



Pianist Klara Min offers a mixed Scriabin programme on her new disc on Steinway & Sons

Min employs liberal tempo fluctuation, her strong melodic declamation and gift for generating harmonic tension and release prevent the interpretations from losing shape and focus.

These qualities particularly reveal themselves via comparative listening. For example, in the Op 11 Preludes, Piers Lane (Hyperion, 5/01) favours steadier overall tempi and makes expressive points primarily through touch, while Min might linger on a cadence, lean into a juicy modulation (as in Prelude No 3) or give an extra nudge or two to the bass-lines (No 6). In No 7, Min's attention to the composer's asymmetric left-hand patterns reveals a darker side to a piece that most pianists cheerfully toss off, while No 16's unison lines inspired by Chopin's 'Funeral March' twist, turn and brood, guided by unpredictable accents.

In the slight and conversational 'Feuillet d'album', Op 45 No 1, Min draws out the ends of each animated phrase as if she wanted to capture these moments in a kind of freeze-frame shot. On the other hand, tapered phrases lend a generic air to the C sharp minor Etude, Op 2 No 1, in contrast to the mesmerising long legato lines of Dmitri Alexeev's stunning recent version (Brilliant, 12/15). If the Op 32 No 1 *Poème* oozes by with little textural differentiation, Min compensates with her quizzically lithe

and transparent readings of the little Op 57 pieces ('*Désir*' and '*Caresse dansée*'). In short, Min's finest performances on this gorgeously engineered release will make Scriabin fans sit up and take notice.

Jed Distler

### 'Rojak Rocks'

**J Gale** *Three Pieces*<sup>b</sup> **B Lynn** *Ba-Dee-Doo-Dup*<sup>b</sup>  
**Raph Rock** **W Ross** *Trombone Concerto No 2*<sup>c</sup>  
**Sacco** *Trombone Sonata*<sup>d</sup>  
**John D Rojak** *bass tbn*<sup>b</sup> **Andy Malloy**, <sup>b</sup>**James Miller**  
*ten tbrns*<sup>a</sup> **Russ Kassoff**, <sup>d</sup>**Antoinette Perry** *pf*<sup>a</sup> **Joe**  
**Bongiorno** *db*<sup>a</sup> **Ray Marchica** *drums*<sup>a</sup> **New York**  
**Chamber Symphony Orchestra** / **Gerard Schwarz**  
 Navona © NV6019 (62' • DDD)



The centrepiece of NYC trombonist John D Rojak's debut Navona CD is undoubtedly Walter Ross's powerful, long-limbed 25-minute Trombone Concerto No 2. Consciously using Beethoven as a symphonic model while flaunting the fluency of a Hindemith and the lyrical punch of a Copland, it's like experiencing a parallel universe in which trombones are the coolest solo instruments.

Cool comes with Rojak's Big Apple territory: he's played in classical orchestras, big bands, Broadway shows, jingles and other freelance recording sessions including gigs in Brooklyn at 1am, 'walking home afterward past burning trash cans in abandoned buildings'. It's appropriate therefore that Rojak's debut release features 'classical pieces that have an element of jazz or commercial music' infused with the gritty elegance of the street.

The sophisticated, easy-listening stylings of Jack Gale's *Three Pieces* for bass trombone and jazz rhythm section start off the proceedings. Steven Christopher Sacco's Sonata for bass trombone and piano meanders introspectively for 15 minutes, beautifully backed by Antoinette Perry. Brian Lynn's naughty and nice *Ba-Dee-Doo-Dup*, five little character pieces written for the trombone section of Scottish Opera around 1980, is played with dash, panache and addictive high humour in an audiophile session engineered by LA Philharmonic trombonist Sonny Ausman.

For the last 2'44" Rojak plays Alan Raph's *Rock* for solo trombone in the natural red-rock beauty of Hunter Canyon in Moab, Utah, recorded 150 feet above the canyon floor in order 'to capture the natural echo of the landscape'. **Laurence Vittes**