



CD Review by **William Zagorski** - *Fanfare Magazine* (Jan/Feb 2008)

BARBER Cello Sonata. **VIVALDI** Cello Sonata No. 5, RV 40. **SCHUMANN** *Fantasiestücke*, op. 73. **BRAHMS** Cello Sonata No. 1 • Kalin Ivanov (vc); Emily White (pn) • GEGA 285 (69:21)

COLLECTIONS: Instrumental

This release's programming offers a fine cross section of Ivanov's stylistic mastery. To his credit he finds a different voice for each of the four pieces. He is not the James Galway style of player who has one (admittedly beautiful) sound and applies it to whatever piece of music lies before him. Thus Ivanov's Barber is appropriately post-Romantic, but with a slight mid-20th-century American edge to it. His Vivaldi is appropriately modestly scaled, cleanly articulated in its quick movements, and played with virtually no vibrato, but with a fine projection of the mystery that informs its two Largo movements. His Schumann is full of the purity, innocence, and ardor of the initial stages of German Romanticism, conveyed by vivid tone coloring and masterfully deployed rubato, and his Brahms is infused with a measure of passion and countervailing intellectual rigor that it seldom receives in live performance or on recording.

Ivanov attacks the opening statement of the Barber Sonata with a far more boldly projected tone than do Michael Rudiakov on Centaur or Andrés Diaz on Dorian. Both Rudiakov and Diaz are a bit neater in terms of articulation, and Diaz boasts the sweetest recording of the lot, but neither of them conveys the full power and sweep of this sonata. Ivanov's and White's handling of the first movement's second theme is exquisite, and works as well as it does because Ivanov isn't afraid to pull out all the stops in his statement of the first theme. He, like Jacqueline du Pré, isn't afraid to sound a bit strained if the emotional demands of the music require it, nor is he, like she, afraid to indulge in rubato in order to give the music its needed breathing space. Ivanov's performance of the second movement, with its two *largos* encapsulating its scherzo-like middle section, goes to the extremes mandated by the music. His opening tempo is very (almost dangerously) slow, but he sustains it, making his performance a bona-fide musical event. His reading of the third movement shows that he not only understands the episodic, ballade-like, quality of this music, but truly appreciates the meaning of the term *appassionato*.

Brahms's First Cello Sonata is a problematical work. Though I have long sensed its potential, I have yet to hear it fully realized. Even such luminaries as Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax on Sony don't do it for me. Up to this point, I've used the Rostropovich/Serkin recording on DG as my critical touchstone. After hearing Ivanov, I find that recording far too nit-pickingly cautious and introspective. This is, after all, comparatively youthful Brahms, not the Brahms of the valedictory works for clarinet. Ivanov sees it as more akin to the op. 8 Piano Trio, or the op. 60 Piano Quartet. From Ivanov's statement of the opening theme—hushed, dark-hued, and ultra pianissimo, but a pianissimo rich in expressive tone and full of anticipation—I realized that this fellow has it. The remainder of the performance went in like fashion, resulting in the most overall moving performance of this sonata I have encountered to date.

The recording is fine, capturing both Ivanov's dynamic range and his alternately finely nuanced and powerful C-string-playing.

Looking over what I have written, I realize that I have not given pianist Emily White her due. She is with him every step of the way, and in the Barber and Brahms sonatas where the music is so evenly divided between the two instrumentalists, she holds up her end with great precision and, most to the point, a panache equaling his.

Likewise looking over this copy, I also realize that I've been comparing this (30-something?) Bulgarian cellist with Jacqueline du Pré and Mstislav Rostropovich, and that—this august company notwithstanding—he comes out a winner. **William Zagorski**

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