

 **CD REVIEW**
**Sonatas for Violin & Piano****Gabriel Faurè:** Sonata #1 in A Major, Op. 13**Robert Schumann:** Sonata #1 in A minor, Op. 105**Béla Bartók:** Sonata #2, Sz. 76**Jade Duo****MSR Classics 1510 60:51**

This is the debut recording of the Jade Duo and from the evidence here I would say it bodes well for the two young performers. Formed in only 2012, the duo captured first prize in 2013 at the New York City-based Arthur Balsam Competition for Duos and second prize that same year at the J.C. Arriaga Chamber Competition in Connecticut. The individual resumes of the two members are both impressive. Chinese violinist Shuai Shi studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and at the Manhattan School of Music. Her teachers include Pinchas Zukerman and Patinka Kopec. She was a high prizewinner in several major competitions, including the Jeunesses Musicale International, the Yehudi Menuhin International, the Henryk Wieniawski, and Abington Concerto Competition. She is currently on the faculty at the Zhejiang Conservatory of Music in China. Pianist Zhen Chen studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in China and Manhattan School of Music, where his teachers included Arkady Aronov. Zhen has had his successes in competitions as well: second prize at the 2007 Hong Kong Asia Piano Open Competition and first prize at the 2009 Bradshaw and Buono International Piano Competition.

In performance the one outstanding trait of this duo is their ability to adapt with seeming ease to the style required to play the various repertory here: they capture the elegant yet passionate Romanticism of Faurè, the mood swings of Schumann from the playful and sweet to the stormy and angst-ridden, and the exotic but often percussive folk-inspired character of Bartók.

The opening movement of the Faurè brims with brightness and optimism in the soaring lyricism so beautifully rendered by these two musicians. The violin tone is sweet and silken and the piano is appropriately deferential most of the time. The hushed and intimate lyricism of the second movement is meltingly beautiful here and the third movement's playfulness emerges all the more cheerily in the crisp and spirited playing of the duo. They perform the finale with their usual elegance and virtuosity, but do add a measure of muscularity and grit in places.

The Schumann performance displays many of the same qualities, but the duo wisely opts to point up the storminess and sense of both angst and mournfulness of the first movement. The ensuing panel's lighter character is nicely highlighted here, though the slightly wistful character of some of the music is not overlooked. The finale races delightfully ahead in this sparkling and effervescent rendering, the pianist wisely holding back a bit on some of the bass notes. Shi's tone is so sumptuous and sleek yet can turn playful or even edgy on a dime.

In the Bartók first movement you notice Shi's subtle use of portamento and Chen's seemingly perfectly judged dynamics: this music has rarely sounded this haunting, this conflicted. For the second (and final) movement to succeed in any performance, it must sound a bit wanton and madcap: Shi and Chen certainly deliver the goods, capturing all the color and wildness of this lengthy movement, with crisp attacks, judicious tempos that feature much well judged gear-shifting, and a seemingly unerring sense for capturing Bartók's driving rhythms and emotional coolness.

The sound reproduction is very good, though I think the miking setup favors the violin somewhat. The album notes are informative. Overall, this is a fine debut disc for this young duo and augurs well for their continued success on the international stage. Recommended.

Copyright © 2015, Robert Cummings

---

© 1995-2016 Classical Net

Use of text, images, or any other copyrightable material contained in these pages, without the written permission of the copyright holder, except as specified in the Copyright Notice, is strictly prohibited. All Rights Reserved.