

Debussy's innovations. Both men had a profound influence on future generations of French organist-composers, and Messiaen in particular acknowledged his debt to Alain.

The Lancelot/Durham/Priory partnership has already produced some outstanding choral and organ CDs, and as is to be expected Lancelot makes light work of Vierne and Alain's awesome challenges. Possibly everything sounds a little too effortless, with the result that in the Vierne symphony we don't quite get the full drama of the faster movements, or the poetic languor of the slower passages. I feel the Alain pieces receive marginally finer performances; nevertheless, throughout the CD there's playing of real flair and virtuosity from one of Britain's finest cathedral organists. Mention should also be made of the excellent insert-notes which accompany the CD. **Christopher Nickol**

Japonisme

Gil-Marchex Deux Images du vieux Japon. **Grainger** In a Nutshell Suite - Arrival Platform Humlet. **Ketèlbey** From a Japanese Screen. **Niemann** Japan, Op 89. **Poldini** Etude japonaise, Op 27 No 2. **Saint-Saëns** La princesse jaune - Overture (trans pf). **Scott** Soirée japonaise, Op 67 No 4. **Silas** Tokio. **Szántó** In Japan. Sakura Sakura. **Tansman** Le tour du Monde en Miniature - Complainte de Nikko **Noriko Ogawa** pf BIS © CD1045 (74 minutes: DDD)

West meets East in this rewarding and enterprising collection - beautifully played and recorded - of piano works inspired by the traditional culture of Japan



With the exception of Alexandre Tansman's haunting 'Complainte de Nikko' (the third piece in his 1933 set entitled *Le tour du Monde en Miniature*) and Grainger's 'Arrival Platform Humlet' (the first movement of his *In a Nutshell* suite, and, like Tansman's miniature, based on the Japanese Miyakobushi pentatonic scale), all this material is new to the catalogue. Henri Gil-Marchex (1894-1970) studied piano at the Paris Conservatoire, winning the Premier Prix in 1911. Dedicated to Alfred Cortot, his *Deux Images du vieux Japon* date from

1936 and turn out to be a most pleasing diptych, the writing both fastidious and imaginative. By contrast, the music of Vienna-born Theodor Szántó (1877-1934) assimilates traditional Japanese idioms to more probing effect - as amply revealed by the 1918-22 suite *In Japan* and *Sakura Sakura* (the second of two Japanese Melodies taken from Szántó's 1924 opera, *Taifun*).

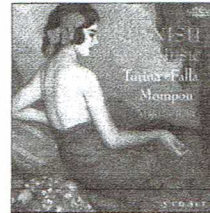
Although it's the lengthiest offering here, Walter Niemann's *Japan* (1923) is also the most charming. A pupil of Humperdinck and Reinecke, Niemann (1887-1953) evidently had a genuine melodic gift, and the five character pieces which make up his Op 89 really do fall most delightfully on the ear. Like Niemann, Cyril Scott also studied with Humperdinck in Frankfurt. His *Soirée japonaise* of 1907 nods at the uncomplicated, populist style so successfully espoused by Albert Ketèlbey, whose winsome *From a Japanese Screen* makes an endearingly naive closing number. We are also treated to the rousing Japanese march *Tokio* (1890) by Amsterdam-born but naturalised Englishman Edouard Silas (1827-1909), Saint-Saëns's own piano transcription of the overture to his 1872 opera, *La princesse jaune* (although set in Japan, the composer unwittingly employs Arabian and Chinese characteristics), and the virtuoso antics of the 1907 *Etude japonaise* by Hungarian Ede Poldini (1869-1957, creator of *La poupée valsante*, made famous in Fritz Kreisler's arrangement).

The talented Japanese pianist, Noriko Ogawa, proves a consistently stylish and affectionate advocate of some intriguing and appealing repertoire, and she has been handsomely served by the BIS sound-engineers. A strong recommendation. **Andrew Achenbach**

Spanish Piano Music, Volume 2

Falla Allegro de concierto. Fantasía bética. Homenaje, 'Pour le tombeau de Paul Dukas'. Homenaje, 'Le tombeau de Claude Debussy'. Mazurka in C minor. Nocturno. Obras desconocidas. Cuatro piezas españolas. Serenata. Serenata andaluza. Vals-capricho **Turina** Album de viaje, Op 15. El castillo de Almodóvar, Op 65. Sevilla, Op 2. Tres danzas andaluzas, Op 8. Danzas gitanas - Set 1, Op 55; Set 2, Op 84. Mujeres españolas, Op 1. Mujeres españolas, Op 73. Sanlúcar de Barrameda, 'Sonata Pintoresca' **Mompou** Cancçons i dansas. Six Charmes. Impresiones íntimas. Preludes Nos 1-10. Scènes d'enfants. Suburbis. 12 Variations sur un thème de Chopin **Martin Jones** pf **Nimbus** © © NI5619/23 (6 hours and 10 minutes: DDD). Recorded 1995-7

Superb piano playing from Martin Jones in a collection of Spanish music that maintains the promise set in Volume 1



The second volume in Martin Jones's nine-CD tribute, 'Spanish Piano Music', could hardly be more enticing or delectable. My initial suspicion that this five-CD set might amount to leftovers from the more substantial offerings of Granados or Albéniz in Vol 1 (5/99) was magically erased by music of an infinite fascination, performed with rare sensitivity, immaculate dexterity and temperamental ardour, all of it admirably recorded by Nimbus in its own concert hall in Monmouth. True, you may feel that Turina is hardly the major figure he was claimed to be by the Spanish (including the poet Manuel Machado), but just as you sense a tendency towards diluted impressionism and cliché - a fluent, lightweight alternative to, say, Falla's fierce integrity ('abrupt as when there's slid/Its rich gold blazing pall/From some black coffin lid') or Mompou's alternating of the visionary and childlike, you hear something remarkable. Try the *Sanlúcar de Barrameda* with its haunting *como un rumor* or 'Le Jeudi Saint à Minuit' from *Sevilla*, played with the most concentrated artistry by Jones and with a gloriously authentic flush of anger in its *fortissimo passioné* outburst. In 'La feria' from the same suite, his playing could hardly be more joyous, bounding from idea to idea with an infectious brio, while in the 'Danza de la seducción' (from Op 55) his response to terms such as *lontano*, *pénétrant* and *suave* suggest a special artistry and acuteness.

Then there are Falla's early works and a touching sense of a composer, haunted by past masters and salon models, tentatively reaching out to find his own identity or character. The two elegies, on Debussy (with its phantom guitar sweeps and memory of *La soirée dans Grenade*) and Dukas, on the other hand, are sombre and magnificent, and if Jones's judicious tempos in the *Fantasia bética* allow every note of Falla's astringent virtuosity to tell, it is surely his command of the lowest reaches of the dynamic spectrum that provides the most magical sense of evocation. Hear him in that triple and quadruple *piano* at the close of 'Andaluza' or in the indolent flick of his phrasing in 'Cubana' (both from *Piezas españolas*) and you will find yourself admiring artistry of the highest calibre.

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