

## ARCADI VOLODOS

VOLODOS PLAYS SCHUBERT REVIEW

08<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019

**THE**  **TIMES**

★★★★★

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# 2 ARTS

November 8 | 2019

## This Russian piano god ascends to the pantheon

**classical**

**Arcadi Volodos**  
**Schubert**  
Sony Classical  
★★★★★

**C**overs for Arcadi Volodos's recital albums usually ignore his first name. He is Volodos, pure and simple. It suits him too, for this fortysomething Russian is surely one of the grandest of living classical pianists, if not one with fancy airs. No platform paroxysms before an audience; no wildly eccentric interpretations. Just the notes, plus the composer's heart and soul.

It's an approach that brings particularly abundant rewards with Schubert. Volodos tackles one of the composer's last epic sonatas, D.959 in A major, with three early minuets as extras. The sympathetic Berlin studio recording underlines the multiple variants of dynamics and touch at his command. Hard-toned one moment, feathery the next, with seemingly infinite gradations of quietness, Volodos's sounds are magical. He's also a genius at pacing and timing, never losing his grip in the sonata's



**Arcadi Volodos: now one of the greats**

expansive first movement, carefully juggling moods in the andantino and always savouring harmonic surprises without toppling into self-indulgence.

After the sonata's emotional depths, the minuets might run the risk of seeming trivial. Not with Volodos. D.600 is particularly engrossing, moving forwards stealthily, note by note. And if the music-box delicacies within D.335 don't touch your heart,

see a heart surgeon immediately. This album is something special.

More delights arrive with Alexander Melnikov's Prokofiev release, recorded at the same Teldex Studio, although listeners should prepare for extreme volatility. It's all justified: in swinging so vividly between brutal scampering and the lyrical, Melnikov is only reflecting the emotional turmoil of the works. At the centre of this second volume in his survey of Prokofiev's piano sonatas lies the famous Seventh, one of the "war sonatas", with a hammering finale requiring a pianist with Hercules' wrists.

That's no problem for Melnikov, who is equally strong on structural control and clarity of line and texture, qualities necessary for the mercurial Fourth and the equivocal Ninth. I can see the day coming when Melnikov's first name also vanishes and he too becomes a piano god.

**Geoff Brown**