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PROKOFIEV Ten Pieces from Romeo and Juliet (Dzmitry Ulasiuk)

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* (10) Pieces from Romeo and Juliet
* (9) Etudes-tableaux

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Dzmitry Ulasiuk is young pianist based in Forth Worth, Texas, with numerous competition prizes to his credit, and, more importantly, a generally strong calling card in the form of this impressive solo CD debut. He launches into Prokofiev’s *Ten Pieces from Romeo and Juliet* with a crisp ‘Folk Dance’ that unfortunately slows down as the music progresses. Happily, the second piece’s stabbing staccato chords remain vibrantly steady. In the ‘Minuet’, Ulasiuk’s caustic phrasing captures the bite of Prokofiev’s original orchestration, as does his jaunty romp through ‘Young Juliet’.

Ulasiuk doesn’t grasp the arpeggiated chords of ‘Masks’ with Andrei Gavrilov’s incisive spring, yet he wonderfully points up the characterful contrasts in ‘Montagues and Capulets’. ‘Mercutio’ is quite exciting, laced with effectively goosed-up accents and cross rhythms. Even the three single, slow repeated F naturals at the start of the ‘Dance of the Girls with Lilies’ generate tension and anticipation! And the lengthy finale holds interest by virtue of Ulasiuk’s variegated articulation, especially in his distinctions between short phrases and long sustained lines. In short, his pianistic astuteness and balletic instincts serve the music well.

For Rachmaninov’s *Études-tableaux*, Op 33, Ulasiuk wends his way from the ballet pit to the orchestra podium, conceptually speaking. He keeps No 1’s long *cantabiles* and marching bass lines in firm perspective, while treating the ostinato figure that persists throughout No 2 as an anchoring component rather than decorative tinsel. Although I prefer the muted shadings and faster overall pace in John Ogdon’s haunting reading of No 3 (Testament, 11/03), Ulasiuk’s slower tempo and more pronounced shaping of the bass lines completely convince. He gets slightly bogged down by the D minor and E flat minor pieces’ multi-level textures that the young Hélène Grimaud effortlessly navigates (Denon, 12/86), yet he works his way up to a powerful climax in the G minor. But the concluding C sharp minor *Étude-tableau* comes off relatively sectionalised when compared to the dramatic continuity of Richter’s various live 1983 performances or the splendid recordings by Lugansky (Challenge Classics, 1/95) and Hayroudinoff (Chandos, 2/07). All told, a promising debut for a talented pianist.