

**HIMMEL & HÖLLE** - Iveta Apkalna (org) • EDITION HERA 02117 (71:58)

**KALEJS** *Toccata über den Choral von J. S. Bach, "Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr."* **LISZT** *Legend No. 1* (trans. G Berger). *Legend No. 2* (trans. Max Reger). **EBEN** *Faust Cycle: Walpurgisnacht*. **DURUFLE** *Suite, op. 5: Toccata*. **N. HAKIM** 4 Etudes-Caprices. **THALBEN-BALL** Variations on a Theme of Paganini. **PROKOFIEV** (am Jean Guillou) *Toccata, op. 11*. The Love for Three Oranges: *March*

This one is a winner on four counts—the choice of repertoire, which presents a refreshing mix of the unfamiliar and the familiar in surprisingly revealing guises; the splendid instrument used (the organ of St. Martin in Wangen, Württemberg); Iveta Apkalna's musical insights and utterly sure technique; and the quality of the recorded sound, which delineates both the horizontal and vertical aspects of the music and vividly illuminates her apt choices of registration. The heaven and hell of the title can be interpreted on a number of levels. Most obviously, the Kalejs, Bach, Liszt, and Durufle pieces represent heaven; the Eben, Hakim, Thalben-Ball, and the first of the two Prokofiev works, the other place. Looking at those latter pieces from another angle, the Thalben-Ball variations present the same Paganini Caprice already immortalized by Brahms and Rachmaninoff among others—its composer a virtuoso reputed to be in league with the devil (I hope I'm not being oxymoronic here). Those variations and Hakim's Etudes-Caprices, both for pedal solo, along with Prokofiev's Toccata, are also devilishly hard to play. In that category, I should include the Durufle Toccata, but I won't; otherwise, my half-baked thesis would fall apart.

Iveta Apkalna was born in 1976 in Rezekne, Latvia. Her early training was in her native country. In 1999, she won a full scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. After subsequent studies in Germany, she won numerous competitions in Russia, Canada, London, Lithuania, and Finland. Most notably, in 2004 she received the Grand Latvian Music Award. Other recipients include Gidon Kremer, Mariss Jansons, and Peteris Vasks. Ordinarily, I don't put much stock in artists' resumes. They are all tailored to look good. In Apkalna's case, I will report only on what I hear. Her playing is devoid of mannerisms, technically sure, insightful, and where required, disarmingly whimsical. All those qualities are laid out in her contemporary compatriot Alvars Kalejs's, ***Toccata on Bach's "Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr."***

Of special note are the two transcriptions of Liszt's Legends. They indeed tease out the sonorities only implied by the piano originals.

Full organ specs are provided, and the whole enterprise adds up to roughly 72 minutes of pure delight. As for her inclusion of the March from Prokofiev's ***Love for Three Oranges***, I'll defer to Apkalna's comment: "Having dealt with 'Heaven & Hell' it is surely not a fault to let the final piece announce the victory of the good powers over the evil ones . . .". Having grown up in an era when radio was still the predominant household medium, I later and often found it ironic that a series titled ***The FBI Story*** used that same piece (by a Communist composer) as its emblematic theme music. Oh well, so much for music and politics.

William Zagorski