

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

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James Harrington

“Rarely have performances measured up to the music as well as here.”

In the old days of stores with a large selection of classical CDs, I browsed for hours and would have purchased this on the basis of its content alone. Here is my favorite piano sonata and my favorite set of variations, in a program with a couple of compositions I didn't know — an unbeatable Beethoven recital. Played with strength and imagination, the performances are hard to beat. The program is perfectly ordered, opening with the lighter-weight but charming Polonaise, followed by the hefty Variations. The Fantasia is a substantial eight-minute work vaguely reminiscent of Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and offers an interesting break before one of the greatest piano works of all time, Beethoven's final sonata.



Faliks's excellent first CD included Rachmaninoff Sonata 2 and Gaspard de la Nuit (MSR 1333, Jan/Feb 2010). I have seen her perform in New York on two occasions and have a non-commercial earlier recording of Sonata 32. She teaches at UCLA and performs all over the USA and also in Italy and Israel. She is a pioneer in Yamaha's newest technology that allows long distance playing and teaching piano via the Internet, video, and their Disklavier recording and reproducing pianos.

Her competition in the big pieces is formidable. I have spent many years listening to Richter (Olympic 339, May/June 1994) and Brendel (Vox 3017, Mar/Apr 1993) play the variations, and with this new recording in my collection, I doubt that I'll return to the old favorites as often. I find a couple of these variations rare examples of Beethoven's musical humor — and Faliks does not miss them. I don't have a specific favorite for the sonata, though I've seen Barenboim perform it twice (EMI 72912, Mar/Apr 1999). Faliks captures the turbulent aspect of the first movement just right. From the stately theme to the jazzy dance elements of the middle variations to the heaven-bound trills in the upper reaches of the piano, II balances perfectly.

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