

Chamber Reviews

Kabalevsky • Prokofiev • Shostakovich

Kabalevsky: Cello Sonata; Rondo in Memory of Prokofiev;

Prokofiev: Ballade in C; Cinderella – Adagio; **Shostakovich:** Cello Sonata; Moderato in A minor
Steven Isserlis (cello),
Olli Mustonen (piano)

Hyperion CDA 68239 76:33 mins



This superb and thought-provoking programme presents mostly lesser-known

works by three Russian composers – two of them among the greatest, and a third whose reputation has been sullied by his apparent close collaboration with the Soviet authorities.

As Steven Isserlis writes in his booklet note, Dmitri Kabalevsky is resented to the point of fury by

those who lived under the Soviet regime; yet the British cellist has long admired his 'powerful and striking' music. Certainly Isserlis and his long-term colleague Olli Mustonen make a compelling case for Kabalevsky's Cello Sonata, finding such expressive drama that for once I was not distracted by the Sonata's obvious cribs from Shostakovich and Debussy. Indeed, why should one be?

The Fauré-like opening of the Shostakovich Sonata which opens the disc is just as disconcerting, though Shostakovich does do some chilling transformations of that theme – rather more fully realised in other performances, admittedly, including a superb live recording by Rostropovich and the composer himself.

Still, Isserlis and Mustonen are themselves extraordinary musicians, and both clearly believe in the music they are performing. Prokofiev's Ballade, a relatively early and still much underestimated work, emerges as quintessential, very much in the febrile world of his Second Piano Concerto. Most extraordinary of all is Kabalevsky's *Rondo in Memory of Prokofiev*. Here a theme which sounds as if taken from one of Prokofiev's official Soviet works is contrasted with anguished musical reflections – a sincere and truly great work in an outstanding performance. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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