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PROKOFIEV Piano Sonatas Nos 2 & 5 (Lukas Geniusas)

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The story of the underdog supposedly autodidact Frenchman Lucas Debargue getting to the finals of 2015 Tchaikovsky competition stole the media limelight. Another Lukas, the Lithuanian-Russian Geniušas, who shared the silver medal with George Li, didn't exactly fit the bill for a Cinderella-like fairy tale, since his father Petras and his grandmother Vera Gornostaeva were both renowned pianists, and Gornostaeva – Lukas's first teacher – was behind many successful competition winners.

But there is certainly an abundance of fairy-tale characterisation in this first instalment of a promised complete survey of Prokofiev's sonatas. The early Second Sonata and the Ten Pieces, Op 12, frame the elusively Poulencian (just compare the opening motif to that of Poulenc's Flute Sonata) Fifth Sonata. And story-telling fantasy, conveyed with a seemingly infinite variety of touch, teams up with youthful bravado, fire and mercurial temperament in Geniušas's superior accounts of all three works.

Every one of the multiple personalities of the Second Sonata is swiftly and sensitively delineated, and you can almost see the cast of carnivalesque characters and creatures parading to the stage in the Op 12 pieces. A judicious dose of piquancy makes all the difference to the Fifth Sonata, which in other hands can come across as merely bland. If risk-taking and capriciousness are not your idea of a good thing in Prokofiev, you can always take the safer options of Berman (Chandos, 9/09) or Donohoe (Somm, 6/13); for a slightly moderated grotesquerie in the Second Sonata, fellow Tchaikovsky competitor and first prize-winner Dmitry Masleev (Melodiya, 1/18) is almost up there. But Geniušas is certainly a bold and immensely idiomatic entrant into the already highly competitive arena of recorded Prokofiev cycles.



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Sonata for Piano No. 2

(10) Pieces

Sonata for Piano No. 5

Label: Mirare

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