

**T**CHAIKOVSKY: Trio  
with RACHMANINOFF: *Trio 1*  
Lang Lang, Vadim Repin, Mischa Maisky  
DG 13504—64 minutes

It's too easy to take potshots at Lang Lang's often absurd stage manner and his interpretations that sometimes go spectacularly, hilariously awry. Surely his tendency to mercilessly beat his instrument in emphatic passages wears thin, but he doesn't win the award for most obnoxiously loud player I've ever heard (that goes to the Russian pianist I heard at Ravinia two summers ago!). His own publicity machine diminishes his status with serious music lovers, and I was sent not a simple review copy of this but a "press kit" with DVD.

None of that really matters because this is a moving, often exciting, sometimes outright playful performance of a work that is sometimes done as a monochromatic funeral dirge. I won't argue that it rivals the classic Borodin Trio (Chandos) or that if you already own a couple of recordings you need this one, too. And yes, the pianist is front-and-center, sometimes too loud, and sometimes chewing the scenery a bit too rabidly. But the piece is piano-heavy, restraint of emotion is not part of the Russian character, and Repin and Maisky, no shrinking violets themselves, hold their own more often than not. The recorded sound is spectacular, with a depth and breadth that makes one feel like one is hearing the players in an empty, mildly reverberant hall. Not distracted by the sight of Lang Lang over-emoting, one can settle back and enjoy the tragic intensity of the bookends that open and close the piece. In between, the players bring a wide range of emotion and variety of moods to the 12 substantial variations of II.

The performers present Rachmaninoff's early one-movement *Trio Elegiaque* with the same expressiveness and emotional engagement.

If Lang Lang's playing sets your teeth on edge, you are hereby warned. But if you agree that the purpose of music is to transmit emotion more directly and purely than any other art form, you'll find plenty to enjoy here.

HANSEN

