

## RACHMANINOFF & TCHAIKOVSKY

### Piano Trios

**Rachmaninoff:** Trio élégiaque 1. **Tchaikovsky:** Piano Trio. Vadim Repin, violin; Mischa Maisky, cello; Lang Lang, piano. Deutsche Grammophon 00289 477 8099 (CD). 2009. Alexander Buhr, exec. prod.; Sid McLauchlan, prod.; Stephan Flock, eng. DDD. TT: 64:00

Performance ★★★★★

Sonics ★★★★★

When famous soloists play chamber music together, the result can be a battle of egos or the creation of a whole greater than its parts.

On this recording, in performances of two romantic Russian works ideally suited to their temperaments, three superstar virtuosos succeed in merging without submerging their over-life-size personalities. They could hardly be more different. Maisky, aged 61, born in Latvia, is a musical and political iconoclast and veteran chamber musician. Repin, 38, is one of the Siberian prodigies who took the world by storm some decades ago; he has played with such partners as pianist Marta Argerich and Gypsy fiddler Roby Lakatos (and recorded the Tchaikovsky Trio in 1997 with two Russian colleagues). Lang Lang, 27, born in China, is famous for his phenomenal technique and meteoric career. This is his first excursion into chamber music; by joining two older, far more experienced players, he proves that his courage matches his talent.

The trios recorded here have certain traits in common, though Rachmaninoff's is a youthful, Tchaikovsky's a mature work. Each is an elegiac memorial to "a great artist": Tchaikovsky's to Nicolai Rubinstein, Rachmaninoff's to Tchaikovsky. Though steeped in the European romantic tradition, both are suffused with a distinctly Russian melan-

choly, and end with funeral marches.

The playing is spectacular. Repin's tone, with its vibrant, expressive intensity and incredible purity, is uniquely beautiful; Lang Lang's, whether delicate or powerful, is consistently singing—even the big chords do not sound harsh. Saving his virtuosity for the solo passages and cadenzas, he never overmatches the strings. Maisky, who sometimes sounds a bit distant, contributes a strong foundation and much dramatic tension.

Though performed without the customary cuts, the Tchaikovsky does not seem long because the playing is full of variety; even the bombastic Fugue is clear and compelling. The work has been called a "concerto for three instruments," but these players' soloistic brilliance is always at the service of the music. They respond to its romanticism with unrestrained ardor, freedom, and abandon, without succumbing to sentimentality or excess. Most remarkably, they never forget that chamber music is essentially "a civilized discourse between friends." In both works, their ensemble is impeccable; the unanimous phrasing, seamless dynamic buildups, and melodic takeovers give it a conversational quality. Far from trying to upstage one another, they discreetly and skillfully underplay the accompanying passages, projecting mutual respect and support. This is a truly special, thrilling recording.

—Edith Eisler



