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Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*



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CD Review: French Treasures, Aleksey Semenenko

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Whomever experiences Aleksey Semenenko and Inna Firsova live gets a strong impression of the duo's deep symbiosis. On their new CD, the violinist and the pianist – both of whom hail from the Ukraine – have embraced France as their main focus. What comes from this – of course! – is a unique world of playful sound, as well as a characteristic sense of poetry. French composers freed themselves of the burdens of the Late Romantic and developed a new sense of sound and atmosphere. Aleksey Semenenko and Inna Firsova possess an intuitive understanding of those musical aspects, displayed through their choice of works as well as their refreshingly distinct, sensitive, and wonderfully spirited grasp of the material. Thus, even though there are some well-known, "standard" works in their repertoire, there is not even a moment that slips into the clichéd.

Francis Poulenc's "Sonata for Violin and Piano" marks the start of an energetic climax. The imaginative power of Aleksey Semenenko's violin achieves an almost nightmarish dimension, particularly during the intermezzo. The richly colored tones this young violinist achieves on his Stradivarius are spectacular, and serve to advance the hidden depths of the music. His skill brings forth a new, remarkable, and heavenly violin-listening experience, and he and his pianist partner have mastered the art of breathing together through the music. After the emotionally ambiguous workings of the Presto Tragico in the Poulenc Sonata, Semenenko's bow builds the suspense again. Enersto Chausson's "Poem for Violin and Orchestra" becomes excitedly tense, building into an intimately sung lament with 15 minutes of suspenseful bowing.

As for Inna Firsova, her style of play is already orchestral, though never possessing a powerful spatial impact, which makes it a safe bet for the cosmos-of-sound that is Claude Debussy. Firsova relishes in the dazzling melody and then hands it off to Aleksey Semenenko, whose violin takes the iridescent and exotic sounds of the original flute motif and enhances them with a firework of dynamic changes, legato effects, rich glissandos and ethereal melodic chimes. On this CD, the waltz from 1910 and the tender Clair de Lune from the "Suite bergamasque" function about the same.

One would like to dive into the pair's spirited and passionate playing for even longer. That wish is fulfilled on this CD: The Caprice originally came from the pen of Camille Saint-Saens and was then transcribed for violin by Eugene Ysaye, which took the technical aspects to new heights. That's exactly how it should be for Aleksey Semenenko and Inna Firsova: though things start with a seemingly harmless and playful waltz, they then explode into an intricate challenge of endless, acrobatic double-stop passages and expressive outbursts.

This duo embarks unreservedly upon every musical adventure, such that one can only wish for more!