

American Record Guide

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By James Harrington

CD Review

**TCHAIKOVSKY: *Piano Sonata*;
PROKOFIEFF: *Romeo & Juliet Pieces*
Concert Artists Guild 105—48 minutes**

One of the most enjoyable aspects of listening to a lot of young artists' debut recordings is the quick realization that classical music and musicians are thriving. Ms Rabotkina, the 2007 winner of the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, has a well-designed website, www.dariarabotkina.com, with plenty of pictures and videos that show off her considerable talents as well as her impressive repertoire, education (Vladimir Feltsman was one of her main teachers), concert schedule, and various ways to contact her and her representatives. **She is an extremely talented young woman**, already with a worldwide concert schedule. Her nearly two dozen ready and available concertos include Tchaikovsky 1, Prokofieff 1 and 3, and all four by Rachmaninoff!

Part of the prize for winning the Concert Artists Guild Competition is this debut disc. **Well-produced, with a fabulous sounding Hamburg Steinway, it will give anyone a clear picture about how strong a pianist and perceptive musician she is.**

I have never been a big fan of the Tchaikovsky Piano Sonata In G. It has never made it into the standard repertoire, despite good recordings by Pletnev (Melodiya, July/Aug 1992) and an old one by Richter (Odyssey LP 35204). It is long (35 minutes), quite repetitious, but very difficult; and, quite frankly, I get really tired of the dotted rhythms that seem to pervade all four movements. **Still, I can't imagine it given a better, more committed performance than it is given here. Rabotkina has a tonal palette that verge on the orchestration this work truly requires. Her fearless virtuosity makes the most of the exciting passages, and her dynamic range fully encompasses *pianissimo tranquillo* right**

up to triple *forte, con tutta forza*. If I have a specialty niche, it would be Russian piano sonatas (I reviewed 19 in one ARG issue last year). Rabotkina's Tchaikovsky has convinced me to add it to my burgeoning collection.

I have also had the opportunity to review many recordings of the Prokofieff *Romeo and Juliet* piano pieces. They are near and dear to my heart—surely some of the greatest music Prokofieff wrote. I dare say that they are now fully established in the standard piano repertoire. **Some movements are within the ability of pianists of modest abilities, while others demand a big technique. All benefit from Rabotkina's interpretation and skillful balancing of the many voices that are almost constantly part of the musical fabric.** About half of these pieces are in an ABA form, with a quiet, lyrical section surrounded by bigger, more vigorous music. I was particularly impressed with Rabotkina's transitions into and out of these central sections. She is not afraid to go her own interpretive route, even if it defies convention, as in the sixth piece, the 'Montagues and Capulets' March. The immediately recognizable left-hand part alternates between a low octave and a mid-range chord through much of the piece. Most pianists sustain the low octave with the pedal right through the chord, but here we have exactly what is written—heavy, even quarter notes, not sustained at all. It is done so convincingly that I may try it myself. **Rabotkina uses a variety of pianistic touches to lend orchestral colors to these pieces**, which are, of course derived from an orchestral score. **This is as satisfying a recording of these great pieces as is available today, and Rabotkina is a young artist—mature beyond her years—to watch for.**