



## CD Review

by Peter Burwasser

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### CHOPIN Piano Sonata No. 3.

**D. SCARLATTI Sonatas: in F, L 385; in d, L 422.**

**MOZART Rondo in D, K 485. Fantasy in c, K 475. Piano Sonata in c, K 457**

• Tao Lin (pn) • ARTEK 0055-2 (67:28) Live: Fremont, California 3/20/2010

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The conceit of this album, as expressed by the pianist in his liner notes, is that live musical performances have a noticeably different character than studio recordings. I emphatically agree, and this recital, captured in California in 2010, is a good example. Tao Lin, a Shanghai-born and -trained pianist now living in America, has a fine, clean technique, so there are no blatant bloopers on this disc, which can be a feature of live recordings, and a reason some collectors avoid them. I don't mind an occasional mistake in a performance; they can add a certain quality of humanity to the music. For example, I actually relish the little slips and smudges that one can readily hear on the famous 1965 Carnegie Hall recital of Horowitz, which was his first public appearance in 12 years. The playing is glorious, and the less than spot-perfect technique enhances the outsized personality of the interpretations. Naturally, a performer of Horowitz's already highly nervous, we might even say neurotic, personality would experience anxiety at a concert that was surely the highlight of the season, or even many seasons. But that anxiety is a key element of almost any recital (much more so than an ensemble performance, where the players can, to an extent, cover for one another). Lin starts his recital, for example, with a lively rendition of Scarlatti that feels just a bit rushed, just enough so as to add a positive level of energy to the music that would probably have not occurred in the studio. The great Mozart sonata seems a tad pedantic at first, but Lin's playing gathers energy and drama as it goes. By the end of the first movement, the depth and passion of this extraordinary music is fully engaged, and in a very natural way. Similarly, Lin finds a pace in the grand, sublime slow movement that allows him to grow into the theatrical space of the music. The Chopin Sonata No. 3 does not lack for fine performances, but here again, the special energy of live performance enhances this playing. I heard Mitsuko Uchida play this in concert last season, and in the last movement wondered how she could maintain the level of intensity that she had initiated. Yet her power rallied, leading to a uniquely exciting conclusion. I cannot pay Lin a higher compliment than to say that his playing of the final passages of this music put me in mind of that Uchida recital. There are too many excellent performances of these works to mention, and in a way, comparisons are beside the point. Lin means to demonstrate the special dynamics of live music-making here, and in that sense he has succeeded.

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