

BAX

Piano Works, Vol. 1: Piano Sonatas Nos 1 & 2; Dream in Exile: Intermezzo; Burlesque; Nereid; In a Vodka Shop
Ashley Wass (piano)
Naxos 8.557439 74:27 mins..... £



Bax's first two sonatas were written before the first of his seven symphonies – the body of work for

which he is best known today. But far from being immature early efforts, they have an impressive strength and imaginative daring. Indeed listeners who find the symphonies too loose-limbed and discursive for their own good may be surprised at how single-minded these one-movement essays can be – improvisatory perhaps, but in the best sense of the word. Bax was a fine pianist, and his writing for the

instrument shows a confidence and flair that puts many other British Romantic piano works in the shade. The bell imitations at the close of the First Sonata (apparently inspired by the bells of St Isaac's Cathedral in St Petersburg) would be impressive enough in a short illustrative piece; as the culmination of a powerful 22-minute argument they are especially memorable.

Rising star pianist Ashley Wass plays both sonatas with all the intensity and technical sensitivity they demand – you'd think Bax had been in his repertoire for years. The shorter pieces, too, are beautifully done, poetic when needed, and with just the right touch of humour for *In a Vodka Shop*. Good, clear recordings too. Recommended. *Stephen Johnson*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

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