

ASHLEY WASS'S BAX SERIES FOR NAXOS LAUNCHES IN AUSPICIOUS FASHION

Piano Sonatas – No 1 in F sharp minor;
No 2 in G. Burlesque. In a Vodka Shop.
Nereid. Dream in exile

Ashley Wass *pf*

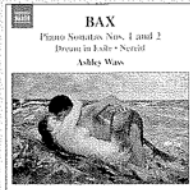
Naxos © 8 557439 (77 minutes: DDD)

Sonata No 2 – selected comparison:

McCabe (11/92) (CONT) CCD1045

Having been so impressed by Ashley Wass's 1999 début recording of César Franck on Naxos, I had high hopes for this first volume in his Bax survey; I was not disappointed. Not only does this gifted young pianist possess a rock-solid technique and striking keyboard finesse, his penetrating accounts of both these large-scale, single-movement sonatas make you sit up and listen.

So it is that in the bracing First Sonata (written in 1910 during Bax's sojourn in Russia and Ukraine) Wass finds the balance between epic and introspective. More than that, he brings out the music's brazen Slavic fervour with its echoes of Scriabin and



McCabe, Wass takes us on a genuine voyage of discovery: the control, sense of colour and dynamic range are remarkable, and his tone never hardens under pressure.

Of the four couplings, *Dream in Exile* stands out. It was written shortly before the 1916 Easter Rising, and again Wass allows Bax's poignant inspiration all the time in the world to cast its spell. He makes the most of the songful *Nereid*, and if it's rollicking fun you're after, the roistering *Burlesque* and *In a Vodka Shop* have it in spades.

The sound throughout is vividly truthful. As should be clear by now, this is quite a release; I can hardly wait for future instalments.

Andrew Achenbach

Rachmaninov (the coda's pealing bells toll with magnificent cumulative impact). He paces its turbulent successor of 1919 with cogency and concentration. Even more than the magisterial John



HANYA CHILALA

Young, gifted and dressed in black – the one-time Leeds Competition-finalist Ashley Wass