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ALEXANDER TCHEREPNIN
 Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 3; Festmusik; Symphonic March
 Noriko Ogawa (piano)

Singapore Symphony Orchestra

Lan Shui

BIS- 1317(CD)
 No Reference Recording

Artistic Quality **10/10** *Sound Quality*

BIS has taken on so many worthy projects over the years that it's difficult to keep up with them. This cycle of Tcherpnin piano concertos and other orchestral works, while not the largest, is by no means the least. With this release of the First and Third Piano Concertos, all six are now available, and what an enjoyable bunch they are, particularly in these marvelously engineered, colorful, and energetic performances from Noriko Ogawa, the Singapore Symphony, and conductor Lan Shui.

The First Concerto, in one movement, offers a fascinating combination of traditional Romantic melodies and keyboard bravura, alongside a lengthy and experimental opening that sounds sort of like a sped-up, minimalist take on the second movement of Saint-Saëns' Egyptian Concerto. At the end, both types of music are combined very effectively. Ogawa has more than enough tone and technique to project the music's grand gestures with the necessary brilliance and sweep, and the whole thing is tremendous fun despite (or because of) its somewhat heterogeneous makeup.

The Third Concerto is more experimental in the sense that its thematic material is sparer and more harmonically acerbic, but not much more than, say, what we find in Shostakovich's First or Fourth Symphonies. Here the interpretive challenge is to project a firm sense of continuity throughout a highly colorful, melodically fragmented journey. Ogawa and Shui have no problems at all in this respect, and rather than sounding like a tough nut the piece comes off as quite appealing in a spiky, dryly witty sort of way.

Festmusik actually is a little four-movement suite of dances drawn from an earlier opera, the details of which don't matter a bit. The music stands perfectly well on its own and would make a delightful concert opener--as would the Symphonic March, for that matter. The nicest thing about this latter work is that it's not in fact rhythmically stiff or even especially militant--it's just a big, colorful, expertly written orchestral showpiece, and it closes the program with a bang. If you don't know Tcherpnin's music yet, you should, and this disc provides an excellent place to start.