

A characteristic of Chopin's music is that there are no wasted notes. Every note means something. Yet how often do we hear pianists in Chopin smudge details in a misguided attempt to shape a melody or heighten drama. The Spanish pianist Ángeles Iglesias will have none of it. Iglesias, a competition winner based in Madrid, is a musician of rare insight. Constantly you hear details in her interpretations that have fallen by the wayside in other performances. She produces a rich sound, with an unusually strong left hand. Charles Rosen called Chopin the finest contrapuntist since J. S. Bach, and Iglesias brings out Chopin's harmonies to an extent unexcelled by any pianist in my experience. Also, she is no speed merchant, though she seems to possess plenty of technique. Rather, her tempos tend to be leisurely, with an emphasis on the delineation of textures instead of virtuoso showiness. I once attended a master class by Ruth Laredo, in which she said her favorite pianist was Horowitz because he took things slower than everyone else, relishing the details. I wouldn't compare Iglesias to Horowitz, but she does approach tempo as a vehicle for elucidating the music. Daniel Barenboim once contrasted Georg Solti, whom he called an "in tempo" conductor, to himself as someone who let the music's expression determine tempo. Iglesias as a musician is in Barenboim's camp, always making room for rubato or a ritard as needed, although never anything excessive. The structure in her interpretations is absolutely clear. For me, hearing Iglesias's performances of these sonatas was like listening to them for the first time.

In the past, I have recommended recordings of the First Sonata by Vassily Primakov and Louis Demetrius Alvanis, but both pale beside Iglesias. Primakov's is a top-melody-line-only reading with an unnecessary cut in the last movement, while Alvanis's, though certainly musicianly, is too fast to let the work breathe as Iglesias does. Her first movement is truly *Maestoso*, with an especial feeling of nobility. Her left hand seems to depict castles in the air. Iglesias finds an elegant majesty in this movement that recognizes Chopin as a musical revolutionary already at age 18. At the same time, Iglesias's playing possesses a gentleness here which characterizes the youthful aspiration in the movement. In the next movement, she draws out a richness in the harmony reminiscent of the French Baroque. In contrast with this heightened emotion, the trio sees Iglesias nearly coy and kittenish. She finds in the slow movement one of those early Romantic moments mixing warmth and sadness. She allows the music to develop with subtlety and distinctiveness. In the finale, Iglesias plays with an impetuosity that never turns into recklessness. The aura of Bach hangs over her passage work. If you ever have thought of the First Sonata as an insubstantial piece, you really need to hear Iglesias's version.

Iglesias's Third Sonata is very special. She doesn't take the first movement repeat, a reasonable decision given her patient tempo. The movement opens with a grand yet unforced sonority that mirrors the nobility of Chopin's thought. Iglesias phrases the second subject beautifully and sensitively over a strong left hand. This whole movement has a breathless, yearning quality that belongs to the world of one of Shakespeare's sonnets. At times the playing borders on the rapturous. The first section of the scherzo is unusually coherent, while the second section is weighty, with a rare sense of gravitas. In the *Largo*, the first subject is dramatic in its emphases, with a left hand like a thudding heartbeat. Iglesias takes the second subject a little louder and faster than usual, exhibiting a potent passion. The whole movement, rather than partaking of the style *galant*, is cathartic in nature. Instead of a rush of high spirits, Iglesias finds in the finale a manic intensity. She gets a darker tone color here than I've ever heard before. The movement drives onward like the inexorability of fate. In previous reviews I've recommended Cécile Ousset and Van Cliburn for this sonata, but I now have a slight preference for Iglesias. The sound engineering is superb, with a well-balanced, somewhat recessed image to the piano. I love this pianist. She has the facility of doing everything right while apparently doing nothing at all. Ángeles Iglesias, quite simply, is a musician's musician.

Dave Saemann