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SCHOENBERG Works for piano

All the piano works from Loriod pupil Boffard

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If this were a *Gramophone* Collection survey of Schoenberg's piano music, and I'd already discussed the relative merits, or otherwise, of Glenn Gould and Maurizio Pollini – Gould playing the piano well but missing the music, Pollini's intellectual and technical genius dealing more equitably with Schoenberg's challenges – I'd still be tempted to hand the ultimate top-choice accolade to this new cycle by the French pianist Florent Boffard.

Schoenberg's piano music is a problem. No question about that. The serial *Fünf Klavierstücke*, Op 23, and *Suite für Klavier*, Op 25 – but not the freely atonal *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op 11, and *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke*, Op 19 – have the feel of an artist throwing paint at a canvas who never steps back to look at the results. That Schoenberg was, of course, painfully concerned with results makes this disjoint between his musically profound workings-out and the aural results ever more inexplicable. But Boffard brings a bountiful spectrum of *trompe-l'œil* shadings and rhythmic nuances to music that can meander by default towards greyness and mechanistic precision. The second moment of the *Fünf Klavierstücke* comes with impressionistic undertones; the 'Gigue' in the Suite demonstrates how to fuel Schoenberg's rhythmic momentum without sounding like you're chopping onions.

An early set of Brahms-meets-Chopin *Three Pieces* ends the disc but the *Drei Klavierstücke* we all know establishes the mood-music: a tasteful whiff of well-applied Romanticism bumping into pumped-up hysteria. The *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke* is best, though: Boffard caresses details, and creates an ambiguity of foreground and background that turns these miniatures into vast canvases of enlightened experience.



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(3) Klavierstücke

(6) Klavierstücke

(5) Klavierstücke

Suite

Klavierstück

Klavierstück