

CHOPIN: *Piano Concerto 2; Fantasy on Polish Themes;*

LUTOSLAWSKI: *Little Suite;*

MONIUSZKO: *Overture to The Raftsmen* Martin Labazevitch, p;
Beethoven Academy Or- chestra/ Ewa Strusinska—Delos 3463—
67 min

Pianist Labazevitch injects more fire into the two concerted works, rushing the tempos in some passagework to build excitement; orchestra and conductor gamely, calmly follow his lead. I'm still smitten by Emanuel Ax's 1997 recording of these works, played with ravish- ing delicacy on a restored 1851 Erard (N/D 1998), and I adore the more recent string quintet accompanied Gianluca Luisi (S/O 2011), perhaps the richest and warmest piano I've ever heard. Labazevitch is excellent, though; and the orchestra is refined and perfectly balanced with the piano—no spotlighting. The gap between I and II is too short.

The endearing Lutoslawski suite is more of the same: stately beauty and balance over intensity. The recent Chandos SACD (M/A 2013) of this work, played by BBC Symphony under Edward Gardner in astonishing, vivid surround sound, puts Beethoven Academy in the shade. This work does not reward reticence.

Beautiful, honest sound, and gorgeous piano.

WRIGHT