

Album Review: Michael Brown- CAG Records: The Victor Elmaleh Collection

SCHUBERT: *Piano Sonata in D*;

DEBUSSY: *Etudes (6)*;

BROWN: *Constellations & Toccata*

Michael Brown

Concert Artists Guild 108—72 minutes

The front cover boldly states that this is part of the Victor Elmaleh Collection. Only on opening does one discover a booklet with a reproduction of an abstract watercolor by Elmaleh on the front. Not another word about either painting or artist is included, though we do learn that Brown was the First Prize Winner of the 2010 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition.

Brown is certainly no slouch when it comes to performing these demanding works. With plenty of competition he holds his own and contributes much in the way of pleasure for the listener who can appreciate his refreshingly understated playing.

The Schubert might be a fraction under tempo when compared with several other pianists. His careful articulation pays rich dividends in terms of nuance and attention to detail. While this is not one of the Schubert sonatas to relax with, or to shy away from pressing forward, the playing is always perfectly apt and beautifully expressive. The final Rondo is deliciously played, with all the perkiness and sparkle one could want.

The choice of Debussy Etudes also presents this pianist at his best in characterizing all of their quixotic turns, wit, and shading. Brown's own two-part creation was commissioned

by the Concert Artists Guild with support from the New York State Council on the Arts. It was written in 2012 and is in a modernist idiom with a definite Jazz tang in the Toccata. They got their money's worth from this New York composer, and pianists have a recent immensely entertaining work to add to their repertory. Brown really explodes with virtuosic abandon—tossing the sparks all around the night sky.

His own notes are always interesting, and the sound is rich, deep, and plummy. Let's have lots more from this pianist.

— Becker, **American Record Guide**