

Classical CD reviews: Bax plays Rachmaninoff, violin-and-orchestra works by David Gompper

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Violin Concerto; Ikon; Flip; Spirals. Wolfgang David, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Siffert (Naxos)

Two musicians with area connections make impressive showings here. Pianist Alessio Bax is a continuing presence, last week performing at the Mimir Chamber Music Festival. A protégé of Joaquín Achúcarro at Southern Methodist University's Meadows School of the Arts, he's now on the adjunct faculty. David **Gompper** has been a composition professor at the University of Iowa since 1991, but before that he taught at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Since winning the prestigious Leeds Competition in 2000, Bax has matured into a one of the most compelling pianists around. In Rachmaninoff's Op. 23 Preludes and assorted smaller pieces, he displays playing in the grand manner. There's dazzling virtuosity where called for, but more impressive is his way of shaping the music, warmly caressing phrases.

In the D-major Prelude and Lilacs, loving attention to accompaniments comes at the price of melodic momentum. (Listen to Rachmaninoff's own recordings of the latter.) But these are the only reservations with otherwise glorious music-making, beautifully recorded.

Gompper supplies the best new violin concerto I've heard in I don't know when. Twenty-five minutes long, in the traditional slow-fast-slow movements, this 2009 score has everything: high drama, athleticism and atmosphere, unflagging invention.

It's certainly modern, but its way of repeating and developing ideas gives us plenty to hang on to. There are moments, as at 4 minutes 45 seconds into the first movement, of sheer magic. The other pieces are more intellectual, less immediate in appeal. (**Gompper's** program notes, about "spirals," proportions of Russian icons and the Fibonacci sequence, make my eyes roll back in my head.) Performances, by violinist Wolfgang David, with Emmanuel Siffert conducting, sound absolutely first-rate, as are Naxos' sonics.