

# REVIEWS

## ALISSA FIRSOVA

### **Wigmore Hall recital 2012**

#### *The Independent*

“The Russian-British pianist Alissa Firsova gave accounts of Beethoven’s final sonata and Rachmaninov’s Corelli Variations which reflected a brilliant grasp of their very different requirements. She has a noble sound and an instinctively singing line, and in her hands Beethoven’s opening Allegro worked up a fine fury, with thunderous trills and cascading figurations. Her pace in the variations was perfectly judged, allowing their increasingly intricate elaborations to blossom; her Rachmaninov was majestic.”

### **Wigmore Hall recital 2009**

#### *Music Web International on Rachmaninov’s 2nd Sonata original version*

“It’s hard to imagine a better performance and she gave an exciting and impressive interpretation. Ms Firsova showed us just what a major addition to the piano repertoire it is...This was a magisterial performance”

#### *Sequenza 21 on Proms performance of Anders Hillborg “Corrente della Primavera”*

“this was a drop dead, take no prisoners performance”

### **Russian Emigres CD**

#### *Financial Times*

“Alissa Firsova plays with élan and reveals the poetic side of the pieces in her performances.”

#### *The Independent*

“Despite the haunting power of the themes involved, Firsova brings a furtive, playful charm quite unexpected in Rachmaninov as she pursues the manifold diversions of his “Corelli Variations”

#### *The Herald*

“Hand on heart, with a tear in the eye, I am overwhelmed by this debut CD from Russian-born, UK-based pianist Alissa Firsova, which is among the most impressive first recordings I have heard. The girl is a powerhouse pianist, but one who has the measure of the melancholy in Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Sonata. Firsova, at 29, has the lot: the intellectualism of her playing renders the music lucid, concise and structurally coherent (perhaps her greatest strength). But the character of her playing, too, is

compelling, as she demonstrates throughout a mercurial account of Rachmaninov's Corelli Variations, revealing the masterpiece in the music...What an extraordinary disc from a young musician who is multi-skilled, comprehensively gifted and possesses the musical power to break hearts. One of a kind, I sense: a musician of life-affirming joy."

*The Classical Reviewer*

"It is her beautiful phrasing and flexible tempi and, indeed, fine rubato that lend so much to this music bringing a freshness that is quite beguiling...she brings passages of terrific clarity, finely sprung rhythmical phrases and often a lovely delicate touch as well as moments of powerful incisiveness. Her phrasing is superb, illuminating so much of this music...Here is a musician that has the measure of Rachmaninov, so much so that she is able to bring a refreshing approach. The other works on this disc show clearly what a gifted family this is. The recording is tip top and there are excellent booklet notes from the pianist.

*Planet Hugill*

"Alissa Firsova's playing combines robust bravura with poetry and understanding of the works' complex structures...This is an impressive debut recital disc."

*Classical CD reviews*

"The sheer clarity of her touch is impressive, and there are always nuances of dynamic and articulation distinguishing the melodies from the accompanying textures...her pianism – elegant and clear without ever sounding forceful...As a debut recital disc, it does everything it sets out to do, not only demonstrating the Firsova's impressive talents, but also giving a clear picture of her musical personality."

*Music Web International*

"Alissa Firsova's playing of Rachmaninov's Sonata No.2 is masterly. She finds all the power necessary to make the work shine out as the masterwork it surely is whilst the quiet passages are beautifully judged making for wonderful contrasts...Alissa Firsova's rendition of the Corelli Variations is quite breathtaking in its power and beauty...As a debut disc this is wonderfully impressive and I am eager to hear more of this highly inventive and masterful pianist/composer – bring it on."

*Classical Ear*

"She includes Rachmaninov's Second Sonata in its original 1913 version – grander, more complex than the revision. She plays it with sympathy and imagination, and virtuosity, as she does the much-later Corelli Variations, a compact, crystalline yet bountiful set of commentaries. This album is also a family affair. There is music by Firsova's mum, Elena Firsova, and her dad, Dmitri Smirnov. The former's For Alissa is enigmatically expressive yet gathers emotional extremes; and the latter's Blake Sonata is not dissimilar in its mysteries and mood-swings. Alissa does not forget herself: Lune Rouge shows her inheritance with a piece that is touchingly lyrical, highly decorated and picturesque. The recorded sound is full, dynamic and immediate. Gifted Alissa also writes a comprehensive note for the booklet."

## Purcell Room debut at Southbank Centre 2005

*The Times*

“Alissa Firsova held the audience spellbound...a formidable talent”

*The Independent*

“a highly expressive performer”

*Süd Deutsche Zeitung about solo recital in Ebersberg*

“Alissa Firsova eröffnet Klavierzyklus auf hohem Niveau Ebersberg - Mit einem fulminanten Konzert und einer in allen Belangen überzeugenden Solistin ist der Ebersberger Klavierzyklus in seine 19. Saison gestartet. Die 25-jährige Alissa Firsova, Spross einer Moskauer Musikerfamilie und heute mit ihren Angehörigen in London zu Hause, präsentierte ein Programm ausschließlich russischer Provenienz, in dem sie neben Kompositionen von Tschaikowsky, Skrjabin, Schostakowitsch, Rachmaninow und Liadow auch jeweils ein Werk ihrer Mutter, Elena Firsova, und ihres Vaters Dmitri Smirnow vortrug. Bei der Auswahl der Stücke wie bei der dramaturgischen Abfolge verzichtete die junge Künstlerin, die sich inzwischen auch schon ihre ersten Meriten als Dirigentin und Komponistin verdient hat, auf Effekthascherei. Vielmehr legte sie erkennbar Wert auf ein schlüssiges Miteinander der Stücke, machte aus einzelnen Erzählungen eine große Geschichte. Ihrer emotional starken, sehr persönlichen Vortragsweise entspricht das in hohem Maße, denn da sitzt eine Musikerin am Flügel, die spürbar die Werke verinnerlicht hat, denen sie sich widmet. Ohne es mit der persönlichen Note zu übertreiben, bringt Alissa Firsova die großen Meister der russischen Klavierliteratur so zu Gehör, als wär's ein Stück von ihr. Ihre Eltern scheinen das erkannt zu haben, denn sowohl der Mutter „Hymn to Spring“ wie des Vaters „Blake Sonata“ sind der Tochter nicht nur zugeeignet, sondern in die Hände komponiert. Dass sie sich von solch großzügigen Vorlagen inzwischen allerdings auch zu emanzipieren versteht, wurde in der Zugabe erkennbar, der Eigenkomposition „Lune rouge“. Das spielerische musikalische Gedicht mag kompositorisch nicht zur schwer wiegen -zeigt aber, dass die Tochter eher den Weg einer Poetin beschreiten will als den einer Dramaturgin. Ihr (ton)dichterischer Ansatz spiegelt sich in einer Spielweise, die den einzelnen Gedanken auch in dichtesten Klangwolken Gelegenheit zum Nachklingen gibt. Wo andere in die Tasten hauen und beim Pianissimo verhauchen, um sich das Prädikat, “ausdrucksstark” zu erwerben, setzt sie auf spielerische Feinheiten. Bei den 2 Poèmes op. 32 Alexander Skrjamins wird ihr kunstvoller Umgang mit Pausen und Punktierungen zur Demonstration: So deklamiert man am Klavier. Oder Sergej Rachmaninows Sonate Nr. Z b-moll op. 36: Wer das Tänzerische an diesem Werk so elegant und leicht zu Ohren bringt wie Alissa Firsova, verharret nicht in Anbetung des Komponisten und des Stücks, sondern ist von tiefer Zuneigung ergriffen und vom Wunsch, andere damit zu erfüllen. Hier reift eine große Pianisten-Persönlichkeit heran, auf deren Interpretation von Werken auch außerhalb des russischen Kulturkreises man sich freuen darf. Dem Kulturverein Zorneding-Baldham gereicht es zur Ehre; den neuen Klavierzyklus im Ebersberger Alten Kino auf so hohem Niveau zu beginnen.” Ulrich Pfaffenberger

## **Lugubre Gondola**

### *Gramophone*

Piano music is particularly well suited to replay on vinyl. Here is a lovely, warm, old-school recital that deserves its home on a beautiful 180 gram, double-LP pressing from a label that I will certainly be keeping in my sights, Amsterdam's Gutman Records.

Alissa Firsova, known as a composer, is evidently a stylish and intelligent pianist too. Her technique is good enough to make itself invisible behind the honesty and clarity of her interpretations, in which the working of her composer's brain are surely ticking. The menu is Romantic in every sense of the word: a journey from Chopin's whimsical Ballade No4, through Bartok's painful elegies for a lost love, to Liszt's eerie premonition of Wagner's death in Venice to that composer's own Liebestod, finishing with the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth (associated with Visconti's Death in Venice) and Beethoven's Piano Sonata No 32.

There is resonance and pathos at every turn, but Firsova is always clear-headed. She can ominously sway the vessel in Liszt's La Lugubre Gondola without over-egging it, and is both judiciously restrained and powerful in his transcription of Wagner's Liebestod. A touch of hesitance sets off the Mahler deliciously and in the Beethoven sonata that famously predicts the boogie-woogie, Firsova again refuses to do gimmicks. Audience applause is included. A very pleasant 75 minutes.

### *Hi-Fi Critic*

Readers wedded solely to the CD will miss a treat with "Lugubre Gondola", Alissa Firsova's 2018 recital at the smaller hall of the Concertgebouw, now available on vinyl and streaming from Gutman Records. After Chopin (a silky registered Fourth Ballade) and Bartok (the two Elegies, played very much with their Romantic context in mind), the rising sixth to open Liszt's title-track makes a shrewdly leading prelude to his transcription of Wagner's Liebestod. The imagery of sea and bells and blurred horizons evoked by the programme's first half is then fulfilled by Firsova's own transcription and rubato-rich playing of Mahler's "Death in Venice" Adagietto, and a spacious, questioning account of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 111 in which Firsova's Russian heritage come to the fore.

## Links

[https://www.heraldscotland.com/life\\_style/arts\\_ents/13599009.alissa-firsova-rising-star-cinematic-life-story/](https://www.heraldscotland.com/life_style/arts_ents/13599009.alissa-firsova-rising-star-cinematic-life-story/)

[https://www.heraldscotland.com/life\\_style/arts\\_ents/13599893.album-review-alissa-firsova-russian-emigres-vivat/](https://www.heraldscotland.com/life_style/arts_ents/13599893.album-review-alissa-firsova-russian-emigres-vivat/)

<https://www.classical-music.com/reviews/chamber/fantasy-works-by-alissa-firsova/>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/a-young-composer-s-first-night-at-the-proms-2025092.html>

<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/firsova-fantasy>

<https://www.ft.com/content/9d27df28-344f-11e5-bdbb-35e55cbae175>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/reviews/review-barry-douglas-and-alissa-firsova-wigmore-hall-london-8405563.html>

<https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/werke-von-rachmaninow-smirnov-und-firsova-russian-emigres-100.html>

[https://www.catringeorge.com/veroeffentlichungen\\_2019/Alissa%20Firsova%20-%20Musik%20zwischen%20Barock%20und%20Moderne.pdf](https://www.catringeorge.com/veroeffentlichungen_2019/Alissa%20Firsova%20-%20Musik%20zwischen%20Barock%20und%20Moderne.pdf)