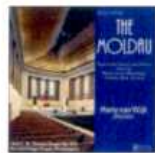

THE MOLDAU

Harry van Wijk, E.M. Skinner organ, Girard College, Philadelphia
Raven OAR-979 [72:45]

★★★★



This CD came as quite a surprise; in a past life, Harry van Wijk and I were 'neighbour' organists in Reformed churches of varying hue in Amersfoort, the Netherlands. Here, Van Wijk performs on the late, great E.M. Skinner at Girard College, made internationally famous by Carlo Curley's Decca recordings and, more recently, Peter Sykes's magnificent transcription of Holst's *Planets*, also for Raven. Van Wijk comes from a very different musical world but I'm happy to report he makes a great success of this recording, not least through clever programming. The heart of the disc is formed by Barbara Bannasch's transcription of Smetana's *The Moldau*, providing an ideal vehicle for Skinner's strings and orchestral flutes. Van Wijk's inclusion of Edwin Lemare's edition of Rheinberger's Fourth Sonata is particularly intelligent and entirely convincing, while the Bossi *Scherzo* matches the era and ethos of the instrument. Van Wijk plays with nimbleness and conviction. My only slight doubt about his use of the instrument concerns the octave couplers in loud passages: they seem to accentuate some gritty tuning at the treble end of Skinner's complex mixtures (tierces, flattened 21sts and all). The organ is splendidly captured, the listener always aware of the vastness of the space and the distance from pew to the ceiling chamber in which the instrument resides.

CHRIS BRAGG

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