



**Gabriel FAURÉ (1845-1924):**  
**Thirteen Barcarolles for Solo Piano (1881-1921) [58:06], Dolly, Op. 56, six pieces for piano duet [14:27]**  
**Sally Pinkas (piano); Evan Hirsch (piano - Dolly)**  
**MSR CLASSICS MS 1438 [72:33]**

Gabriel Fauré's thirteen barcarolles, songs without words in the style of Mendelssohn but broader in scope, are as varied and as carefully built as Chopin's nocturnes. They lack the simplicity of Mendelssohn or the directness of Chopin, however: there are dark harmonies here, and Fauré's heart isn't always on his sleeve. That's why the second barcarolle, nominally in G major, ultimately grows a little disturbing to my ears. By the way, most of it is in 6/8 time, but parts shift to 9/8.

As Fauré aged, his barcarolles grew more and more melancholy; Nos. 1 and 4 are rather straightforward in their pretty cheer, but Nos. 7, 9, 10, and 11 are all in minor keys, and although many of them are short they are not simple. Almost a decade passed between the sixth and seventh works; the tenth barcarolle strongly suggests late Brahms. Ultimately the collection as a whole projects a wide range of somewhat muted colors and emotions, dark but not in a cathartic or easily-felt way like Chopin. These leave a more complicated aftertaste.

Part of this must be attributed to the artistry of Sally Pinkas. Although alive to the prettiness of the scores (and good at expressing it), tunes don't interest her as much as the nuances, the oddnesses, the undercurrents of melancholy. She's been praised on MusicWeb International before for her Fauré nocturnes ("breathtaking...dives head-first into the intensity of the later works," a remark that's relevant here too) and her work with the American modernist George Rochberg. That said, I think if she were in a recital hall, and if I were the only audience member, I would ask if she knows any Scriabin.

She's joined by Evan Hirsch for the piano duet suite Dolly, which is temperamentally the opposite of many of the barcarolles: a suite of six works written for the child daughter of a friend, with titles like "Mi-a-ou," which Sally Pinkas notes in her booklet "is not a reference to a cat, but to the 2-year-old's attempt at pronouncing her brother Raoul's name." I'm not sure I'd like my infant mispronunciations to be read about 119 years later, but I'm glad hers inspired such charming music. No need to worry about the chemistry between the two pianists; they're married. He also produced and edited the good, atmospheric recorded sound.

All told, a marvellous disc. Not Fauré for easy listening, but very good music nonetheless. The pianist's own booklet notes are a considerable bonus. Now, if someone at MSR Classics is reading, about that Scriabin idea ...

Brian Reinhart