

UVM pianist in outstanding recital
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Central Vermont is full of hidden gems. One such is pianist Sylvia Parker, Berlin resident and longtime University of Vermont music professor, who is often heard at UVM but seldom here. She has just released an outstanding recital album, one that whets the appetite for more. Parker's outstanding recital program, recorded this year at the UVM Recital Hall in Burlington, includes traditional works by Scarlatti, Mozart and Bartók, all well-played, but it is the "Roman Sketches," Opus 7, by American composer Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920) that makes this a true gem of a recording. Although Griffes' music employs decidedly 20th century language, polytonal and polymetric, the influences of the French Impressionists and German Romantics dominate its unique flavor. Griffes' "Roman Sketches," written 1915-1916, take their cue from Franz Liszt, both in piano style and coloring. Parker, an excellent concert pianist, successfully brings out the four very different flavors of this descriptive work, with clarity and power, making it truly compelling. "The White Peacock" is very cocky, but with a quiet grandeur. "Nightfall" has a darker grandness, while "The Fountain" explodes. "Clouds" has a more ethereal, untouchable quality. Parker uses a wide palette of colors-in an American way, more by volume control than quality of touch. The passion is restrained, giving it grandeur. It's quite beautiful. Mozart's Sonata in F Major, K. 332, is given a full-blooded, rich-sounding performance, full of spirit. Although the Mozart is ideally done with a steady pulse, the first movement Allegro, is a little square rhythmically. The slow movement, Adagio, on the other hand, is very personal with some subtle and unusual-but effective-rubato. It's not predictable, yet it's very musical and convincing. The last movement, Allegro assai, is spirited and exciting. She is clearly passionate in Mozart, but all within Classical parameters-which is what makes it successful. Parker has always had an affinity for the edgy folk-based music of Béla Bartók (1881-1945), and is heard here in the Sonatina and the Suite, Opus 14. Parker combines a nice lyricism with rhythmic incisiveness, and a playful rather than a hard-edged approach. It's attractive and fun. The program opens three harpsichord sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), two of which are seldom heard. Parker's performances are all skillful and spirited.