



[Valaquenta Tableaux Fantastiques](#)

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Norwegian by birth, Parisian by choice, Martin Romberg has written music that is unabashedly populist and very easy to like. His main extramusical influences are from the world of fantasy literature and art, the direct influences for the two sets of solo piano music featured on this album. Valaquenta is an homage to Tolkien, specifically his creation myth that forms the background to both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Each of the seven pieces that make up the set is a character study based on deities invented by Tolkien. *Tableaux Fantastiques* is a 10-section suite of pieces inspired by individual paintings by the Polish artist Jacek Yerka, whose work is highly influenced by Bosch and Breugel, with a heavy dose of 20th-century surrealism.

Romberg's harmonic language is basically late 19th century, with overlays of Impressionism. His style is highly indebted to French music, especially Ravel. His picture music also recalls Mussorgsky. I cannot report that he challenges the imagination of either of those geniuses, but this is an honest and well-crafted tribute to a variety of impulses. For those so inclined, the music might have greater impact with the literature and artwork at hand (web link, LAWO?), but it works well, in a limited way, on its own. French pianist Aimo Pagin delivers the material with admirable warmth and clean technique. Peter Burwasser

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