
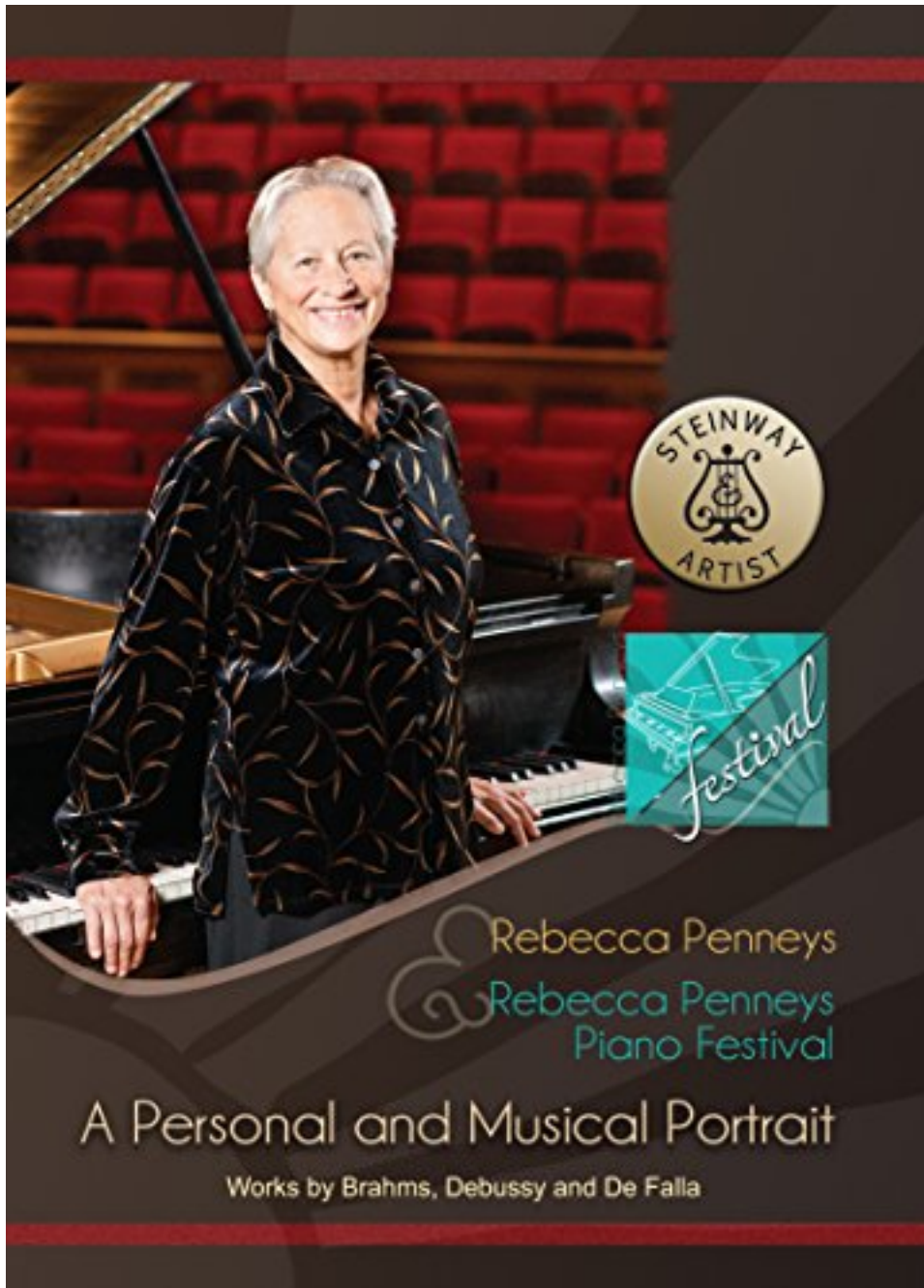


FEATURE REVIEW by [Colin Clarke](#)

 **BRAHMS Piano Sonata No. 3. DEBUSSY *Images oubliées*. FALLA *7 canciones populares españolas*** (trans. E. Halffter) • Rebecca Penneys (pn) • FLEUR DE SON 58037 (Blu-ray: 74:40)
& Interviews



Rebecca Penneys: A Personal and Musical Portrait
DVD; NTSC
Fleur De Son



The premise behind this Blu-ray is a documentary of both pianist, Rebecca Penneys, and her commendably tuition-free festival. A sequence of interviews with Penneys precedes a succession of well-chosen works from three territories with three very distinct musical vernaculars.

The pieces Penneys has chosen are simply those that are significant to her at this time. She gives a lovely image of the Brahms as a pine tree; over time it does not diminish, it grows and branches out in different directions. Penneys used to play the Falla a lot with János Starker, and the Halffter transcription keeps Starker alive for Penneys.

The great Brahms op. 5 Sonata is given a strong performance. Penneys's strength is that her structural grasp is immediately clear. Her chordal attack is impeccable (this is one aspect of piano playing one can easily miss; it only becomes readily apparent when one hears it so perfectly done). Penneys is very still at the piano; all of her energies and concentration go into the performance at hand. The sweet tone Penneys elicits from her Steinway in the Intermezzo is perfectly in accord with Brahms's crepuscular outpouring. The Trio of the Scherzo is beautifully burnished in tone, the second Intermezzo (the fourth movement) is marked by its superb bass staccato, imparting an ominous onward tread; dissonances are marked and even, on occasion, shocking. That structural integrity is again evident in the finale, here imparting to the music a real sense of integrity.

The Debussy is identified on the back cover of this product as "Images (1894)"; better known as the Images oubliées. The central Sarabande is a clear highlight here, and again it is the clarity of chord placement coupled with the voicing of those chords that really impresses. Penneys is clearly highly attuned to Debussy's sound world. The final movement is a whirligig of Debussian delight, Penneys's staccato bringing a real sense of play at one point before it gets overshadowed by clouds. Of the entire program, it is the Debussy that is the jewel.

Penneys's performance of the Falla is remarkable. Her sense of timing in "El Paño moruno" is just perfect, while in "Seguidilla murciana" her touch takes essentially a Debussian texture and converts it into a truly Hispanic tale. Just watching her hands (especially from the aerial camera angle) one can see how the arrangement lies so splendidly underneath the pianist's fingers. The more reflective movements are exquisitely shaded,

The camera angles chosen are intelligent and non-obtrusive to the listening experience; there is also plenty of opportunity to study Penney's superlative technique, in particular how she elicits such a wonderful variety of sound, and always beautifully.

Penneys has previously recorded for a variety of labels. Here, in interviews, she talks about the vision and the legacy of the RPPF (Rebecca Penneys Piano Festival). Her sense of lineage, of how important it is to pass it on, shines through. “Legacy” is a key word here; the idea of expanding the festival to new territories is also on the table. The Rebecca Penneys Piano Festival will be held at the University of South Florida, Tampa in July 2018: Details are at [rebeccapenneyspianofestival/org](http://rebeccapenneyspianofestival.org). **Colin Clarke**

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