



Erica Morini plays Tchaikovsky, Tartini, Vivaldi, Kreisler, Brahms and Wieniawski

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GRAMOPHONE

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Brilliant recollections - Bumper box sets at super-budget price

Brilliant Classics mightn't provide the ultimate in useful documentation – most of their boxed reissues don't carry any at all – but for genuine quality packed at budget price, you could hardly do better. A personal favourite among recent releases is a 20-disc collection titled *Espana* which includes Alfonso Moreno playing Rodrigo guitar concertos, Rodrigo piano music played in 2002 by Albert Guinovart, guitar works recorded in the same year by Ignacio Rodes and Carles Trepat, and three discs' worth of Falla orchestral works played with a combination of fire and tonal refinement by the *Símon Bolívar* Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela and the *Solistas de Mexico* under Eduardo Mata. A personal highlight within this particular selection is a three-disc selection of Albéniz piano music recorded between 1968 and 1974 by Esteban Sánchez, a name previously unknown to me but an extremely sensitive player, especially of the rarely heard Fifth Piano Sonata, the third movement of which moved me so much I listened to it three times in succession. Thomas Rajna's memorable 1976 set of Granados piano works is better known and so are the three discs of music by Federico Mompou recorded by the composer in 1974, a must-have for anyone interested in 20th-century piano music, especially if it needs to be serenely beautiful, which Mompou's often is. The set is rounded off with three much-praised CDs of zarzuela arias, all recorded 1975-77, one featuring José Carreras, two Teresa Berganza. What a feast!

Other Brilliant boxes are hardly less enticing, even though much of the material has been out before in one form or another. A 10-disc set of *Pianists* opens daringly with a June 1978 Schubert concert by Sviatoslav Richter where the first movement of the G major Sonata, D894, stretches to an epic 26'18". Also included are the Sonata in E minor, D566, and the Allegretto in C minor, D915. I loved Nelson Freire's Liszt CD (the First and Second Concertos) with the Dresden Philharmonic under Michel Plasson, playing that is both flexibly phrased and technically brilliant. Emil Gilels is placed mercilessly close to the microphones for a coupling of Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth concertos with the USSR State SO under Kurt Masur (1976) but the performances are hugely authoritative. Géza Anda's 1966 DG recordings of Schumann's Kreisleriana and Davidsbündlertänze capture playing that is both deft and fanciful, and I'm always ready to enjoy Jean-Philippe Collard in Fauré. The rest, although well worth having, has graced the store shelves rather more often – early Brendel recordings of Mozart, Rachmaninov with Lugansky and Grimaud, Liszt Rhapsodies with Pizzaro and Kissin's feted boyhood disc of Chopin concertos.

Brilliant's collection of "The Early Recordings" of pianist Christoph Eschenbach (this time including a modest booklet) affords us a useful opportunity to revisit the playing of a major musician whose ear for nuance and ability to sustain even the slowest tempi convincingly (a Hammerklavier Sonata Adagio that runs to 24'16") are at the very least remarkable. These are highly individual readings, but it's a soft-spoken individuality, always at the service of the music. The repertoire covered includes Beethoven's Concertos Nos 5 (under Ozawa) and 3 (under Hans Werner Henze), Henze's own Second Concerto, Schubert's last two sonatas, Schumann's Kinderszenen and Chopin's Preludes Opp 28 and 45 and "No 26".

Another mixed collection, this time of Violinists, includes such desirable couplings as David Oistrakh in the two Shostakovich concertos (under Mravinsky and Rozhddestvensky), Ivry Gitlis's Vox-originated disc of Berg, Hindemith and Stravinsky concertos, Beethoven sonatas Op 24 and Op 30 Nos 1 and 2 with Arthur Grumiaux and Clara Haskil, and a potpourri of pieces played by Gidon Kremer, bizarrely some of it recorded (or transferred) in mono. Other violinists represented include Christian Ferras (Franck and Lekeu sonatas), Viktor Tretyakov (Paganini and Khachaturian concertos), Ulf Hoelscher (Saint-Saëns), Salvatore Accardo (Elgar and Walton concertos under Richard Hickox) and Shlomo Mintz (Lalo, Vieuxtemps and Saint-Saëns).

However, my prize violin issue for the month is without question Audite's single CD of 1952 "live" Berlin recordings by the Sevcik-pupil Erica Morini who, when she made her debut under Nikisch in Berlin in 1917 (she was just 13), was immediately hailed among the best violinists of her generation. Morini's Westminster recording of the Tchaikovsky Concerto under Rodzinski (RPO) is pretty impressive but this 1951 version with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra under a highly volatile Ferenc Fricsay is even better, Morini's swagger, dashing spiccato and sensitive quiet playing reminding me at times of the great Bronislaw Huberman, especially in the (truncated) finale. Occasionally one senses that Fricsay wants to push the tempo even harder but the effect is never uncomfortable. If Morini's Tchaikovsky reflects the influence of Huberman, her Vivaldi (Sonata Op 2 No 11) and Tartini (Corelli Variations) often recall the playing of Adolf Busch, especially in the way she draws out and colours the musical line. A characterful quartet of encores (all the duet pieces are with pianist Michael Raucheisen) includes a wonderful performance of Wieniawski's delightful Capriccio-Waltz, much beloved of Huberman and Heifetz, and where Morini displays some impressive staccato bowing. This is an altogether exceptional CD and the mono sound quality throughout is more than acceptable.