



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

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[Fanfare](#) (Robert Maxham - 01.05.2011)

Audite's release devoted to violinist Erica Morini falls into two parts: a live performance of Tchaikovsky's concerto from October 13, 1952, and studio recordings she made two days later in Berlin's RIAS Studio 7. Morini recorded the concerto with Désiré Defauw and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on 78s and with Artur Rodzinski and the Royal Philharmonic for Westminster in 1958 (289 471 200-2). DOREMI has released another live performance of the concerto, in which Igor Stravinsky conducted the New York Philharmonic in 1940, Doremi 7772 (Fanfare 24:6). Audite's release of the live version, with Ferenc Fricsay conducting the RIAS Symphony Orchestra, enjoys a transfer that allows Morini's rich tone to emerge naturally, vibrantly, and authoritatively (and transmits a vividly detailed impression of Fricsay's and the orchestra's vigorous accompaniment). Morini shifts back and forth in the first movement between poetic sensitivity and technical passagework that digs deeply into the strings, especially in double-stops. This contrast appears in microcosm in the cadenza, to which she introduces unexampled sensibility into phrases that often serve only as transitions between technical coups. Throughout the movement, her 1727 Davidoff Stradivari (sadly, stolen from her as she lay dying) sounds as throaty as a Guarneri on the G string but brilliantly reedy in the upper registers (listen to the introductory measures of the finale to get an idea of her slashing rhetoric as enhanced by her instrument). Carl Flesch thought that her technical manner sounded dated, but it suits the episodes in the finale, for example; in any case, she never employs devices, such as swooping portamentos, that would mark her playing as anything but individual. Just as in the cases of Nathan Milstein, Jascha Heifetz, Zino Francescatti, and David Oistrakh, not to mention Fritz Kreisler, those mannerisms impress the violinist's playing with a personal stamp, and so they do as well in Morini's case. Listeners should beware, however: Although the booklet clearly indicates that the finale appears in a truncated version, the timings of the finale (8:10 with Stravinsky, 8:29 with Horenstein, 8:00 with Rodzinski, and 8:10 with Fricsay) reveal that the performance, however surprising the cuts when they occur, fits well into her usual way of playing the movement.

Morini recorded Giuseppe Tartini's "other" G-Minor Sonata, "Didone abbandonata," in a collection that included works by Vivaldi, Pergolesi, and Nardini, with Leon Pommers, and I remember acquiring that LP (Decca DL 10102) now almost two generations ago and finding the performance somewhat chunky and stolid. This one seems more gracious and suave. Those familiar with Isaac Stern's master class in China in his award-winning documentary should remember his insistence that the young student sing the first movement (literally). Morini doesn't sing it with the kind of expressivity that Stern suggested, but as in the third movement, not always interpolated nowadays, her reading is expressive in its own way—and at a tempo that seems slow but not quite languishing. The second movement's technical passages sparkle as brightly as so many diamonds; still, the recorded sound in these

studio recordings seems a bit tubby. She makes the finale sound as cheerful despite its minor key as do any of the sunny minor-key movements in violin concertos by Giovanni Battista Viotti. For some, her combination of wistfulness and brilliance in Tartini will sound altogether too romantic; for those who don't adhere rigidly to any performance-practice dogmas, it will seem a sensitive updating, effectively translating many of Tartini's idiosyncratic expressions into modern dialects.

Ottorino Respighi's popular reworking of Antonio Vivaldi's sonata already contains within it the seeds of tension between the Baroque and the era in which Respighi transcribed it, so it should be no surprise if Morini's performance sounds somewhat ambivalent as well. But the same characteristics nevertheless prevail—an incisive technical approach married to a bold yet lyrical expressivity. Morini also recorded this sonata later, included in Decca's collection with Leon Pommers.

The end of the program consists of what might nowadays be considered "mere" encore pieces. Kreisler's celebrated pastiche of Tartini's celebrated variations on Corelli's celebrated gavotte from his *L'arte del arco*, a favorite with almost every eminent violinist since Kreisler's time, makes a strong appeal in this elegant performance (an early video of David Oistrakh playing it doesn't suggest either such effortlessness or such sparkle). DOREMI also reissued this performance, along with the Tchaikovsky concerto conducted by Stravinsky, in its second Morini volume. In Kreisler's own *Schön Rosmarin*, Morini turns in an even more elegant, more sparkling performance that catapults her to a place among the very most convincing exponents of that violinist's composition, while her by turns sultry and skittish reading of the famous *Caprice viennois* cements her in that place. (Her capriciousness in the middle section recalls Kreisler's own; not every successful Kreisler re-creator resembles him so much here.) Her reading of Brahms's waltz may provide one of the most pleasant surprises of the collection for listeners largely unfamiliar with the panache with which violinists of her generation could dispatch such simple items. Wieniawski's *Capriccio-Valse* isn't so simple, though it may be simply a barn burner. Many violinists could play it with equal technical command, but how can you compare her silken sound and the subtly nuanced coddling of phrases tailor-made for such an approach to theirs?

Because of the slenderness of Morini's output, these recordings should appeal to every collector of violin music and to every admirer of the best violinists of the 20th century, now sadly receding into the past. Nathan Milstein supposedly would play only with Morini in his later years. It's easy to see why. Inspiring, and urgently recommended.