



Michael Rabin plays Bruch's Violin Concerto and Virtuoso Pieces for Violin and Piano

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 01.10.2009)

GRAMOPHONE

Violin brilliance from a player taken from us far too early

Michael Rabin's was a talent that even among a plethora of great violinists was something rather special, and we're lucky to have so many fine records that recall it, whether studio or live. Rabin died in 1972, apparently from a head injury sustained in a fall at his New York apartment. He was 35 and victim of a neurological condition that necessitated debilitating medication. Rumours of psychological problems and drug mismanagement were rife, and yet in spite of these and other problems Rabin managed an impressive comeback, as this svelte but musically responsive account of Bruch's First Concerto (the only complete Rabin version that I know of) amply proves. The line is mostly seamless, the tone warm and seductive, the bowing impeccably drawn. Thomas Schippers conducts a thoughtful if occasionally overweight accompaniment, somewhat muddily recorded although the violin sound is excellent. Just two points: the slow movement is occasionally troubled by an unobtrusive knocking and the leisurely movement timing of 9'45" includes well over a minute's worth of shuffling and tuning, so you needn't fear undue solemnity.

The shorter works include a brilliant account of Sarasate's Carmen Fantasy and a tenderly phrased Tchaikovsky Méditation. I also love the cheeky close to Kroll's Banjo and Fiddle. The other items relate the same happy impression, a technical wizard and an artist in total command of his instrument, someone who would surely have developed an extra musical dimension had he been granted another 30 or so years to do so. Sadly he wasn't but this well mastered programme of radio broadcasts is a valuable addition to Rabin's precious legacy.