



Organ Music from Multiethnic Transylvania

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Audiophile Audition (John Sunier - 2010.07.24)

This one really strikes me as an extremely niche item, especially considering the strictures against ever airing pipe organ music on public radio stations (and the few remaining commercial classical stations) following the programming rules established by consultants using focus groups of listeners. Don't expect to hear the theme from Dracula, but these three selections demonstrate the melting pot of ethnicities and religions found in this unique area of the Balkans.

The seven short Chorale Preludes use melodies from the Romanian Colinda songs, which are sung on Christian feast days, including Christmas. There are 14 tracks, as each prelude is prefaced by soprano Ungureanu singing the first line of the original songs. These pipe organ arrangements are unusual in that the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church is that only vocal music is allowed – no instrumental music. It made me think such an approach to some of the Bach Chorale Preludes would be most elucidating.

Richter lived until 1950 and wrote a number of large-scale orchestral works, but the Organ Sonata is his only work for organ. Written in 1939, it follows much of the style and design of the turn-of-the-century French organ symphony, but with a modicum of German romanticism thrown in. It is in four movements, with the second the longest and showing off the most the full panoply of instrumental colors possible with the modern organ. It is a theme in G minor with a series of variations.

Bucharest composer Marbe, who lived to 1997, was part of a group of avant-garde composers there following WWII. The Pavane is also her only work written for organ. In it she uses the sounds of bagpipe-birds, angel-birds, chirrups and fiddle sounds. Her pastoral sound-painting is intended to breathe the spirit of Transylvania.

The surround sonics are perfect and highly appropriate for pipe organ music. In fact, hi-res surround nearly always seems perfect for organ music, giving it an enveloping realism that makes two-channel reproduction a very poor alternative.