



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

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Rabin has been increasingly well served of late, not least by smaller, dedicated labels such as Medici, Doremi and now, as here, Audite. The Doremi issue contained sonatas with, as in this case, Lothar Broddack, recorded by RIAS in Berlin in October 1961 and 1962 whilst the Medici enshrined commercial recordings made in London and Hollywood 1959 and 1960. So the RIAS broadcasts are beginning to open up a very promising outlet for live Rabin, caught during his European tours, especially when something new to the commercial discography emerges.

In this case it's the major addition of the Bruch G minor concerto, in which he was joined by the RIAS-Symphonie-Orchester and Thomas Schippers. By 1969 Rabin had begun to recover from the damaging problems that had begun to assail him from around 1962. As one would expect this is an example of adroit technical address and musicality. Rabin was never a speed merchant - though he could have been had he wanted to be - and despite a reputation for firework repertoire based on his Paganini recordings he was a sensitive and dedicated violinist. No wonder Perlman admired him so much.

Rhythmically malleable and subtly coloured this Bruch performance is a notable addition to Rabin's relatively small discography. Orchestrally things are not as refined or blended as they might be. And despite the breadth of tonal resources in the slow movement and the personalised finger position changes - rather Heifetz orientated - this isn't quite the best of Rabin. The finale is relatively restrained and the ethos a little depersonalised, and lacking the vibrant incision of his better, earlier years.

This is shown in graphic relief if one turns briefly to the Havanaise recorded in the troubled year of 1962. True, this is a febrile performance that some times borders on the brash but the more volatile and even vulnerable nature of the playing carries a hugely personalised charge that compels interest. It's the only example from this period, the remaining items deriving from 1969. There are still plenty of engaging things though in the rather confectionery-light programme. Rabin imparts a saucy B section to fellow violinist William Kroll's echt Americana in Banjo and Fiddle and he serves up a rich cantilena in the Tchaikovsky.

Which leaves the Sarasate sequence. The Carmen Fantasia is the kind of thing assumed, lazily, that Rabin habitually trotted out to the exclusion of deeper repertoire whilst the three Danzas Españolas allow him to revel in contrasts between his rich lower register and an insouciantly whistling upper. Of the three, Zapateado is played with something near panache but one can imagine a wider range of tone colours from his earlier self.

The Bruch concerto though makes this an essential purchase for Rabin collectors.