

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1156

The GREAT VIOLINISTS – Volume VII

SHIN-ICHI SUZUKI

GEORGE ENESCO

JAQUES THIBAUD

ZINO FRANCESCATTI

At first glance there may appear to be little connection between the four composers on this disc other than their Gallicism, and even that may be disputed in the case of César Franck who was French only by adoption. Certainly there could hardly be a wider contrast of aims and ideals than between Franck, the priest of High Seriousness, and Ravel, the advocate of "le plaisir...d'une occupation inutile". Yet there are important, if unobvious, links. Franck and Fauré were the architects of the revival of French chamber music, and between them inspired what were to become the two main traditions of the late 19th/early 20th century. Chausson was a pupil of Franck, Ravel of Fauré.

There is a link, too, in the dedications of two of the works. César Franck dedicated his Sonata to Eugène Ysaÿe as a wedding gift and, we are told, when it was presented to him at a banquet, so moved was he that he performed it, then and there. Chausson's Poème, too, is dedicated to Ysaÿe. After one run-through with piano and one rehearsal with orchestra he gave this piece too, its first performance.

(One might add, on a more gruesome note, that both Franck and Chausson died as a result of vehicular accidents: Franck struck by the pole of a horse-omnibus, Chausson thrown over the handlebars of his bicycle.)

The distinguished violinists on this disc between them have provided us with a recital of four masterworks from the French violin repertoire.

CÉSAR FRANCK 1822-1890

Sonata in A major 1886

Allegretto ben moderato Allegro Recitativo-Fantasia Allegretto poco mosso

Franck - Belgian by birth, French by naturalisation and German by musical inclination - espoused a Beethovenian idealism in his music. Almost every work represents a struggle, a pilgrimage from darkness to light. The Violin Sonata is one of his sunniest works. Compared with Fauré's sonata it will seem stormy and overcast, but in Franck's output it is positively buoyant. A singing lyricism pervades the whole piece and the ever-present problem of balance between percussive keyboard and cantabile violin is beautifully managed. Like the Piano Quintet and the Symphony, it is cyclic in form, the entire work generated by the three-note motive (up a minor third and back) heard at the outset. Though in four movements, Franck imaginatively varies the traditional classical balance. The opening Allegretto ben moderato is one of Franck's most individual movements. The two main themes - the first, containing the germinal motive, gentle,

pastoral, static; the second more questioning and modulatory - are allotted to the violin and piano respectively and are rarely exchanged: something most unusual in the sonata repertory. This is followed by a dramatic, passionate Allegro in which the two instruments at last come together to share themes. In the central section the germinal theme reappears with an assertive gesture, as though saying "I'm still here!". The third movement, marked Recitativo-Fantasia, is, as its title suggests, improvisatory in structure, acting as a 'Retrospective' to themes heard earlier. Later on an important new theme is heard, marked *drammatico* with a refrain-like character. The Finale is dominated by the famous canon which acts as a kind of rondo theme. The episodes again refer back to earlier themes, including the 'dramatic refrain', but it is the canon which eventually takes the piece to its joyful, triumphant end.

ERNEST CHAUSSON 1855-1899

Poème Opus 25 1896

Chausson's music is characterised by a mood of sombre, brooding melancholy: it is, as one critic has put it, as though the composer had been born with a *cor anglais* in his mouth. Many of his works suffer from over-elaboration and a habit of infilling textures with trills, tremolos and arpeggios. His friend Debussy put his finger on the problem: "A thing I should like to see you lose is your preoccupation with the inner parts [*les dessous*]". The Poème epitomises the best features of his style and its richly inventive and lyrical character has made it a favourite concert-piece with violinists, as well as his most popular work with audiences. The composer based it on a short story by Turgenev and originally gave it the title, "Le chant de l'amour triomphant: poème symphonique..." It is usually heard with its original accompaniment for orchestra, but is here performed in a very effective version for violin and piano. Its basic shape is a large-scale ternary form, blurred at the edges in typical Romantic fashion. After a brief piano introduction, the violin enters with the main melody, singing and poetic, which the piano takes up and elaborates. A cadenza-like section leads in to a long central episode, more rhythmic and vigorous, during which the violin introduces a new melody with an important counter-theme for piano. The soloist soars aloft with this counter-theme, gradually descending to the rich, dark hues of the violin's G-string. In the recapitulation, after a varied reprise of the main theme, Chausson re-introduces the counter-theme from the central section, and subjects both to what is virtually a development section before the opening theme returns in triumph to bring the music to a close.

GABRIEL FAURÉ 1845-1924

Sonata No.1 in A major Opus 13 1875

Allegro molto Andante Allegro vivo Allegro quasi presto

Fauré's first violin sonata was written in 1875, the year that Ravel was born and eleven years before Franck's sonata was written: a fact worth remembering, for some might assume that it was influenced by Franck's. (As Charles Koechlin wittily remarked, "Render unto Gabriel, and not unto César that which is Gabriel's") Whereas Franck's sonata, written when he was 64, is the crowning achievement of a long career, Fauré's, written when he was 30, is the work of a young man embarking on his career. Yet already a composer's personal voice is evident. Like the Franck it follows the traditional four-movement scheme, but in a much more classical manner. The opening sonata-allegro shows many of the hallmarks of Fauré's style: lapping piano arpeggios which buoy up the cantabile violin line, and the prominent 'Lydian' feel to the A-major tonality. The Andante is a gently-rocking barcarole in 9/8 metre and in its wistful sadness is reminiscent of his early song, "Après un rêve". The Allegro vivo is a "proper" scherzo, fleet of foot with a freshness of expression and means (note the deft use of pizzicato) to which the central D-flat major intermezzo makes an effective contrast. The Finale, like the first movement in sonata-form, is characterised by a sprightly first subject which pivots, with typical Fauréan teasing, round an ambiguous C sharp (? mediant of A major or dominant of F sharp minor). Though it was his first chamber work, the A major sonata remains one of Fauré's most popular works, and deservedly so.

MAURICE RAVEL 1875-1937

Tzigane 1924

Ravel wrote this "Rhapsody de Concert" in 1924 as a showpiece for the Hungarian violinist, Jelly d'Aranyi, and the Hungarian gypsy element is obvious throughout. Here is Ravel dressed in gypsy costume, imitating the gypsy style in a brilliant display of pastiche. Harmonics and pizzicatos, trills and arpeggios, double-stopping, octaving, augmented seconds, accelerandos and hesitations, sudden moves from high to low string positions: the entire gamut of effects is called into play. It is like a witty, exuberant musical postcard sent to the Parisian public from Central Europe. Inevitably many disapproved: "reptilian cold-bloodedness", said *The Times* critic; music to appeal to "the ladies in pince-nez and the gentlemen behind large stomachs", said another. Like the Bolero of 1928, its formal scheme is very simple; in this case a gradual acceleration of speed from start to finish. The violin begins with a long, unaccompanied prelude on the G-string, carrying with it a weight of gypsy passion. The piano then enters with swirling arpeggios over a violin tremolo leading to a quicker theme of pronounced zigeuner character. As the music speeds up, the violin rises higher and higher, spiralling more and more out-of-key, as though someone were speeding up a gramophone record, bringing the work to an exciting conclusion. During its composition, Ravel asked a friend to play him Paganini's twenty-four "Caprices", so that he could get himself into appropriate virtuoso-violinistic mood. Yet, for all its virtuosity, beneath all its gypsy trappings, Tzigane remains essentially Ravel.

TREVOR HOLD

SHINICHI SUZUKI was born in 1898 in Nagoya, Japan where his father had founded the largest violin factory in the world. After initial studies in Japan, he came to Berlin shortly after the Great War to study with Karl Klingler, a student of Joachim and founder of the Klingler Quartet.

By the mid-1930s Suzuki had come to believe that there are vastly larger reserves of potential in children than is generally believed, and that this potential can be realised. If children in their earliest years could acquire facility with languages, then they could, given an environment equally conducive, acquire facility with the violin. As speech is acquired before reading, so playing could be acquired before reading music. And as speech is acquired from parents, so too, could playing be learned with a parent who played or learned to play alongside the child. The ability to speak is commonplace so that we cease to marvel at it as a virtuoso level of accomplishment. Suzuki maintains that in all children a similar level of accomplishment is possible in violin playing.

He reports that when he started teaching, the entrance requirement for the Tokyo Conservatoire was the Vivaldi A minor Concerto; now, in Japan, the average Suzuki-trained 6-year old can play it. He does not maintain that any child can become a "great" violinist any more than that any child can become a "great" actor or orator or linguist; indeed, to see 12-year old children playing, say, the Mendelssohn Concerto en masse, is to realise that they are not all prodigies, only that such potential as is present, whether by heredity or whatever, can be made actual.

The "Suzuki method" has a world-wide following but, equally, it has provoked great controversy, but then so has every theory of education from Plato onwards.

One criticism has been that Suzuki has not produced a string of great virtuosi. However, as even the brief account above makes clear, this is not what he is about.

Another argument, much more interesting, revolves around imitation or mimicry versus feeling or experiencing a work of art. (If I in the stalls believe that I am hearing a very great performance of the Waldstein Sonata, does it matter what emotions, if any, are experienced by you on the platform or whether, however skilfully, you are simply imitating what you have been told is a "great" performance? Perhaps you are a piano-roll.)

Suzuki stands on the "blank slate" side of the nurture-nature debate: children do imitate, but they absorb what they are imitating and make it their own. He is opposed to the élitist view of inborn talent by which "Great" violin teachers start with carefully selected prodigies and train them to be "great" violinists. Suzuki starts with all children and, through the medium of music, educates them to be fine human beings.

In Japan nightingale chicks are put with nightingales with beautiful songs, to learn to sing beautifully. With the same purpose in mind, Suzuki will play a record of Kreisler to his students and then ask them to bow to a photo of Kreisler which he has on the wall, to thank him for being such a wonderful teacher through his records. "No wonder my pupils are good" he has been heard to remark, "They have the best teachers, Kreisler, Oistrakh, Neveu, Heifetz."

JACQUES THIBAUD was born in Bordeaux in 1880 into a musical family. He intended originally to become a pianist and, indeed, made his début at five as a pianist. However, he heard Beethoven's Violin Concerto and pleaded with his father for a violin. When he was nine his playing greatly impressed Ysaÿe and at 13 he entered the Paris Conservatoire to be taught by Marsick who also taught Georges Enesco and Carl Flesch. He also studied with Ysaÿe. At 16 he attained a First Prize. He supplemented the money his family could spare him by playing in a café band and was there spotted by Édouard Colonne who gave him a place in his orchestra. The illness of the leader provided him with an opportunity to play as a soloist. His immediate success was repeated within a very few years in London, Berlin and New York. "At twenty-two, Thibaud was the youngest violinist of great stature... (he) far surpassed the promise of his boyhood... his tone, though not big in itself, fascinated... by its sweet and seductive colour." Thus writes Carl Flesch in his *Memoirs*. In 1905 he formed the Cortot-Thibaud-Casals Trio which must have been the most high-powered group ever.

In 1914 he enlisted in the French Army and served in the battles of Ypres, the Marne, Aisne, Arras and Verdun. He was wounded, though only slightly, and invalided out.

Between the wars he was celebrated for his interpretations of the great classical German concertos but esteemed even more for his performances of modern French works.

During the Second World War, under cover of writing his *Memoirs*, he worked for Allied Intelligence. His son was killed at the front in 1940 and a further devastating blow was the death of Ginette Neveu, whom he expected would carry on the finest French style, in an air crash in 1949. He died, also in an aeroplane crash, in 1953, on his way to a concert.

He believed that the purpose of music is to distract from the miseries of life; hence he deplored the view of modern music as reflecting its ugly realities.

His playing was virile; vulgarity and sentimentality were unknown to him. Beauty of music revealed through performance was essential to him; the occasional slip, a transient irrelevance. Indeed, in his later years, his audiences accepted the beauty of his playing and overlooked a scratch here or a flat note there.

GEORGES ENESCO was born in Doroholu, Rumania in 1881, but lived most of his life in Paris. When seven years old he entered the class of Joseph Hellmesberger Jnr. at the Vienna Conservatoire and two years later he was promoted into the adult class. Although he graduated with the highest award for violin, he had already begun to show great promise in composition. Hellmesberger used to secrete him in the orchestra pit of the opera house for him to absorb orchestration and experience orchestral colours. The music of Wagner he found overpowering. He transferred to the Paris Conservatoire as a pupil of Marsick for violin and Fauré for composition in a class which included Maurice Ravel. Now he wanted to become a composer and a pianist; playing the violin was to be merely a means of earning a living. As if this were not enough, he was also a more than competent cellist and master of upwards of half a dozen languages.

During summer vacations he used to return home to Romania. On one such trip he was presented by the Queen of Romania (Carmen Sylva) with the complete works of Bach, which he studied intensely. His performances of the Violin Suites were renowned not only for his insight into the individual movements, but also for his performing them complete, at a time when many restricted themselves to those movements which they felt offered the most scope for flashy playing.

During the first world war he worked in a Romanian hospital.

His memory, too, was phenomenal. His students reckoned that he knew by heart well over one hundred of the Cantatas. Menuhin reports that Enesco sight-read Ravel's violin sonata and after one more run through, played it from memory. He was renowned as a teacher. He did not attempt to teach technique nor did he try to force his students into his own mould, rather he was a teacher for whom music and the understanding of music were everything. He died in Paris in 1955, partially paralysed and almost without means.

Flesch writes that Enesco "towered above his musical compatriots like a solitary rock in a sea of mediocrity" and that he "represented the most perfect type of versatile musician". He observed that "His fingers touched the strings at an acute angle which resulted in a kind of smooth, velvety tone". However, he felt that he did not achieve in each of his main professions, composer and violinist, everything that was promised. The deeply analytic Flesch is also, not surprisingly, pretty scathing of Enesco as a teacher. On the other hand, Menuhin was clearly inspired by Enesco and remains so to this day.

(RÉNÉ) ZINO FRANCESCATTI was born in Marseilles in 1902 (or 1905) and was entirely French even though the name suggests Italian origins. His parents, both professional musicians, were his first teachers and by the age of 10 he was a prodigy. He moved to Paris in 1924 and received encouragement from Thibaud. He made his début at the Concerts Conservatoire, but without achieving much recognition. At first he earned his keep at an orchestral desk. Flesch would have approved; he always arranged a spell in an orchestra for those of his students he felt were destined for solo careers.

In 1926 he and Ravel were in England; the works they played included Tzigane.

By the late 1930s, Francescatti had travelled widely in North and in South America and had settled in New England.

His partnership with Robert Casadesus was especially highly regarded in the French repertoire, from Saint-Saëns to Ravel, but he also made his mark in the German classics. In the more extrovert repertoire of the instrument, Paganini and Kreisler, for example, his technical perfection and French refinement were united.

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