

John Adams, etc ... – Violin Concerto

Written by bluesever

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1. Corigliano - Chaconne from *The Red Violin*
2. Enescu - *Romanian Rhapsody N°1* (arr. Franz Waxman)
3. Waxman - *Tristan and Isolde Fantasia*
4. Adams - *Violin Concerto - I. Crotchet = 78*
5. Adams - *Violin Concerto - II. Chaconne; Body Through Which the Dream Flows*
6. Adams - *Violin Concerto - III. Toccata*

Chloë Hanslip: violin

Charles Owen: piano

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Leonard Slatkin – director

The 1993 Violin Concerto - now, strictly speaking, the "First Violin Concerto" - gets its fourth recording (it seems to have become "hugely popular", as the CD box has it, and I'm glad to hear it). Ms. Hanslip is a fine player, as you have to be to manage this knotty masterpiece, and she fares well against the high-level competition. Stephen Haller raves about her Bruch concertos (M/S 2003), and I can only second his comments about her golden tone and assured command. I think, we can dismiss the ragged Kremer (Nonesuch) and also safely put aside Robert McDuffee's Telarc (J/F 2000). That puts the main competition between this and Leyla Josefowicz on BBC's Late Junction label (with the composer conducting, J/F 2004). I like Ms Josefowicz's recording more this time around and appreciated the extra presence of the composer and the audience. It's hard to say enough about Ms Josefowicz's playing, which seems to grow in vividness on every hearing. Ms Hanslip is altogether mellower, even suave. She and conductor Slatkin stress clarity and detail and give the work a warmer, more laidback approach, but with a clear sense of dramatic purpose. I honestly like both recordings.

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Ms Hanslip has cinema and theater in her background - she was the "infant prodigy violinist" in the film adaptation of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin with Ralph Fiennes and premiered Andrew Lloyd Webber's Phantasia on Phantom of the Opera; the choice of companion pieces reflects this tendency. The opening piece on this program is a Chaconne based on the two principal materials from John Corigliano's score for The Red Violin : the slowly rising scale of the main title and the big mushy tune, 'Anna's Theme'. I must confess I'm clueless as to how specifically this is a Chaconne. It sounds to me simply like a fantasy on cues from the film, and it doesn't work very well as a concert piece. Don't confuse this with the Red Violin Suite, recorded by Eleanora Turovsky and chamber orchestra on Chandos (S/O 2005, with a reduced version of Corigliano's Second Symphony). I didn't think much of that either.

I guess the brief virtuosic conclusion of Enesco's First Romanian Rhapsody, in an arrangement for violin and orchestra by movie music composer Franz Waxman, is meant to serve as a Red Violin continuation (or encore). What other artistic purpose it serves is beyond this review's imagination. Waxman returns in a Tristan and Isolde Fantasia, originally the climax of the 1946 film Humoresque. It makes Wagner sound like Hollywood (rather than the other way around), complete with corny piano arpeggiations and mooning violin commentaries. Yuck.

I'm afraid those fillers place the Adams Concerto in an odd light, as if it were some kind of pops concert entry. It's not. I hope the young and breathtakingly talented Ms Hanslip resists that well-worn road, which management might foist on her if she doesn't take charge herself. She's a beautiful player, and her Adams is well worth hearing. I suppose the hope is that a coupling like this will sell records, and the unwashed masses will move up to the Adams somehow. I doubt that strategy works. --- American Record Guide, February 2007

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