

Leila Josefowicz - Bohemian Rhapsodies (1997)

Written by bluesever
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- Pablo de Sarasate 01. *Fantasy on Bizet's "Carmen," for violin & orchestra (or piano), Op. 25*
Camille Saint-Saëns
02. *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, for violin & orchestra in A minor, Op. 28*
Pablo de Sarasate
03. *Zigeunerweisen, for violin & piano (or orchestra) ("Gypsy Airs"), Op. 20*
Henryk Wieniawski
04. *Polonaise (No. 1) de concert, for violin & orchestra in D major, Op. 4*
Jules Massenet
05. *Méditation, for violin & orchestra (or other arrangement) (from opera "Thaïs")*
Maurice Ravel
06. *Tzigane, rhapsodie de concert, for violin & piano (or orchestra)*
Ernest Chausson
07. *Poème, for violin & orchestra, Op. 25*
Leila Josefowicz - violin Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Sir Neville Marriner - conductor

We violin fanciers are an odd lot when it comes to evaluating “new” violinists. The most glittering recommendations from reliable authorities? Brushed off. Recordings of major concerto or sonata repertoire—and Josefowicz superbly recorded the once-unplayable Sibelius and Tchaikovsky concertos (Fanfare 19:3)? Very nice, very impressive—but can they really play the fiddle? It's not until they have recorded the chestnuts that we finally feel prepared to pass judgment. As a consequence, there is a set of pieces that has been recorded by just about every major artist since the dawn of the LP, and I have reviewed dozens of CDs by young and promising artists with contents almost precisely identical to this release. Many have been excellent. And many of the excellent artists have not been heard of since, a fate I do not predict for Josefowicz.

The playing is first-class in every respect, just as one would assume from her concerto disc.

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Josefowicz has the big, rich tone and the clean mastery of technical difficulties that one wants to see in a major violin talent. And she does invest these pieces with a good dose of warmth and emotion, if not the high individuality of tone and approach that one hears from Rabin, Heifetz, Milstein, Francescatti, Ricci, and the like. She stretches the Chausson to seventeen minutes without inviting tedium, and she adds, as a few others have done, to my delight, Carmen's big aria, "En vain pour éviter" (in the Zimbalist arrangement) to the Sarasate. If you wonder, from the title, where the Bohemian Rhapsodies are, well, they aren't, although I tracked down violin pieces with that title by Toborowsky and Ondříšek. Evidently the title is meant to evoke the raging hormones promised by Josefowicz's rather purple program notes and the disc's "art," on the disc and within the notes: "romance novel" photos of a hot babe (our soloist? could be, as she is most comely) being clinched by a cheesy Fabio wannabe. The actual manner of playing on this disc is too tasteful to try to match any of that, to my relief, although it could be argued that the disc, in the grand tradition of the romance novel, promises more (or at least, something other) than what it delivers.

Note to the fiddle fanciers: yes, she really can play. What, you don't trust me? -- David K. Nelson, FANFARE [9/1997], arkivmusic.com

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