

stunning amplitude and depth (although given the supremely virtuosic quality of much of the solo writing some might prefer a bolder violin image).

Lara St John was one of the first young female artists to use glamour overtly as part of her market placement, but far more importantly she is an extremely fine player who mixes quicksilver technique with gripping spontaneity to captivating effect. The high drama of Australian composer Martin Hindson's three-movement Violin Concerto plays right to her strengths, the opening orchestral crescendo and whip-crack raising the curtain on a daredevil *moto perpetuo* of fiendish difficulty, whose wide-ranging hyperactivity appears to take up where the finale of Barber's Violin Concerto leaves off. St John throws herself into the fray with such unabashed alacrity that one cannot help but be bowled over.

Corigliano's suite from *The Red Violin* has already become something of a modern classic, thanks especially to the persuasive advocacy of Joshua Bell (Sony). St John possesses a more sinewy, lithe sound than the gloriously opulent Bell, imparting an arrestingly haunting quality to the work's more introspective passages. Yet the real showstopper here is the gloriously unrestrained, deliriously over-the-top adaptation of Liszt's demonic *Totentanz*, which St John negotiates with scintillating abandon and chutzpah, supported to the hilt by some deliciously uncoiffured playing from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's brass section.

JULIAN HAYLOCK

SIBELIUS Violin Concerto in D minor op.47

KHACHATURIAN Violin Concerto

SARASATE Carmen Fantasy

Gerhard Taschner (violin)

Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra,

Herbert Sandberg (conductor)

NDR Symphony Orchestra,

Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt (conductor)

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Lehmann (conductor)

Dabringhaus und Grimm Archive MDG 642 1508-2



I have not previously encountered this 1955 version of the Khachaturian, a work Gerhard Taschner (1922-76) plays pretty well. He is supported by the splendid Hamburg radio band under Schmidt-Isserstedt but unfortunately the sound is a little 'papery'.

In the interim since the 1947 radio recording (on Tahra), Taschner switched to the revised, shortened cadenza. He also apparently decided that since Heifetz never recorded this work, we should hear how Heifetz might have played the first movement's second subject. It is a passable imitation but a mite vulgar. He plays well in the cadenza and the succeeding two movements.

He is also in good form in the 1953 *Carmen Fantasy*, which has been out before - I prefer the sound on EMI. In trying to remedy a very slight edge on his tone, Dabringhaus und Grimm has made a roomy acoustic sound even roomier. Some of his portamentos again verge on vulgarity but his upper register is beautifully controlled and he is technically accurate.

For the Sibelius, in better sound than on Archipel, Taschner is partnered by Herbert Sandberg, an estimable German-born Swedish maestro, and a good radio orchestra, but the performance does not take off, despite impressive moments from both soloist and conductor. They seem at odds on the tempo of the *Allegro moderato*, which has too many relaxations.

The *Adagio* is turgid in places, with more traces of crudity from Taschner, and the finale is only so-so. The sole essential historical Sibelius is the *Ignatius*, and I could name a dozen others before getting to Taschner.

TULLY POTTER

STICKS AND STONES: MUSIC FOR PERCUSSION AND STRINGS

LOU HARRISON Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra

TAN DUN Elegy: Snow in June

MARK PHILLIPS Porch Music

Marjorie Bagley (violin) Michael Carrera (cello)
Roger Braun (percussion) Ohio University Percussion Ensemble, Roger Braun (conductor)
Steven Huang (conductor)
Equilibrium EQ 88 (www.equilibri.com)



The combination of a solo stringed instrument and an all-percussion ensemble might seem an unlikely one, but the three works on this very enjoyable disc prove that it can be something of a revelation.

The Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra of 1940-59 by Lou Harrison pits the soloist against an unlikely array of 'found' instruments - flower pots, brake drums, coffee cans, wash tubs and even a double bass laid down on its back and its strings struck with beaters. Violinist Marjorie Bagley proves more than able to hold her own, though, with a rich, full-throated tone and clean articulation that bring vigour to Harrison's purposeful chromatic melodies. The performance is full of vitality - the precision of the Ohio University ensemble is particularly remarkable - and Bagley even manages to make her violin sound merge with the clattering percussion sonorities at several points. It's a hugely enjoyable performance.

Tan Dun's *Elegy: Snow in June* (1991) occupies another world altogether, one of stillness, fragility and rarefied beauty, and cello soloist Michael Carrera is particularly effective in its Chinese-tinged melodic fragments, almost whispered at the opening. At times he evokes the reedy sound of an *erhu*, but at others he gives full rein to a powerful, passionate tone, provoking eruptions of drums and gongs that threaten to overwhelm him.

Porch Music (2007) by Ohio music professor Mark Phillips brings the two soloists together. It's a slighter piece, hugely wide-ranging in style, but contains some good-natured evocations of Appalachian fiddle music which the string players deliver gracefully, with some affecting inflections. Recorded sound is warm and detailed, and the soloists are balanced well against the percussion forces.

DAVID KETTLE