

Works by Bartók, Beethoven, Waxman, & Ysaÿe

Tobias Feldmann's recital with Boris Kusnezow includes two works for solo violin: Eugène Ysaÿe's frequently played Third Sonata, dedicated to George Enescu, and Bartók's formidable solo violin sonata (including the quarter tones in the last movement), in addition to Beethoven's Seventh Sonata and Franz Waxman's Carmen Fantasy. He plays the program on 1703 Stradivari on loan to him.

The recital opens with Ysaÿe's "Ballade," a work already adopted a generation ago by Michael Rabin and David Oistrakh when Ysaÿe's complete set hadn't achieved its current popularity, at least on recordings. Feldmann, captured by the engineers at a respectful distance, communicates the composer's compound of mystery and ecstasy, indulging in Ysaÿe's musical gestures, slithering harmonies, and dynamic contrasts, yet never indulging in mannerism or effects for their own sakes. His reading in fact, has most of the authority and the probing comprehension of Oistrakh's.

In the opening measures of Beethoven's Seventh Sonata, Kusnezow creates a role for himself far beyond that of accompanist (after all these sonatas still went under the designation as works for piano and violin, even though the violin asserts itself progressively throughout the set of 10), achieving clarity in the first movement while still allowing the bass notes to rumble. Violinist and pianist play the slow movement with riveting intimacy, one engaging, for example, in brilliant figuration while the other comments discretely. Together, they strut through the scherzo, spiking the theme with bracing accents; and they recreate the gnomic gestures that introduce the finale, generating a great deal of excitement in the subsequent thematic material by use of carefully calibrated dynamic contrasts, and, towards the end of them movement, a burst of virtuosic energy.

Bartók's Sonata confronts the listener in an almost unsettling barrage: Feldmann recorded the entire recital on May 21–23, 2013 in the Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Daheim, but the engineers seem to have come much closer to him during his reading of this sonata. Feldmann holds no prisoners: He makes no attempt to blunt the thorns in the Tempo di ciaccona, although he doesn't conceive the work only as so much angular geometry—he plays with surprising sensitivity in the across-the-string passages near the movement's center and in the meditative passages following them. The Fuga isn't a mere knife-throwing exhibition (although the swordsmanship in Viktoria Mullova's reading on Philips 420948-2, Fanfare 12:4 hardly sounds so mere either; neither do those of György Pauk on Naxos 8.550868, Fanfare 19:5; or Yulia Krasko on Russian Disc RD CD 10 006, Fanfare 20:4), yet Feldmann doesn't take prisoners, either, grinding the movement's dissonances gleefully (or, perhaps, grimly) and endowing the cross accents near the end with a jazzy verve. The "Melodia," reminiscent of the slow movement of Brahms's Double Concerto (adapted as the theme of the police soap opera, *The Edge of Night*, a generation ago) sounds hauntingly meditative, although some listeners may feel Feldmann loses momentum about halfway through; in any case he brings the finale to a magical, quiet conclusion. Dedicatee Yehudi Menuhin played the sonata with a version of the Presto shorn of the quarter-tones, but the quarter-tones seem to be gaining ground (and Ysaÿe had employed them in his solo sonatas already quite a bit earlier). Feldmann makes them sound natural rather than an artificial, intimidating, effect.

Waxman's Carmen Fantasy, I understand, has overtaken Pablo Sarasate's in popularity among Russian violinists. Jascha Heifetz (originally to have played the solos in Humoresque) recorded the piece, as did Isaac Stern (who actually played those solos). Feldmann acquits himself with real panache in the technical passages; but he endows others with a smoldering intensity and great expressive depth than can be found in other pastiches of the work (Sarasate's and Jenö Hubay's).

Everybody should find something of interest in this well-chosen program; and everybody should find something of interest in each of its selections: the shifting expression in Ysaÿe's work, the revelatory dialogues in Beethoven's, Feldmann's assurance in Bartók's, and his panache in Waxman's. Strongly recommended. © 2014 Fanfare

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