

TARANTELLE

ROBERT SPRING, CLARINET



It was more or less reliably reported that on the occasion of Jascha Heifetz's first recording session with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra its members were naturally a bit in awe of the great virtuoso. Besides, recording sessions and rehearsals led by maestro Fritz Reiner were not known for their gemütlich atmosphere, to put it gently. But when the producer asked over the intercom if Mr. Heifetz was ready, his response was "No, but I'm not getting any younger". The orchestra roared in laughter, and it was even reported, perhaps less reliably, that the corners of Reiner's mouth may have twitched.

Heifetz (1899-1987) was in awe of no one. It was generally agreed, even among other prominent violinists, that he was the greatest fiddler of his time, and perhaps the greatest since Paganini. Conductors were known, after performing a concerto with Heifetz, to come offstage muttering things like, "He played all the notes! All of them!" In truth, this was indeed remarkable, as one can verify by listening closely to recordings by other masters of that golden era of violinistic accomplishment. But not only was his technique remarkable; his tone was elegant and full, even in pianissimo passages. And perhaps most admirable was his towering musical intelligence: he understood what he played.

Heifetz recorded often and well, working within a vast repertory that encompassed the standard concertos, sonatas, virtuosic bon bons and far beyond. His records will still excite, providing models for other artists by their poise and brilliance. As Heifetz found stimuli and opportunities in music by others and for other performing media, so can the modern virtuoso rise to encounter the giant on his own turf on an instrument no less receptive to awe-inspiring musical achievement. Perhaps the accomplishment is even more startling: endless legato phrases, rapid parallel octaves and repeated notes on violin are one thing; on clarinet they are quite another.

Both *La ronde des lutins*, scherzo fantastique (Dance of the Goblins) and *Scherzo tarantelle* were composed by nineteenth century violinists and first recorded by Heifetz in 1917. Antonio Bazzini (1818-1897) had been encouraged by Paganini himself and introduced Mendelssohn's violin concerto to the world; his skill at composing led to a professorship in Milan, where he taught opera composers Mascagni and Puccini. Hendryk Wieniawski (1835-1880) had an even more illustrious career as a traveling virtuoso, and many of his compositions still serve as staples in the student repertory. Both works are so idiomatic for the violin that performance on clarinet poses extraordinary difficulties, particularly so when, as here, they are executed at *Tempo di Lickety Split*.

One of the lighter pieces in the first book (1910) of Claude Debussy's *Preludes* for piano, *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (The Girl with Flaxen Hair) was a favorite Heifetz encore. Its fluent delicacy was just the thing after hair-raising violinistics. Both this and the preceding work were featured by Heifetz in the 1950 film *Of Mice and Men*.

It's hard to believe that Heifetz never commercially recorded *Csardas* by Vittorio Monti (1868-1902), a Neapolitan violinist, mandolinist and composer best known for his operettas and other "light" music. Perhaps there exists a "bootleg" recording of this fiddler's favorite taken from one of the many radio broadcasts he made beginning in 1931. In the present arrangement clarinet and violin share equally in its flamboyance. Although the fastidious violinist may have found the evocation of Hungarian Gypsy tunes too earthy, this didn't prevent him from letting it all out in *Hora Staccato* by Grigoras Dinicu (1889-1949), whose arrangement of a Rumanian folk dance was turned into a tour-de-force of unparalleled brilliance by Heifetz.

The Toccata by Domenico Paradies, a composer much admired by his eighteenth-century contemporaries including the Mozart family, started out life as an allegro movement in the sixth of a set of solo keyboard sonatas. It was discovered (and retitled) by Heifetz, who added a brilliant cadenza near the end. He made many such arrangements and adaptations during his lifetime. In so doing he was encouraged by the example of an older violinist, Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), who for years had composed music in vaguely antique styles, passing them off as the works of long-dead composers until he was found out in 1935. Though not composed by Francoeur (1698-1787) nor even much in his style, the Sicilienne and Rigaudon are charming enough to make anyone forgive Kreisler's subterfuge.

Although the Heifetz recordings in 1949 and '59 of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto were much admired, he first recorded the finale back in 1920 in a violin/piano transcription. Its elfin cheerfulness demands effortless speed, while the Vivaldi Concerto in Bb (F.IV n. 2; RV 547), recorded with Gregor Piatigorsky in 1963, is so idiomatically suited to violin and cello that it presents a formidable stylistic challenge on other instruments. Here and throughout this remarkable CD the accomplishment of Robert Spring and his colleagues are astonishing. Their ability to evoke Heifetz's jaw-dropping aura of supreme artistry depends not only on apparently limitless technique but also on their possession of a quality that helps separate artists from the craftsmen: taste.

Oh, yes, the album title, suggested by Wieniawski's Scherzo Tarantelle: the legend was that Sicilians bitten by tarantulas would dance (in compound duple meter, apparently) to effect a cure. Perhaps this album's contents won't be quite so compelling, but listeners should feel free to move about with abandon if no one is watching.

Wallace Rave

ROBERT SPRING, CLARINET

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Jeffrey Lyman, Bassoon

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Sonorous Mastering,
Tempe, AZ

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO

Bill and Linda Brannen
for the idea and for their
superb craftsmanship.

1. 5:42 • La Ronde Des Lutins,
Scherzo Fantastique, Opus 25
(The Round of the Goblins)
Antonio Bazzini (1818-1897)
2. 4:40 • Scherzo Tarantelle, Op. 16
Henri Wieniawski
3. 2:19 • La fille aux cheveux de lin
Claude Debussy
4. 5:48 • Csárdás
V. Monti
5. 2:00 • Hora Staccato (Roumanian)
Dinicu
6. 2:47 • Toccata
Paradies
- 7-8. 2:58 / 2:17 • Sicilienne & Rigaudon
(In the style of Francoeur)
Fritz Kreisler
- 9-11 Concerto in Si^b Maggiore per Violino
Violoncello Archi e Cembalo
F.IV n. 2
Antonio Vivaldi (1675? - 1741)
4:11 • Allegro
1:43 • Andante
3:17 • Allegro molto
12. 6:03 • Concerto for the Violin, Op. 64
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy
Allegro molto vivace