

Classical Reissue Reviews

SCHOECK: Violin Concerto "Quasi una fantasia"; GLAZUNOV: Violin Concerto in A Minor – Ursala Bagdasarjanz, v./ Radiochestra Lugano/ Francesco d'Avalos /Leopoldo Casella – Gallo

Another installment from Gallo's Bagdasarjanz project pairs two late Romantic concertos; the infrequent Schoeck Concerto doesn't match the inspiration of the Glazunov.



Three breathtaking cello concertos
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SCHOECK: Violin Concerto in B-flat Major, Op. 21 "Quasi una fantasia"; GLAZUNOV: Violin Concerto in A Minor, Op. 82 – Ursala Bagdasarjanz, violin/ Radiochestra Lugano/ Francesco d'Avalos (Schoeck)/Leopoldo Casella (Glazunov) – Gallo CD-1250, 56:40 [Distr. by Albany] **:**

The third installment of discs devoted to violin virtuoso Ursala Bagdasarjanz (b. 1934), a pupil of Aida Stucki – who also taught Anne-Sophie Mutter – and Sandor Vegh, includes two seminal late Romantic concertos (in monaural sound), inscribed 1970 and 1960 for Swiss Radio. Othmar Schoeck (1886-1957) wrote his *Concerto "Quasi una Fantasia" in B-flat Major, Op. 21* in 1912. The genesis of the concerto belongs to the infatuation of the composer for the Hungarian violinist Stefi Geyer (1888-1956), the work's dedicatee and first performer.

Although the Schoeck opens with a large affecting gesture, it settles down into a series of lyrical, bucolic platitudes derived from the Brahms syntax, but without the melodic inspiration to enshrine the work in our memory. The music of the first movement *Allegretto* introduces some emotional interjections that finally resolve into the main, yearning "theme," but Schoeck would rather treat its variable possibilities than set it as a folk-song that would guarantee its longevity. Conductor Francesco d'Avalos (b. 1930) devotes considerable energy to the orchestral detail, where colors and pensive mood swings replace traditional sonata-form; hence, the *quasi una fantasia* designation. Bagdasarjanz plays (rec. 1970, in mono sound) with rapt authority and ardent sweetness, but the materials cannot sustain her energy.

The second movement, *Grave, non troppo lento*, attempts an even more anguished sensibility, the violin in close conjunction with long-held notes in the French horn. We hear the rather "academic" results of Schoeck's having taken composition studies with another Brahms acolyte, Max Reger. The sentiment becomes luxurious, sweet, a love song amidst some twittering larks, but the music too often proceeds like variations without a defined theme, or musical characters in search of a clear author. If the dark scales and chromatic rhetoric remind me of Max Bruch, I wonder if the association is accidental.

The last bars of the *Grave* lead directly into the *Allegro con spirito*, for a moment quite suggestive of Korngold's rustic dances. Schoeck applies the same formula, alternating his dance figures with a plaintive melody that pairs high-register violin riffs against the French horn, but he cannot sustain the melodic line without embellishments that do more to obscure it than immortalize it. Having tried so hard to gain profundity of expression, the original dance impulse, upon its return, seems trite. A false cadence on the dance motif in the coda leads to one more try at ecstasy, and then to the *scherzando* conclusion. None of these quibbles with the score of my part deter Ursala Bagdasarjanz from having invested sincere and pointed energy into selling this concerto, which I fear will remain outside the main stream of beloved works in the genre.

The 1960 inscription of the 1904 Glazunov *Concerto* finds in Bagdasarjanz a sincere and masterful arbiter for its ingratiating lyricism, an expression of this composer's highest inspiration. Since the Glazunov work exploits a continuous, rhapsodic format, it does complement the Schoeck *Concerto*, except to that work's disadvantage. The canny use of orchestral coloration by Glazunov, the harp against the solo, for example, proves magical here, while in Schoeck the colors seemed merely "effective." That Bagdasarjanz can soar into majestic spaces certainly places her mastery and sympathy for this work on a par with such practitioners as Morini and Marcovici. The seamless writing of the inter-connected movements finds matching ease of transitions from Bagdasarjanz and conductor Casella, the latter of whom injects the often balletic orchestral tissue into the mix with lovingly molded phrases. The big *cadenza* at the end of the second movement offers a throaty, muscular rendition from Bagdasarjanz, though she can fly high, along with the likes of Milstein and Oistrakh. Though the general tenor of this concerto does not strike me as particularly "Russian," the last movement *Allegro* manages a pomp and high-spirited "hunting" impulse that never ceases to enchant because of the composer's canny color effects. Here, too, the writing of the violin against the French horn (and harp, pizzicato strings, and triangle) proceeds more successfully than it had with Schoeck, since the "folk" energy of the concerto enjoys that element of spontaneity and freedom that "academic" competence simply cannot achieve.

—Gary Lemco