



The importance of being ERNST

Sherban Lupu grants a great
virtuoso a long-overdue revival

Ernst

Fantaisie brillante sur Le prophète, Op 24.
Two Nocturnes, Op 8. Carnaval de Venise,
Op 18. Two Morceaux de salon, Op 13.
Thème allemand varié, Op 9. Rondo allemand
sur des thèmes d'Oberon, Op 23. Rondo
Papageno, Op 20

Sherban Lupu *vm* Ian Hobson *pf*
Toccata Classics © TOCCO118 (76' • DDD)



"The greatest violinist I ever heard." That was the verdict of Joseph Joachim. Dismayingly overlooked, like so many other once-celebrated composer-

virtuosos of the 19th century, Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1812-65) is at last beginning to receive a measure of recognition, on disc at least. In the past, Renard, Repin, Rosand, Ricci and many other distinguished violinists whose names don't begin with "R" (Vengerov, Kremer, Gringolts and, most recently, Ning Feng) have revived his works. And now the ever-enterprising Toccata Classics is recording Ernst's complete works on six CDs. Perhaps this will, finally, put him where he deserves to be – at the top of the pile along with Paganini (whose heir he was), Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps.

Sherban Lupu, currently editing a new edition of Ernst's works for Toccata, first

championed Ernst on disc back in 1990 ("Violon diabolique", Continuum, 7/90) and is as much at home with the fiendish finger-breaker as he is with the sentimental-lyrical Ernst, not to mention the comedian. Witness the 25 "variations burlesques" on the *Carnival of Venice* (a first recording), "a piece of sublime whimsy" which Ernst played "like a juggler whose counters are diamonds" (Berlioz). There is always room for a serious composer/musician with a sense of humour.

Lupu, deftly and flamboyantly accompanied by Ian Hobson, astonishes and bewitches in equal measure. Try the *Thème allemand varié* or the *Rondo allemand*

on Weber's *Oberon* (two further world premieres) and you'll wonder why Ernst is so little played. Perhaps it's the difficulty. On that score, the concluding *Rondo Papageno* sorts out the men from the boys. My one complaint is that Hobson is placed too distantly from the closely miked Lupu: the piano, which has an important and often busy role to play here, needs to be heard as an equally matched partner acoustically. But no matter. This is a hugely engaging and entertaining disc produced to Toccata's exemplary high standard, and the 14-page booklet by Ernst's biographer Mark Rowe is outstanding.

Jeremy Nicholas

INTERVIEW

Sherban Lupu

As a composer, Ernst has been grossly neglected, especially throughout the latter half of the 20th century. He is mainly known for his very difficult, virtuoso music for the violin, but in fact he is a wonderful romantic composer, too. Let's not forget that he was friends and musical partners with Chopin, Liszt, Mendelssohn and Schumann. So he was, if you like, the linchpin between the classical era culminating with Paganini, and the new Romantic era of violin expression. There are many facets of Ernst that have been forgotten. Great parts of his output are lyrical pieces – songs for violin and piano inspired by poetry, and nocturnes rivalling those of Chopin.

Most of the pieces on this disc are virtually unknown and very rarely heard in the concert hall. Some have never been recorded before. It is important to make them accessible again and to help audiences become reacquainted with this kind of brilliant style of violin-playing. Ernst was considered one of the greatest violinists of his day, even by Berlioz. He was an extraordinary artist on stage and audiences were enraptured by the charisma of his performances.

I am recording a total of six CDs in this series and will publish new editions of the works through Toccata Press. I hope this will help to make Ernst well known to a new generation of young violinists. **Interview by Charlotte Smith**