

In *The Leaden Echo* (1991), for countertenor, violin, viola, two cellos and double bass, with an offstage ensemble of three trombones and timpani, we are at least allowed to hear unsullied Desyatnikov – admittedly, with Purcellian echoes, but this dignified and elegant piece is by far the most impressive piece on the CD. Like *Return*, it is another ritual, a repeated bass figure (either as bass *pizzicati* or drum thwacks) turning it into an extended funeral march. That quality, coupled with the countertenor voice and the restrained scoring, places it very close to the music of the late Geoffrey Burgon. The CD closes with an arrangement for violin and strings by Roman Mints of the main theme from the 1994 film *Moscow Nights*, as lyrically lovely and atmospheric as it is brief.

The performances are technically flawless and have a hint of missionary zeal about them, as if the performers know how much Desyatnikov's international standing hangs on this first portrait CD, and the excellent recording captures that sense of excitement. Quite what to make of Desyatnikov I'm not yet sure: there's certainly a Busonian sense of musical truth in the best of his music, but his tendency to allow himself to be distracted by earlier composers vitiates its impact. The French have just banned the wearing of face veils in public; if Desyatnikov put aside the allusions to the past, it would allow us to see his own face more clearly. The solution, I guess, is to listen to more of his music, and I hope the opportunity comes my way soon.

Martin Anderson

Ernst New Complete Music for Violin and Piano, Volume 1.

Deux Nocturnes, Op. 8. Thème Allemand Varié, Op. 9. Deux Morceaux de Salon, Op. 13. Carnaval de Venise (Variations burlesques sur la canzonetta 'Caramamma mia'), Op. 18. Rondo Papageno, Op. 20. Rondo Allemand sur des thèmes d'Oberon, Op. 23. Fantaisie brillante sur Le Prophète (Opéra de G. Meyerbeer), Op. 24.

Sherban Lupu (violin); Ian Hobson (piano).

Toccata Classics TOCC0118 (full price, 1 hour

16 minutes). [Website www.toccataclassics.com](http://www.toccataclassics.com)

Producer Samir Golescu. Engineer Jon Schoenoff.

Dates April 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th, 2010.

Comparison:

Rondo Papageno:

Lupu, Pettinger (Continuum) CCD1017 (1990)

The performing career of Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1812-65), who was among the most prodigious and influential violin virtuosos of the nineteenth century, was unfairly circumscribed, at least in the public's perception, by the spellbinding theatrics of his Genoese rival Nicolò Paganini. Contemporary descriptions of Ernst's playing suggest that as a violinist he was every inch

Paganini's equal, while his considerable output indicates that as a composer he was in many respects the Italian's superior.

Unaccountably little of Ernst's music is represented on disc, though some collectors will know Aaron Rosand's fine 1973 recording with the Luxembourg RSO under Louis de Froment of the spectacularly difficult Concerto in F sharp minor, Op. 23 (available on a two-disc set on Vox CDX5102). There's also Ilya Grubert's thoroughly creditable Naxos offering (8.557565), which includes the *Concertino* in D, Op. 12, plus a smattering of other works by this Moravian-born violinist-composer.

Much the greatest part of Ernst's *oeuvre* comprises smaller-scale pieces, most of which have been conspicuously absent from the catalogue for far too long. That seems set to change now, for this initial release in violinist Sherban Lupu's projected six-disc Ernst cycle with pianist Ian Hobson augurs uncommonly well for future issues from this partnership. In Romanian-born Lupu, Ernst's music finds an ideal exponent. A Continuum disc entitled 'Violon Diabolique', featuring compositions by Ernst and Wieniawski, found him fully up to the formidable violinistic challenges posed by these works; common to both issues is Ernst's Op. 20 *Rondo Papageno*. After his 1854 remodelling of Schubert's *Erk König* and *The Last Rose of Summer* it's probably Ernst's best-known work, as testing of any violinist's overall technical agility and mastery (especially with the bow) as you're likely to find among salonesque offerings such as these. Lupu's new account is superb; the coruscating *spiccato* figurations are every bit as dazzling as the left-hand pyrotechnics and here, as elsewhere, Hobson proves himself a supportive and thoroughly musical collaborator.

Their programme begins with the most extended work here, the *Prophet Fantasy*, based on themes from Meyerbeer's opera of the same name. The last and best of Ernst's many operatic fantasies, this is far more than a tub-thumping miscellany of themes loosely cobbled together and, in the hands of Lupu and Hobson, assumes a depth and seriousness not normally expected of the genre. Lupu's technical control, secure intonation and ready assimilation of the music's romantic ethos will keep you on the edge of your seat throughout, contrasting moments of soulful introspection and flighty gypsy abandon notwithstanding!

It's good to rediscover gems like the 1837 *Carnaval de Venise* variations, clearly designed to rival Paganini's eponymous set, as Berlioz sagely observed after hearing Ernst play the work at his farewell concert in St Petersburg in 1847. Here, too, Lupu's account is at once completely assured and fully alive to every expressive possibility this music affords; note, for example, Variation XV's left-hand *pizzicato* harmonization of the theme played with the bow and the trilling effects over the open E string in Variation XXII.

Violin devotees may have heard Gringolts's Hyperion disc (reviewed in March 2008), offering a number of Ernst compositions delivered with panache but at times (his *Erk König* being a case in point) a certain noticeable lack of allure and insight, qualities which Lupu and Hobson bring to this music by the bucket load. The recording itself, made in the Foellinger Great Hall of the Krannert Performing Arts Center, University of Illinois (where both artists serve as faculty members), is closely focused and punchy, but rather less pleasing to the ear than Hyperion's unforced warmth and bloom for Gringolts and pianist Ashley Wass.

Full marks to Toccata for having had the good sense to commission insert notes from Mark Rowe, whose splendid Ashgate biography of the composer was published in 2008. Like the performances themselves, these scholarly, entertaining and informative annotations leave little or nothing to be desired. I'll be looking forward to future instalments in this series with mounting expectation!

Michael Jameson

Duos for Violin and Viola New

M. Haydn Duos – C, MH335; D, MH336; E, MH337; F, MH338.

Mozart Duos – G, K423; B flat, K424.

Maya Magub (violin); Judith Busbridge (viola).

CRD CRD35278 (medium price, two discs, 1 hour

37 minutes). [Website www.crdrecords.com](http://www.crdrecords.com)

Producer Eric Wen. Engineer Ric Levy. Date January

2008.

Comparison:

Mozart:

Grumiaux, Pelliccia (Philips) 454 023-2

(1968, two discs)

Perlman, Zukerman (RCA) RD60735 (1991)

Linking the four duos for violin and viola by Michael Haydn with the more familiar pair by Mozart on this two-disc set from CRD makes good sense for several reasons, not the least among them being historical. The apocryphal story of how, during a visit to Salzburg in 1783, Mozart found his friend Johann Michael Haydn indisposed (some have suggested due to alcohol!) and unable to complete an urgent commission for six duos, thus jeopardizing his salary, is well known. Mozart selflessly undertook to provide a further two duos to complete the set, finishing them off in just two days, an achievement made yet more astonishing by the fact that he seldom composed instrumental duos, and had written for this instrumental combination only once before, in the magisterial *Sinfonia concertante* for violin, viola, and orchestra in E flat, K364 of 1779.

All six duos are capably played here by violinist Maya Magub and violist Judith Busbridge. They are a well-matched team, whose respective sonorities and temperaments blend pleasingly, resulting in performances that sound for the most part freshly minted