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**TOCC 0310 reviewed in the July/Aug Fanfare**

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| **Martin Anderson** [**via**](https://support.google.com/mail/answer/1311182?hl=en)**amazonses.com** |

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**ERNST *Polonaise de Concert,*** op. 17. ***3 Rondinos,*** op. 5. ***Romanesca fameux*. Variations on the Dutch National Air. HELLER**(arr. Ernst) ***Feuillet d’Album.*OSBORNE/ERNST Variations on *I tuoi frequenti palpiti*•** Sherban Lupu (vn); Ian Hobson (pn) **•**TOCCATA 0310 (69:47)The fifth volume of Toccata’s series of CDs encompassing the complete works of violinist Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (and including some performances billed as premiere recordings) opens with Ernst’s strutting *Polonaise de Concert*, which Mark Rowe describes in his booklet notes as the longest movement Ernst had written by 1842 (it’s 12 minutes long). However severe and even grandiose it may have seemed to listeners of the composer’s time, it’s fully informed by the exciting technical wizardry that characterizes so many of the Ernst’s works—but also with the kind of not-quite-sentimental sensibility that sets these works off from Paganini’s. Sherban Lupu, who must have a will of iron to attempt such a comprehensive survey of violinistic torture, acquits himself well in this gargantuan piece, with a tone stropped to a sharp edge, a firm technical command, and a general sense of both comedy and tragedy. He never wallows in a manner suggestive of a later generation of Romanticism; and he makes the 12 minutes flash by seemingly in seconds.Ernst’s affecting arrangement of Stephen Heller’s brief *Fuillet d’Album*, op. 16/4, allows Lupu and his archly prepossessing pianist, Ian Hobson, to explore the softer side of the composer’s musical personality. Ernst based the *Three Rondinos* on themes, respectively, from Giacomo Meyerbeer’s opera *Robert le Diable*, Michele Carafa’s ballet *Nathalie*, and Jacques Halévy’s *La Tentation*. These aren’t simplistic works, though Rowe notes that they may have been intended for amateurs rather than for the composer himself. Lupu brings to them the grace and elegance suggested by their intended use, though his technical command remains sharp throughout. In the second piece, based on the ballet*Nathalie*, he fuses this command with a cheeky insouciance, appropriate to the music itself, to deliver a highly entertaining performance. The third and longest *Rondino* sounds more serious in Lupu’s and Hobson’s performance by comparison with the sweet-as-whipped-cream lightness of the second.In the variations composed jointly by Ernst and George Osborne on a melody from Giovanni Pacini’s opera *Niobe*, Lupu and Hobson make the violin and piano parts fit together seamlessly yet each in its own way individual and brilliantly effective. Rowe relates that Osborne later collaborated with the violinist Charles de Bériot, with whose salon-like elegance he felt more comfortable than with Ernst’s commanding virtuosity. Still, this work makes a highly entertaining impression.After an affecting reading of the *Romanesca fameux*, chastely shorn of virtuosic tricks, the duo brings the program to a close with Ernst’s variations on the Dutch national anthem, a piece written, perhaps, with the same general intent as Paganini’s variations on*God Save the Queen* or Henri Vieuxtemps’s on *Yankee Doodle*—to ingratiate the violinist-composer with audiences in a country he intended to tour. Not so compact, perhaps, as Paganini’s variations or so popular in its manner as Vieuxtemps’s (that violinist had to contend with Ole Bull, who had captured the hearts of America’s heartland), it’s still a most impressive work—and apparently worked its magic on its intended audiences, as did Paganini’s and Vieuxtemps’s (or, for that matter, Bull’s) patriotic tubthumpers.The recorded sound, clear and spacious, once again presents the duo in a highly favorable light. Those who have enjoyed the earlier volumes of the series should find this one equally fascinating. At times, especially in the simpler short works, it reveals to an exceptional degree, in fact, a more direct side of the composer’s musical personality. Strongly recommended. **Robert Maxham****This article originally appeared in Issue 39:6 (July/Aug 2016) of *Fanfare* Magazine.** |