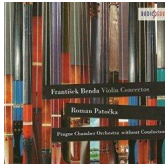


Franz Benda - Violin Concertos (2009)

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Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A major 14:15 1. *I. Senza tempo* 6:08 2. *II. Adagio poco andante* 3:58 3. *III. Presto* 4:10 Concerto
for Violin and Orchestra in E flat major 17:16
4. *I. Allegretto* 6:57 5. *II. Affetuoso ma non troppo. Lento* 5:20 6. *III. Presto assai* 4:52
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in C Major 19:59
7. *I. Allegro* 6:52 8. *II. Adagio* 6:11 9. *III. Presto* 6:53
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Major 20:18
10. *I. Allegro* 8:22 11. *II. Largo* 6:18 12. *Allegro* 5:37
Roman Patocka - violin Prague Chamber Orchestra (without conductor)

Benda was one of the most illustrious, possibly the single most illustrious, Czech violinist of the eighteenth century. Yet fewer than twenty concertos of his concertos for his own instrument have survived. The intimate nature of the music making suits the performances, and indeed the nature of the compositions themselves. These are pleasantly old-fashioned, more akin to Vivaldi than an Italian contemporary like Tartini - akin to Vivaldi, yes, in a sense, but rather lacking the flair, panache, colour and hubristic danger of Vivaldi.

Which is not to suggest that they are not worthy or exciting in their own way. The C major has a forceful first movement, but the slow movement remains in the memory more for its character than for any true melodic distinction. The finale is probably the finest of the three movements, fizzing with energy and clever contrasts between ritornellos and the vivid, slashing solo violin. Here, for sure, one feels the impress of Vivaldi's spirit. Here, too, one can tentatively gauge just what sort of virtuoso Benda must have been. The confident, fluent, Italianate lyricism that floods the E flat major is aerial in its finesse, showy in places, whilst not achieving much true distinction. Someone else added extraneous parts to the D major - let's name him; Johann Georg Pisendel, who was a friend, and led the Dresden court orchestra which, because it was larger than the orchestra for which Benda wrote, needed something 'extra' to play. Finally there is the later A minor Concerto, a rather more 'affetuoso' work with a melancholy cadenza. Here

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we find Benda being just a touch too liberal with his expressive caesurae, just a little artificial and over gallant. The finale, though, is rollicking good fun.

Benda's violin music is highly accomplished and highly polished. I can't say it's desperately original, nor is it always melodically special, but it's well presented here. ---Jonathan Woolf, musicweb-international.com

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