

RECORD REVIEWS

BEETHOVEN: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D, Op. 61. Bronislaw Huberman, violin; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by George Szell. Pathé-Référence 1435351.

Considering that the Beethoven Violin Concerto was the last of the composer's works for soloist and orchestra to gain a place in the standard repertory, it is ironic that by 1934 it had already received three stunning recorded performances and was thus far better served by that time than any of his other concertos. In 1926 Fritz Kreisler (with Leo Blech conducting) produced what was, perhaps, the most tonally opulent of all 78-rpm editions; in 1932 Joseph Szigeti (with Bruno Walter conducting) left the most structurally integrated and stylish of all pre-LP sets; and 1934 gave birth to this Huberman-Szell account, probably the most intense and vibrant and (in many respects) the most Beethovenian of all recorded editions.

On the surface, Huberman's playing offers much to fault. Technically he is not always secure; note, for instance, his opening octaves. Then, too, his tone is far from ingratiating; indeed, it is sometimes so screechy, it sounds like a whistling tea-kettle. And finally, his overall approach seems almost willful in his exceptional freedom, not only in phrasing but in rhythm as well. But a great performance, like the work of art it projects, often creates its own raison d'être and ultimately must be judged within the context of its own personality. In such a context, Huberman's playing is spellbinding: intense, dramatic, and richly inflected.

I can recall no other violinist who has suggested the vigor and fire Huberman displays in the first movement while permitting its more gentle, lyric moments to sing and soar with expansive delicacy. What is more, despite the frequent coarseness of his tone, it nonetheless boasts a robustness that proves powerfully gripping and italicizes the first movement's grand scale. The two concluding movements are just as winning, the *Larghetto*, if not the last word in muted delicacy, taking on an uncommonly broad emotional range, and the finale having a peasant-like gruffness and wonderfully apt exuberance. Even the two familiar Joachim cadenzas are projected with refreshing inflection and thrust. Throughout the entire performance, portamento abounds, clearly revealing the execution to be from a bygone era. Yet it is used with such taste, one soon forgets how old-fashioned it now is.

The 41-year-old George Szell provides splendid support: disciplined, grandly symphonic, and unusually precise in its sharp motivic delineation. Keith Hardwick's transfer--boasting almost silent surfaces and absolutely seamless side-joins--is light years ahead of the old Columbia LP reissue of the mid fifties and of the more recent Rococo edition. For anyone interested in this score or in Huberman, this is a disc not to be missed.

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