

CLASSICAL

Souvenir II. Trondheim Soloists.
 (192/24 stereo and 96/24
 multichannel; Blu-ray; 180g LP)
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The *Souvenir II* LP and downloads give us the other half of the program started on *Souvenir I* (Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings and Nielsen's String Orchestra Suite, reviewed in Issue 224). *Souvenir II*, again, offers a major work by the Russian composer, *Souvenir de Florence*, and a brief Nielsen piece, *At the Bier of a Young Artist*. The *Serenade* Blu-ray disc holds all four pieces, almost an hour-and-a-half of music.

Souvenir de Florence was conceived originally as a string sextet and later arranged by the composer for string orchestra. As with the earlier installment, the playing of the Trondheim Soloists is propulsive, especially in the opening Allegro con spirito. With the lyrically enchanting Adagio that follows, five first violins manage to shape the ingratiating main melody as artfully as would a single musician in a sextet: this is truly chamber music writ large. The arrangement includes solo turns for violin and cello, handled very capably by the TS's first-chair players. The wistful, lilting third movement maintains a rhythmic liveliness that prevents any late-Romantic sogginess and the Finale charges ahead amicably but never rushes: its boundless energy derives from the ensemble's alert rhythmic pointing. Nielsen's 5-minute elegy is suitably sad and contemplative. As Barber's Adagio for Strings would be a generation later, it was recognized as a logical candidate for expansion into a setting for string orchestra.

The sound of the LP and downloads is familiar from their respective *Souvenir I* releases. No surprise, as they were recorded at the same Norwegian church, albeit six months apart. A primary aim of this recording, clearly, was to capture the dynamics of live music, so if *Souvenir* sounds aggressive at times... well, massed violins have a *lot* of treble energy in life. As usual for this label, the multichannel presentation is definitely of the immersive kind and a carefully configured 5.1 system will give you exactly the disposition of the players as shown in photos and diagrams in the BD's booklet. Tonally, the recording is stunning. When a player, or group of players produce a sustained note on an open string, you can tell. Likewise, the extraordinary detail—in *all* formats—lets you know just how hard the musicians bear down on the string or when they bounce the bow for a more buoyant effect.

The LP version uses a slightly different mix which makes for a slightly more distant aural perspective. Download-to-BD comparisons are perhaps fairest using the stereo programs, as both are at 192kHz resolution. Telling these apart wasn't easy, though the download *may* have a tad more dynamic continuity. The 5.1 tracks available for purchase on the 2L Web site are "just" 24/96 FLAC files, and the superiority of the 24/192 surround version on Blu-ray is apparent. But 2L informed me that its Japanese distributor, e-ONKYO, sells the multichannel version as 192 kHz/24-bit Dolby True HD files, if you are so inclined.