

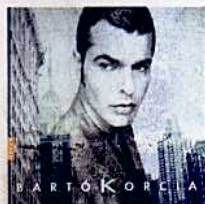
Bartók

Violin Concerto No 2^a. Contrasts^b. Solo Violin Sonata. Violin Sonata No 1^c
Laurent Korcia *vn* ^b**Michel Portal** *cl*
^{bc}**Jean-Effiam Bavouzet** *pf*
^a**City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo**
Naïve ② V4991 (114' • DDD). ^aRecorded live at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, in June 2004

Bartók

Contrasts^{ab}. Violin Sonata No 2^b. Solo Violin Sonata
Annar Follesø *vn* ^a**Björn Nyman** *cl*
^b**Christian Ihle Hadland** *pf*
Lindberg Lyd ② 2L28SACD (66' • DDD)

Compare and contrast: a concerto winner and sonata choices



Laurent Korcia plays Bartók's Second Violin Concerto as if he's known it and loved it since birth. Everything sounds so natural. Aside from drawing a big, demonstrative tone from his instrument, Korcia generates a high degree of tension in the many quieter passages – and here Sakari Oramo and his Birmingham players must take a fair slice of the credit. I'm thinking in

particular of the *calmo* episode at around 2'44" into the first movement where the soloist soars quietly above a shimmering backdrop made up of alternating semiquavers on violas, cello and basses. Within a minute or so the violins and violas intone what sounds like an ethereal chorale, all this marked *pp* or *ppp*, and superbly controlled by Oramo. Later on in the movement, the arguments hot up – the soloist's sudden *vivace* onrush at 6'46", for example, and the winds' jazzy riposte, really tight exchanges here, helped no doubt by being captured in a live context. The coda, too, with its resonating *pizzicati*, has a real snap to it. Warmth is another valuable ingredient: note for example the sudden flush to the first big string *tutti* in the second movement. A sense of play later on in the same movement marks a meaningful contrast, Korcia scurrying around what sounds like a cheeky march, again set against the rebounding snap of *pizzicati*. The finale, the first movement's mirror image, is lustily interpreted by Korcia and his collaborators, the coda wearing a broad smile. OK, not

everything is squeaky-clean; there are moments of overwrought solo delivery and the odd spot of imperfect orchestral articulation, but the sweep and spontaneity are infectious, Korcia's sound invariably full and gutsy, the whole production focused in an excellent, well balanced recording.

As to viable digital rivals, Mullova (Philips, 5/98) is compelling but cool, Pauk (Naxos, 1/00) a good central recommendation. But Korcia is special: he plays the Concerto as if he means every note and in my book that counts for a great deal. The *Contrasts* are for the most part also excellently played, though Korcia's last-movement cadenza is a bit too impulsive and rough-edged for comfort (if comfort is what you're after). Michel Portal has a creamy, mellifluous tone that reminds me of the original soloist, Benny Goodman, whose own playing wasn't anywhere near as agile. Jean-Effiam Bavouzet is a highly capable pianist, the performance of *Contrasts* somewhat freer than another fine new version by violinist Annar Follesø, who is marginally more reserved than Korcia (in spite of the manic cover photo), with clarinetist Björn Nyman and pianist Christian Ihle Hadland in obvious accord. Follesø's lean, brittle sound suits the grittier pages of the dusky Second Violin Sonata, which he plays with great gusto, though Christian Tetzlaff with Leif Ove Andsnes (Virgin, 9/04) tops him for subtlety. It's also worth mentioning Sherban Lupu's 'complete Bartók works for violin and piano' (Zephyr), very gypsy-like in style with folk tunes thrown in as examples of the works' origins (the Rhapsodies specifically), though pianist Ian Hobson is excessively prominent. As to Follesø, I liked his resilient, deeply felt account of the Solo Sonata, more so in fact than Korcia's which, although undeniably impassioned, is rather too wilful for my liking: the music's contours tend to lose shape in the heat of the moment. Compare the opening *Ciaccona* with Follesø, whose grip is so much firmer. Then again, Naïve's second CD was recorded seven or eight years before the first (ie. the Concerto and *Contrasts*) which, viewed in terms of a young player's career, is a pretty significant gap. Korcia and Bavouzet recorded the First Sonata at around the same time, finer in most respects with a very free-spirited slow movement, quite ghostly in the weird 'night music' episode around five minutes in. But again, Tetzlaff and Andsnes offer the more durable experience.

So, summing up, Korcia in the Violin Concerto is a sure-fire winner, with *Contrasts* virtually as good. Follesø is impressive in the Sonata but of recent rivals I'd incline more to the gentler, more lyrically engaging Baiba Skride (Sony, 3/06). As to the two mature

sonatas with piano, as I've already suggested, Tetzlaff and Andsnes remain top recommendations with Lupu an instructive alternative, if you can find it. **Rob Cowan**

Cage

27' 10.554" for a Percussionist (ed Amadinda). *Fads and Fancies in the Academy*^a. Four Dances, 'What so proudly we hail'^b
Amadinda Percussion Group
 (Zoltán Rácz, Károly Bojtos, Aurél Holló, Zoltán Vácsi *perc*) with ^b**Zoltán Gavodi** *ten*
^{ab}**Zoltán Kocsis** *pf*
Hungaroton ② HCD31847 (64' • DDD)

Revealed – Cage's C major shockers!



The fourth volume of Cage's percussion music contains some shocking revelations – at one time Cage wrote in glorious C major! These discoveries are pieces for dance and I suspect

that more could be found out about the circumstances of the original performances. *Fads and Fancies in the Academy* was given in a dance programme at Mills College in 1940 and has some weird titles attached to its seven movements. The first section, 'The pupil is eager to learn', sets the tone in Cage's bouncy rhythmic style. When we get to 'We deal with the total child', there's a C major oom-pah of a kind that could only have occurred later in one of Cage's extravaganzas by accidental tuning in on a radio. Surprises continue with 'Reactionaries', a salon piece with only a few surrealist twists; 'Revolutionaries' bring noise, symbolising a 'pitched battle'; 'Vistas of the future: pessimistic' are represented by a voice counting up to nine four times then cut off by the pianist with – of all things – a version of 'O du lieber Augustin'! 'Vistas: optimistic' come in C major with clapping.

The Four Dances (1942-43) use folk styles with vocal monody, clapping, swept and plucked piano strings, and the last one is a boogie-woogie – C major to the fore again. Some of this material links to later Cage and it amplifies our understanding of where he came from and points to where things were going with minimalism.

Percussionists haven't rushed to play 27' 10.554". Zoltán Rácz considers its demands to be impossible but, since Cage allows the use of recording, he is able to use multi-tracking effectively. No shocks here – predictably unpredictable Cage. Confident performances throughout and well recorded: the series should be better known.

Peter Dickinson