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Strings Magazine (Edith Eisler - 01.09.2011)

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Born in Vienna in 1904, Erica Morini started her career as a spectacular child violin prodigy. At the age of eight, she became the Vienna Music Academy's youngest and first female student. Her 1916 Vienna debut in the Paganini Concerto was a sensation; her first American tour in 1920 included an appearance with the New York Philharmonic. Yet, though regarded as one of the finest violinists of her day, she became famous less as an artist than as the first woman violinist with a successful international career, an injustice she deplored and resented. She died in New York in 1995.

As her playing on this live 1952 recording shows, Morini's tone was singularly beautiful: pure and silken, with a focused vibrato, variable in color and intensity, and unflinchingly expressive. Her technique was effortless and brilliant, her intonation impeccable—she never let her facility run away with her. An eloquent musician and distinctive personality, she combined a fiery temperament with sophistication, earthy robustness with tenderness and delicacy. The Tchaikovsky is lush, with many juicy slides, and very free: big tempo changes underline shifts of mood and character. Here, the orchestral sound is raucous and loud, and even Morini's own is scratchy sometimes. Stylistically a child of her time, she makes the Baroque works equally romantic, but gives the virtuoso pieces irresistible charm.

Unfortunately, she made few records, which may explain why she is not as well known as she deserves. But these recordings showcase her many gifts.