



Christian Ferras plays Beethoven and Berg Violin Concertos

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Like all long-time record collectors I have been aware of Christian Ferras, and over the years I have heard a few of his LPs and generally admired his playing. It wasn't until I read the notes for this disc, though, that I learned of his alcoholism and depression, which led him to commit suicide in 1982 at the age of 49.

The violinist playing the Beethoven Violin Concerto on this release was only 18 years old, a good decade younger than at the time of his commercial recording with Karajan. He plays with remarkable poise and maturity, and collaborates intelligently with the orchestra rather than battling it for domination.

The sound quality of the 1951 recording is surprisingly fine for its date, even knowing that it originates from broadcast master tapes. The performance may not supplant those of such geniuses as Szigetzi, Grumiaux, or Busch, but it is definitely worth hearing. The opening phrase of the second movement is missing from the existing tape but that is a very minor problem.

Ferras made an EMI recording of the Berg Concerto with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra and Georges Prêtre (there is also another live version with Ansermet and the Suisse Romande Orchestra on Claves). As I recall it was orchestrally superior to this 1964 live performance. Ferras plays fervently here, similarly to what I recall from the EMI version, concentrating more on the lyrical than the spiky qualities of the music. It's interesting to hear Freccia, the one-time conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, who died in 2004 at the age of 98. He was completely at home in twentieth-century music, having been introduced to Dallapiccola and other Italian modernists when he was only 17, and although the orchestra isn't world-class Freccia has it making sense out of somewhat challenging music.

Not a compelling issue for the general collector, perhaps, but violin aficionados may find it worth having and devotees of Ferras will be delighted at the chance to hear newly discovered performances of major works.