



Gioconda de Vito plays Beethoven, Brahms & Vitali

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It was the 'Bs' that formed the core of Gioconda de Vito's rather limited repertoire. She shunned violinistic showpieces, preferring to focus on the masterworks. Modern composers didn't much interest her either. She never played Sibelius, Stravinsky, Berg or Bartók, though she did make concessions to her Italian compatriots Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Casella and Pizzetti whose Violin Concerto she premiered in 1944. Two of the 'Bs' are represented here, joined by the Italian composer Tomaso Antonio Vitali.

De Vito carved out a successful career for herself at a time when violin concertising was very much a male bastion. Erica Morini, Johanna Martzy, Ginette Neveu, Camilla Wicks and Ida Haendel made similar inroads. As well as tramping the concert circuit, she forged a parallel teaching career. In 1949, she married David Bicknell, an EMI executive producer and, from 1951, lived in the UK; she never really mastered the English language, often needing a translator. Strangely, she was only fifty-four when she retired, never performing or teaching again, living happily in retirement in her cottage in Hertfordshire, England. She died in Rome in 1994, aged 87.

The contents of Audite's release are all new to the violinist's sparse discography, which makes the disc all the more welcome. She never recorded the Beethoven Violin Concerto in the studio, neither are there any other extant live airings apart from this 1954 RIAS performance. It attests to a congenial partnership between soloist and conductor. The opening movement is broad and spacious and has nobility and stature. De Vito savours the sublime lyricism of the score, judging the ebb and flow of the music instinctively. I didn't recognize the cadenza she uses, and Ruggiero Ricci's Biddulph recording, including fourteen alternative cadenzas, didn't come up with any answers. I liked it anyway – maybe it was her own. The slow movement is eloquent and imaginatively phrased and in the finale her bowing has real bite and tenacity. Intonation throughout is, for the most part, on the mark. This is a performance which certainly brings the music to life. The sound quality is excellent, not sonically compromised like some of her live airings I've heard that have hit the market-place over the years. The audience members were extremely well-behaved, and I only detected their presence between movements – the odd rustle and suppressed cough.

The Brahms Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100, with Michael Raucheisen, pre-dates the commercial recording she made at the Abbey Road Studios in London by five years. In that recording, Tito Aprea took the piano part, completing the HMV trilogy begun in 1954 with Edwin Fischer. Surprisingly, the audio quality of Audite's Berlin traversal far exceeds that of the later version: Testament SBT1024. The sound is more vivid and bright. Interpretively there is less divergence. The players convey

the intimacy, affection and luminous warmth that permeates the music. The first movement is spacious and relaxed. Joy and affability abound in the second movement, and an ardent glow suffuses the finale.

In 1948, de Vito made a commercial recording of the Vitali Chaconne, again at Abbey Road, London, in the orchestral version arranged by Ottorino Respighi. Her accompanists were the Philharmonia and Alberto Erede. Here Michael Raucheisen supports her, and takes a bit of a backseat, allowing the violinist, who is very forwardly projected, the spotlight. The opening theme is announced boldly and majestically, and as each variation becomes progressively more demanding, De Vito maintains the cumulative thrust with astounding virtuosity. I do confess to having a predilection for organ accompaniment in this work, my taste persuasively formed by my first encounter with it in the unsurpassable version by Jascha Heifetz.

This release fills a notable gap in the violinist's discography and receives my wholehearted endorsement.

