



Portrait Bronislaw Gimpel

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RECORD REVIEW Bronislaw Gimpel and Zino Francescatti

Bronislaw Gimpel (1911-79) made his debut at the age of eight in the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto and when he was 14 he played the Goldmark with the Vienna Philharmonic. He studied in Vienna with Robert Pollack and in Berlin with Carl Flesch. In 1937, Klemperer invited him to lead the Los Angeles Philharmonic and after the war Gimpel took up his European solo career again. Audite has released the radio recordings Gimpel made for RIAS during the 1950s: the Sibelius Violin Concerto (1955, with Fritz Lehmann), Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 2 (1957, with Arthur Rother) and Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No. 2 (1954, with Alfred Gohlke) and works for violin and piano, all with Martin Krause: sonatas by Schubert (A major, D524), Mendelssohn (F minor, Op. 4) Schumann (A minor, Op. 105), Tartini (Op. 1 No. 10, 'Didone abbandonata') and Janáček, and Karol Rathaus's Pastorale et Danse, Op. 39. The interesting notes with this set speak of Gimpel's 'vivacious, original musicality' and I can only agree with that: these performances show a soloist with a warm, commanding sound and great virtuosity in the big concertos. He is also a musician who brings sensitivity and intelligence to chamber music – the sinewy and muscular account of the Janáček sonatas strike me as particularly fine, while the Sibelius and Szymanowski are highlights of the concertos. As is regularly the case with Audite's remastered radio recordings, the quality of the sound is astonishingly good for its age; the presentation is good too. This set is a valuable chance to hear a violinist with a big musical personality who made far too few commercial recordings (Audite 21.418, three discs, 3 hours 2 minutes).

From the same generation as Gimpel, the French violinist Zino Francescatti recorded quite extensively (mostly for Columbia), but he's not well represented in the catalogue at the moment. It is fascinating to hear a live performance of the Brahms Violin Concerto from late in his career, given with the SWR SO and Ernest Bour in 1974, two years before Francescatti's retirement. His fleet-footed 1956 recording of the Brahms with Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra was followed by a more spacious stereo remake with Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic: both are notable for the fine-spun beauty of Francescatti's tone as well as his technical security. The same can't quite be said for this later version. His intonation and bowing are showing signs of raggedness, though there is still the noble sweetness of Francescatti's tone in more expressive passages. The coupling is a 1978 performance, also conducted by Bour, of Brahms's Serenade No. 2 in A major – a leisurely, affectionate account with some particularly attractive woodwind playing (Hänssler Classic CD94.219, 1 hour 12 minutes).