



Paul Tortelier: RIAS Recordings

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Gramophone (2020.05.01)

GRAMOPHONE

What we have here, to quote Rüdiger Albrecht's comprehensive Prior to the Casella Tortelier gives us an often contemplative, broadly paced account of Kodály's magnificent Op 8 Solo Sonata, quite different to more volatile near-contemporary versions by Zara Nelsova (Decca), János Starker (Period/Saga, his second recording of the work) or, from a little later, Pierre Fournier, the finale taped a day after the rest of the performance because an audience member had suffered from a highly audible cold. Musically speaking, the finale itself indulges just about every effect in the cellist's box of tricks (forceful multi-string pizzicatos, harmonics, trilling chords, wide-ranging arpeggios, etc), but because he doesn't rush things, Tortelier focuses this spectacular dance sequence with a vivid sense of location and a keen ear for detail.

The second disc opens with an emphatic account of Bach's Sixth Solo Suite, set at a lower pitch than Tortelier's generally more colourful 1982 London recording (Warner), whereas Fauré's G minor Sonata (always a work that Tortelier excelled in), although memorable, traces a less subtle line than the version he made with Jean Hubeau for Erato, especially in the Andante second movement. The first disc opens with an account of Beethoven's last cello sonata that's reflective and assertive by turns, Broddack here on very good form, before Tortelier treats us to a warmly communicative reading of Mendelssohn's Second Sonata, again with Broddack (Feuermann most readily comes to mind here), before Klaus Billing takes over for an unhurried and well-argued account of Brahms's First Sonata. The virtuoso aspect of Tortelier's personality is represented by the Paganini/Silva 'Moses Fantasia', which is brilliantly played. And the emergent personality throughout this set? A great cellist and a deeply human personality whose performances, comparing one with another, are deeply satisfying and in general very consistent. The transfers, taken from clean original mono tapes, fall pleasingly on the ear.