

CD Review 32

GINETTE NEVEU

Beethoven Violin Concerto S-West German Radio Orchestra, Hans Rosbaud. Rec. Sept. 1949

Ravel Tzigane New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Charles Munch. Rec. 2 January 1949

Brahms Violin Concerto Hague Residentie Orchestra Antal Dorati Rec. 10 June 1949

Chausson Poem New York Philharmonic Orchestra Charles Munch Rec. 2 January 1949

Two CDs Music & Art CD 837 (54.40 and 57.08)

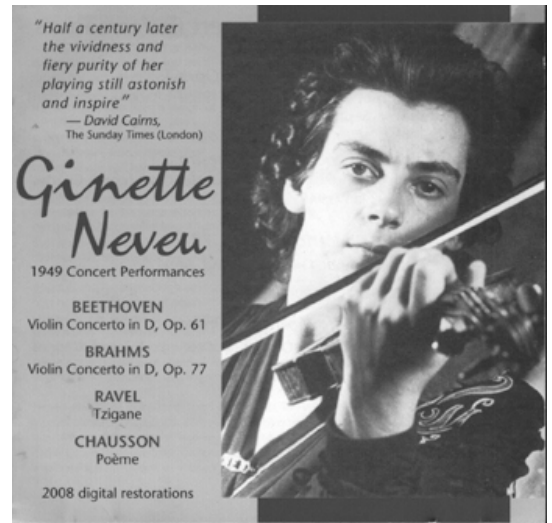
It is over sixty year ago that Ginette Neveu and her brother died in a plane crash. Had she lived she would have become the greatest violinist of her time so said Jacques Thibaud another French violinist who was also killed in a plane crash. Those who her play and still survive say that she was, without doubt, the finest violinist they have ever heard, seen or worked with. Ida Haendal, herself a very fine violinist, is on record as saying, 'She was the best of us all'. Pablo Casals said that she was magnificent and the best violinist he ever heard and he heard all the greats of his time. She beat David Oistrakh in a competition. Antal Dorati said that he had never met any soloist so focused and she would look at the conductor constantly and not 'just go off on her own'. She worked with the orchestra and conductor, not against them. To add to this, she was charming, full of life and a rare genuine servant of music.

A few myths have arisen about her. Barbirolli said that he had discovered her and made her a star. I have his comments recorded. Her success, he said, was all down to him. This is absolute nonsense. She was a star before Barbirolli ever heard her but Barbirolli was always making such claims. It was said that she was interested in the Elgar Concerto which is also not true. She did say that she liked the Walton concerto. It was said that when she was found in the crash she was clutching her Stradivarius which is also untrue. In fact she was buried as someone else until the mistake was discovered.

This double CD is a digital remastering of recordings made in the last year of her life.

I have over fifty recordings of the Beethoven Concerto and I know the work very well. This recording tops them all. The orchestra playing is first class as you would expect from the great Hans Rosbaud. What superb clarity and perfection he achieves with the heartbeats and how he observes the staccato horn writing. He makes the oboe and clarinet solos simple and direct and not mawkish. Neveu has perfect intonation and follows every instruction in the score. Her tone is sweet and absolutely delicious. In the quicker passages she is reliable and is devoid of showing off and affectation. Modern soloists take note. Her top B is choice. It is not shrill but beautiful and in perfect tune. I could name a lot of violinists who are not. The cadenza is impassioned and raw but, my goodness, it is faultless. I did not quite get the point of the slight slackening of the speed after the cadenza but this is such a minor point in the best performance of this work, that it probably does not matter.

The slow movement is marked Larghetto and is in G major with the strings con sordini. The music is plaintive and the bassoon soloist has an enviable clarity. Rosbaud gets the oboe to observe the staccato notes and accents which I have not heard before on all my recordings. After about five and a half minutes, Beethoven gives us real beauty and Neveu's reliable intonation and total accuracy is amazing. She makes her violin sing in the cantabile passage. Never heard it played better. A cadenza leads in to the Rondo finale.





Rosbaud gives the orchestra a wonderful atmosphere. The horns are meticulous with the instruction in the score. Where it is applicable there is a airy feeling and he obtains from his strings a velvety woody sound. The violin playing is out of this world. Is this a mere mortal playing it? She is mature beyond her years and the final pages of the cadenza are mind blowing. You can only admire her, lament her passing and wish that violinists today, even the great and popular ones, could reach the heights that she does.

One of the writers of the sleeve notes refers to Ravel's Tzigane as sexy which I cannot understand. I can understand men finding the glorious Violin Concerto of Berg as sexy because it portrays his love for an eighteen year old girl but it is the connotation and purpose that makes it sexy.

After four and a half minutes, the orchestra joins in this piece following some brilliant playing from Neveu. It is a work that does not appeal to me since the music is somewhat repetitive but not as disconcerting as the Bolero written four years later in 1928. The Tzigane is a work that displays the violinists skill and Neveu does so without any exaggeration. She has a good range of dynamics and her double stopping does not sound strained as it does with many violinists some of whom do exaggerate the music to promote themselves.

Much as I am a Beethovenian, Brahms' Violin Concerto is a better concerto than the Beethoven. It is superbly written for the violin and the orchestration is very good. Neveu's dynamics are very well judged and her very high notes are immaculate such as top Cs at bars 314 and 379. Her phrasing is excellent and the double stopping is smooth. She observes all that is in the score including the dolce lusingando at bar 224. There is a tremendous build up and the orchestra again excels at 271 ff. The tune at 304 is warm and glowing and Neveu's velvet solo at 304 is wonderful. The tenderness returns at 393.

The cadenza is full of impeccable artistry and contrast. There is a slight portamenti at one point and there is one in the Chausson Poem.

I do not like applause between movements but can understand it at the end of this movement.

The Adagio has a sadness with that opening beautiful oboe tune. The violin enters at 31 with the faultless intonation. How expressive are her low notes and the tenderness is very touching. The music is effortless in her hands and there is a very high D sparkingly pure.

The finale is unbeatable. The double stopping is breathtaking and Neveu has a truly magnificent spiccato. There is a tremendous passion and overwhelming excitement. You will not hear a better performance. You want to shout your approval and cheer but also weep for this superlative violinist tragically taken from us.

Dorati proves himself to be a fine conductor as well.

After a performance of this concerto in the 1980s the distinguished conductor Bryden Thomson said, 'It is such a pity that there is no great British violin Concerto!'

The Chausson Poem is loving music as David Drew said. It



has a tune to die for. It is sensual and has a warmth that often glows in the most benign way. The violin playing is, as usual, trustworthy and communicates so effectively. The modulations from E flat to F sharp, D and returning to E flat are well handled. I felt that very occasionally the orchestra was a bit heavy.

We are grateful to have these performances and the engineers have done a grand job in remastering for these CDs.

These CDs cannot be praised too highly. They are a testimony to the greatest female violinist of all time.

(See article [Ginette Neveu](#) on this site)

COPYRIGHT David C F Wright 2010. This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.