

Mark Kaplan

Violin

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Stravinsky and Berg Violin Concertos. Mark Kaplan, violin; Lawrence Foster conducting the Budapest Festival Orchestra. (Koch International Classics, 3-7530-2 III)

Lalo: Symphonie Espagnol; Manen: Concierto Espagnol. Mark Kaplan, violin; Lawrence Foster conducting the Orquestra Simfonica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya. (Koch International Classics, 3-7531-2 HI)

The Stravinsky and Berg CD pairs two very different 20th-century masterpieces and provides a fitting showcase for the talents of violinist Mark Kaplan, a young performer and professor of violin at UCLA. Berg transcends stringent 12-tone technique by guiding the ear with hints of tonality to the melodic, harmonic, and thus the emotional content of the music.

Written in memory of the teenage daughter of Alma and Walter Gropius who had just died of polio, Berg's concerto depicts her vibrant life with a lilting waltz and mourns her death with deeply moving lamentations, culminating in a quote from a Bach chorale. On the other hand, Stravinsky's concerto is a cheerful romp: brilliant, elegant, bouncy, rhythmically spiky, sarcastic, masterfully orchestrated, with lovely melodies in the slow movements. The performances are wonderful. Playing from deep inside the music,

Kaplan uses his brilliant virtuosity and strikingly beautiful, variable tone to evoke and instantly change mood, character, and expression; the orchestra supports him splendidly.

Only a performer could have written his scholarly, illuminating program notes.

The Lalo and Manen disc spotlights two Spanish violin concertos: one the best-known work of a familiar French composer, the other the unknown work of a forgotten Spanish composer. Like many of his compatriots, Edouard Lalo was attracted to the dance-rhythms and melodies of Spain. Written for Spanish violinist Pablo Sarasate, his *Symphonie Espagnol* abounds with technical fireworks and passionate ardor. Kaplan's dazzling virtuosity and sumptuous tone make it glow, shimmer, and soar. The first two movements are a bit fussy, but the rest is terrific. Juan Manen was a famous virtuoso on both piano and violin as well as a serious and prolific composer. This obscure concerto is distinguished by its unexpectedly chromatic harmonies, sometimes overly lush orchestration, and mixture of many different dance rhythms. A true showpiece, it makes use of every violinistic effect, including long passages in sixths and thirds, and ends high up with a bird-like trill. Though charming and inventive, it is a bit long and discursive, but the performance could not be more brilliant, persuasive, and affectionate.

—*Edith Eisler*