

Erica Morini was born in Vienna in 1904. Her father had trained as a violinist and ran a music school. Although she began ballet lessons at the age of four, her musical talents were quickly recognized, and she entered the Vienna Conservatory at seven as its youngest (and first female) student. She made her Viennese debut at the age of twelve, and by the following year played the Beethoven concerto under Nikisch, who proclaimed "This is not a Wunderkind, it is a wonder."

In January, 1921, she made a sensational American debut in New York at the age of seventeen, with critics comparing her to Heifetz. She continued to appear in the USA, Britain and the continent with Vienna as her home until the Anschluss forced her, among many other prominent Jewish artists, to relocate to America. She continued to concertize regularly until the mid-1960s with one final recital in 1976, and died in New York in 1995. New York Times critic Harold C. Schonberg called her "probably the greatest woman violinist who ever lived," although Morini herself said "[a] violinist is a violinist, and I am to be judged as one – not as a female musician."

Morini's recording career began shortly after her New York debut with a series of acoustic discs for the Victor Talking Machine Company. As was their practice at the time with other violinists on their roster, such as Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz, Morini was asked to record short, encore-like works that would fit on a single side, even if this meant abridgement (as in the case of the Sarasate Carmen Fantasy). The high number of takes for some of the sides (thirteen for the Toselli Serenade alone) document her struggle for perfection.

Already, at the age of seventeen, the hallmarks of her playing can be discerned: her amazing technical facility, her generous portamento, and the smoky, viola-like tones she could produce when called upon. A handful of her fourteen acoustic sides have been reissued over the years, but this is the first time they have been collected together since they were recorded, a hundred years ago and more.

After a three-year hiatus from the recording studio, Morini made a series of discs for Polydor and Electrola in Germany and for HMV in Britain from 1927 through 1929. A dozen further years away from the microphone lay ahead before she rejoined Victor to record the six sides heard at the beginning of the second half of our program. Interestingly, she remade three of the titles she had first waxed for the label twenty years earlier - the two Wieniawski works and the Sarasate Faust Waltz - while adding a Vivaldi Sonata that would point toward the kind of repertoire she would explore in greater depth in her 1950s LP recordings for Westminster.

Nearly four more years would pass until her next group of Victor sessions. The Brahms Hungarian Dances were recorded in numerical order, but originally presented as they are here. They are characterful readings, played with immense panache. Three months later, her final recording for the label would also be her first concerto recording, the Tchaikovsky, with the Chicago Symphony under its Belgian-born music director, Désiré Defauw. The recording, well-made for its time, virtually leaps out of the speakers with virtuosic excitement. Morini presses Defauw to keep up with her speed in the first movement; and throughout, each minor detail seems to have been carefully considered, and beautifully rendered, by the soloist.

Morini was among the last of the "old school" of Viennese violinists like Kreisler; and even during her career, her popularity was eclipsed by the rising number of Russian-trained fiddlers such as Heifetz, Milstein, Oistrakh and others who were influenced by them (Stern, Perlman). She is remembered today by few other than collectors of old violin recordings. It is to be hoped that reissues such as this will help remedy the situation, by bringing her considerable achievements to the fore once again - still a wonder, a century onward.

Mark Obert-Thorn



erica morini
the complete victor recordings

tchaikovsky
violin concerto

chicago symphony orchestra
conducted by désiré defauw

short works by
brahms
ravel
sarasate
schubert
schumann
vivaldi
wieniawski

studio recordings
1921 - 1945

Obert-Thorn

PRISTINE AUDIO
PASC 714

disc one: acoustic recordings (1921-1924) (53:12)

1. SARASATE Romanza andaluza from *Danzas españolas*, Op. 22 (4:59)
2. WIENIAWSKI Capriccio-Valse Op. 7 (4:21)
3. SARASATE Waltz from Fantasy on Gounod's *Faust*, Op. 13 (2:39)
4. ZARZYCKI Mazurka in G major Op. 26 (4:47)
5. WIENIAWSKI Romance from Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 22 (4:35)
6. GODARD Canzonetta from *Concerto romantique*, Op. 35 (3:03)
7. SCHUMANN At the fountain (2:46) (2:46)
8. SCHUBERT (arr. Franko) Valse sentimentale No. 10 from D.783 (2:25)
9. SVENDSEN Romance in G major Op. 26 (4:30)
10. TCHAIKOVSKY June (*Barcarolle*) from *The Seasons*, Op. 37a (3:44)
11. TOSELLI Serenata 'Rimpianto' Op. 6, No. 1 (2:35)
12. GUSTAV LANGE Blumenlied Op. 39 (4:24)
13. SARASATE Fantasy on Bizet's *Carmen* Op. 25 (3:46)
14. TOBANI Hearts and Flowers Op. 245 (4:38)

disc two: electric recordings (1941 & 1945) (70:10)

VIVALDI (arr. Respighi) Violin Sonata in D major, RV 10

1. 1st Mvt. - Moderato (2:12)
2. 2nd Mvt. - Allegro moderato (2:23)
3. 3rd Mvt. - Largo (1:29)
4. 4th Mvt. - Vivace (2:31)

5. WIENIAWSKI Romance from Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 22 (4:23)
6. WIENIAWSKI Capriccio-Valse, Op. 7 (4:30)
7. RAVEL (arr. Catherine) Pièce en forme de Habenera (2:26)
8. SARASATE Waltz from Fantasy on Gounod's *Faust*, Op. 13 (2:33)
9. BRAHMS (arr. Joachim) Hungarian Dance No. 17 in F-sharp minor (2:51)
10. BRAHMS (arr. Joachim) Hungarian Dance No. 6 in B-flat major (3:20)
11. BRAHMS (arr. Joachim) Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G minor (2:38)
12. BRAHMS (arr. Joachim) Hungarian Dance No. 7 in A major (2:10)
13. BRAHMS (arr. Joachim) Hungarian Dance No. 8 in A minor (2:42)
14. BRAHMS (arr. Joachim) Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor (3:04)

TCHAIKOVSKY Violin Concerto in D Major Op. 35

15. 1st Mvt. - Allegro moderato (16:55)
16. 2nd Mvt. - Canzonetta: Andante (6:03)
17. 3rd Mvt. - Finale: Allegro vivacissimo (7:58)

Erica Morini, violin



PASC 714

disc one:

Alice Morini, piano (Tracks 1 - 3, 9 - 10)

Emanuel Balaban, piano (Tracks 4 - 8)

Sándor Vas, piano (Track 11)

Kurt Hetzel, piano (Track 12)

Orchestra/Unidentified Conductor (Track 13)

Nathaniel Shilkret, piano (Track 14)

Recorded in the Victor Studios, Camden, New Jersey (Tracks 1 - 13)
and New York (Track 14)

disc two:

Max Lanner, piano (Tracks 1 - 8)

Artur Balsam, piano (Tracks 9 - 14)

Chicago Symphony Orchestra/Désiré Defauw
conductor (Tracks 15 - 17)

Recorded in RCA Studio No. 1, New York (Tracks 1 - 14)
and Orchestra Hall, Chicago (Tracks 15 - 17)

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Special thanks to Jim Cartwright of Immortal Performances,
Inc. for providing the acoustic recordings

Full discographic information can be found online at the
Pristine Classical website

Total duration: 2hr 3:22

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