

LIVMIGDAL PRESSE

VIOLINE

Music as refuge in times of emotional/spiritual crisis is the theme of this simply superb recital. In each of the three composer's cases, music was a key point of refuge during significant stages of their lives.

How arrestingly the disc begins, with those keening gestures of the Adagio of the Bach instantly speaking to the heart. Written in 1720, and therefore at the time of the sudden death of his first wife, Maria Barbara, the music speaks with a sort of laden eloquence. It's difficult to imagine more of a connection with the music than Liv Migdal exudes here, in a performance of immense intelligence married to an equally impressive emotionality. Migdal uses a Baroque bow for the Bach. The vast, 12-minute Fuga seems to pose no technical challenges to this executant; we follow the music's trajectory easily, but simultaneously feel the pain, the many stoppings creating sudden forests of sound that challenge the music's progress. The end of the movement is the result of an astonishing journey; here one feels that sense of arrival, yet there also feels as if there is more to do, hence the arrival of the relatively short but consoling Largo. Even in the finale, it is only retrospectively that one notices Migdal's all-consuming virtuosity; during the performance, it is the spirit of joy that captivates, her articulation being a delight. There is, of course, a raft of recordings—and approaches to—this piece, from Rachel Barton-Pine to Giuliano Carmignola, from Isabelle Faust and Alina Ibragimova to Nathan Milstein and, of course, Menuhin, but Migdal carves out her own unique space. Another unifying factor of this disc is in fact Yehudi Menuhin himself, who was so associated with solo Bach but also key to the Bartók and the Ben-Haim works (which were both commissioned by him).

The music of Paul Ben-Haim speaks with a powerful eloquence. Born Paul Frankfurter in Munich in 1897, he changed his name in response to forced exile by the Nazis. The musical language of his Violin Sonata (1951) is fascinating in that it seeks to unite Western and more Oriental musics. The balance is impeccably managed on a compositional level, and perfectly projected here in this performance.

While listening, it is literally impossible to imagine a greater account. Menuhin set a requirement that the piece be difficult, but certainly the first movement's many challenges pose no problems to Migdal. It is the central lonely song of the Lento *e sotto voce* wherein Migdal impresses most: a lament from the heart that seems to carry the weight of the Judaic tradition proudly, and softly, on its shoulders. Migdal's

sweet upper register seems to issue forth from some heavenly space far above any considerations of race, nationality or creed; she spins the line from the finest silken thread. The finale, simply marked *Molto Allegro*, is on one level a Hebrew flight of a bumble bee; but descriptive though that is, it is to demean a work of high individuality. I'd rather hear the Ben-Haim than that pesky Rimsky buzzing any day, anyway. Again, here is what might be called hidden, or retrospectively-experienced, virtuosity. Instead, one gets carried away by the unstoppable energy, in terms of both kinetic energy and emotional power that Migdal calls upon.

There are a number of alternatives to this performance, and interestingly on Avie, Herwig Zack also couples Ben-Haim with Bach (in his case, the First Solo Violin Sonata), but adds Bloch and Berio to the mix (his disc is entitled *Four Strings* but it could also be called "Four Bs"). Menuhin himself, too, is there, his direct line to the music beyond question, while Hagai Shaham on Hyperion was warmly welcomed by Robert Maxham in *Fanfare 30:6*; the same reviewer also praised that stunning violinist Zino Francescatti in this work (as did Huntley Dent). But Migdal lives this music as well as loves it, and she is utterly, utterly compelling.

She is equally compelling in Bartók's magnificent edifice for solo violin, that composer's last completed work. The first movement is *Tempo di ciaccona*, instantly linking it with Bach (the famous Chaconne from the D-Minor Partita looms large in the background). Migdal offers here the original version of the finale, with its micro-intervals (Bartók offered Menuhin a smoothed-out version that was used for the 1944 premiere). The second movement *Fuga* could only be by Bartók, with so many fingerprints in one place. Prime among these is the rhythmic vitality, honored superbly here by Migdal; all of this is eclipsed, however, by the song of the adagio "Melodia." Migdal's upper reaches are impossibly pure, with the stoppings speaking of two clear, independent voices. Tuning here, as everywhere, is beyond criticism. The finale, a *Presto*, finds articulated shadows impacting on the spots of brightness. This is a terrific performance to crown a terrific disc. Recording quality is excellent: present and detailed, but not disrespectfully close.

Listen straight through from beginning to end to really appreciate what an achievement this disc is.