

ILYA KALER

Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto / Souvenir d'un lieu cher – Album Review

Violinist Ilya Kaler plays with excitement and conviction, fire and soul, which are sometimes missing in a work that requires a good deal of Russian passion. One of the first criticisms of the Concerto was its supposed trivial “Cossack” element, something that today has become its biggest selling point. Anyway, Kaler does not shy away from the big moments, yet he seems equally at home in the meditative stages, too. I thought during the first few minutes of the performance that Kaler lacked the requisite fervor for this work, but either he or I warmed up to the proceedings, and by the time it was over, I was a believer. In addition, the disc offers up the Serenade mélancolique, the Souvenir d'un lieu cher, and the Valse-Scherzo, all worthy, if lesser-known Tchaikovsky pieces. Personally, I would have opted for a second violin concerto, maybe the Lalo concerto that inspired Tchaikovsky, but that's neither here nor there.

John J. Puccio | Classical Candor | June 2010

In the 1980's Ilya Kaler had the quite unique achievement of winning the Tchaikovsky, Sibelius and Paganini competitions, the three great luminaries in the violin world. It was to herald a career that has taken him around the world many times performing with most of the world's most prestigious orchestras. If from that description you are expecting an extrovert firebrand performance of the concerto you are going to be disappointed, for Kaler is a musician of impeccable good taste who places his technique at the service of the composer, his task simply to bring the printed page to life. Tempos for the outer movements are quick but never breathless, the agility of his left hand matched by a bowing technique that ensures crisp articulation, the spiccato passages in the finale being a particular joy. He offers a very pure tone not indulged by exaggerated resonance on the lower strings, and avoids any wayward rhythmic distortion. Even the passage on harmonics in the finale is taken without the heavy slowing that we usually encounter. I enjoy the lightweight and free flowing central Andante that never gets bogged down with sentimentality, his instrument singing with silvery sweetness. I would forgive him an exciting dash to the finishing line that we have come to expect. All of these many virtues continue through the disc, and if you want to sample this great virtuoso go to track 8, the Valse-Scherzo, the violin dancing around its big bold waltz tune. There have not been other recordings that bring together all four of Tchaikovsky's violin and orchestra works, and even in the presence of legendary recordings of the concerto—with David Oistrakh surely the greatest interpretation—I would strongly commend this disc to you. The sound quality is among the very best, Yablonsky bringing a most responsive accompaniment from the orchestra.

David Denton | David's Review Corner | February 2007