



Copland and Brahms Sonatas

Volkan Orhon, double bass

Rose Chancler Feinbloom, piano

Centaur Records CRC 2878

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Turkish-born **Volkan Orhon** is professor of double bass at the University of Iowa and fast becoming one of the top soloists in the U.S. or anywhere. He has an impressive list of awards to his credit and this, his second CD will amply demonstrate why. The CD contains two sonatas, both of which are fast becoming standard bass fare.

Aaron Copland's Sonata for Violin and piano was written during 1942 and 1943, partly in New York and partly in Hollywood while he was working on the score for his fourth film NorthStar. In his oeuvre it sits between two masterworks, the ballets Rodeo and Appalachian Spring and is entirely representative of his mature and concentrated writing style. Dedicated to Harry H. Dunham, a friend of the composer who lost his life while on active duty in the South Pacific just as the work was completed, it was premiered in New York in 1944. Most importantly for bassists is the time Gary Karr spent with the composer in Poughkeepsie, N.Y in the late 1970s working on a realization of the work for bass which the composer was reportedly delighted with (this occurred while Copland's biographer Vivian Perils was interviewing the composer. As Gary tells: "Perlis, who was there to do more work on her biography, was visibly angry that Copland was devoting so much time to me instead of working on her book with her. She, therefore, left out of her biography, the fact that Copland and I had this collaboration.")

Copland's sonata is performed here with great fluidity and sensitivity. The tender lyricism of the first movement's opening is dramatically contrasted with the nervous intensity of the faster paced sections. Orhon's intonation throughout is impeccable, his use of vibrato very tasteful. Despite the angular rhythmic sections and brisk pace of much of the movement the lyrical growth and emotional development is much slower paced, rarely moving far from the eight-note theme with its characteristic prominent fourth interval and here Orhon demonstrates a real understanding of the work's architecture.

The second movement is bare and poetic; the simple counterpoint sensitively shaped by Orhon with great restraint and the third movement again shows off Orhon's technique and musicality with a flawless performance, clearly highlighting all the contrasts between the lighter/faster and more serious lyrical sections.

Brahms's first cello sonata is perhaps more common transcription-fare for bassists (it was performed three times at the 2007 ISB Convention and has been recorded several times) and this is one of the finest performances I have heard of the sonata on any instrument. It occupies a far more dramatic landscape than the Copland but again Orhon's sense of timing and shape make for a compelling reading. The balance throughout is very good, the recording rich and detailed. After the death of Schumann in 1865, Brahms emerged as one of the most significant voices in chamber music and this is one of his earliest published works in the genre. While a natural extension of the classical tradition Brahms' fascination with Bach is especially evident in the fugato theme of the third movement which bears more than a passing resemblance to the Contrapunctus No.13 of the Art of Fugue. Orhon manages to bring out a great deal of contrast and emotional breadth in his reading, the second movement perhaps slightly cautious but the final Allegro is passionate and exciting. Such recordings are justification in themselves for such transcriptions; a very successful recording.

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