

Joshua Bell - Voice Of The Violin (2006)

Written by bluesever

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1 Vocalise 5:52 2 Ave Maria 4:44 3 Pourquoi me réveiller 2:37 4 Après un rêve 2:51 5 Lied an den Mond 5:29 6 Laudate Dominum 4:44 7 None but the Lonely Heart 2:51 8 Una furtiva lagrima 4:17 9 In trutina 2:35 10 Frühlingslied 2:19 11 Beau Soir 2:33 12 Estrellita 3:17 13 Nana 2:12 14 Je Crois Entendre Encore 3:32 15 Morgen! (Tomorrow) (feat. soprano: Anna Netrebko) 3:42
Joshua Bell (Violin) Frederic Chiu (Piano) Anna Netrebko (Soprano)
Orchestra of St. Luke's Women's Chorus Michael Stern – conductor

Following his 2003 crossover smash *Romance of the Violin*, wunderkind Joshua Bell and his sonically awesome 1713 Stradivarius (he clutches it closely like a nervous lover in the back cover photo, seemingly afraid it will desert him) pursues a related project with *Voice of the Violin*. Whereas *Romance of the Violin* drew on pieces originally written in a variety of media, *Voice of the Violin* shows Bell's ability to make his instrument "sing" in vocal pieces. As with the earlier album, Bell goes for a specific type of piece -- slow or moderate in tempo, with a passionate, wide-ranging melody that allows him to show off his rich, spacious sound on both the violin's bottom and top strings. There are orchestral and keyboard-accompanied songs, operatic arias, Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*, and sacred pieces, all but one heard here in new orchestral arrangements. Many of these are by film composer J.A.C. Redford, and they have a film-music quality -- they combine sentiment with a certain background-music feel, with low contrast from piece to piece. Bell doesn't program any fiery, fast-tempo music, generating variety instead through slow rises in intensity that culminate in a luscious performance of Debussy's song *Beau soir* (Beautiful Evening) accompanied by piano on track 11, and in the introduction of an actual voice, that of operatic soprano Anna Netrebko, on Richard Strauss' *Morgen!* (Tomorrow!), the final track. Bell alludes to the example of Heifetz and other violin stars who frequently performed arrangements, but Heifetz would never have played a program as homogeneous as this one. Bell appeals to a desire for surface sensuousness alone. But he executes his plan well, and anyone in need of a demonstration of his formidable talent should check out track 6, the "Laudate Dominum" aria from Mozart's *Vesperae de Confessore*, K. 339. This long, slow-unfolding melody is a challenge for singers in its vocal version; generating the breath to support it all the way through is quite a task. The high, quiet entrances and the subtle dynamics challenge the violinist equally severely, but Bell's performance is a model of control

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and resultant tranquility. For the car, for the commute, even for the romantic encounter, this disc has its uses. Those who would prefer to hear Bell in mainstream repertory may find it a bit limited in variety, but this rising megastar has certainly pulled off another flawless performance.

--- James Manheim, Rovi

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