Chabrier – Espana & others Roussel – Suite in F (1991)

1. Chabrier: España - Rhapsody for Orchestra 6:40 2. Chabrier: Suite pastorale - 1. Idylle 4:04 3. Chabrier: Suite pastorale - 2. Danse villageoise 4:20 4. Chabrier: Suite pastorale - 3. Sous-bois 2:57 5. Chabrier: Suite pastorale - 4. Scherzo-Valse 4:39 6. Chabrier: Le roi malgré lui - Fête polonaise 7:36 7. Chabrier: Gwendoline - Overture 8:43 8. Chabrier: Le roi malgré lui - Danse slave 5:12 9. Chabrier: Joyeuse marche 3:40 10. Chabrier: Bourreé fantasque 6:15 11. Roussel: Suite in F, Op.33 - 1. Prelude 4:02 12. Roussel: Suite in F, Op.33 - 2. Sarabande 4:51 13. Roussel: Suite in F, Op.33 - 3. Gigue 4:20 Detroit Symphony Orchestra Paul Paray – conductor

This well-known and well-loved collection of Chabrier favourites makes a welcome return to the catalogue in remastered SACD form. As is to be expected from this source, the sound is quite spectacular for the 1950s; comparable to the wonders our own John Culshaw and Walter Legge were achieving. Tape hiss appears quite prominent at first, until one realises that the recordings are cut at a very high level, so when the music starts it emerges from the speakers with a quite phenomenal degree of immediacy. Brass rings out thrillingly, bass drums shake the floorboards and the whole aural ‘picture’ is one of full-blooded realism and impact.

As for the performances, I know of no other Chabrier collection that is carried off with more panache and life-affirming spontaneity. Although comparisons are often odious, I did have to hand a very serviceable disc from Armin Jordan and the French National Orchestra on Erato which has many of the same items and has served me well. Playing them side by side was rather cruel, for in just about every case Paray’s rhythmic grip and freewheeling exuberance made the French set seem mundane, workaday and even plain boring, even in this music. It’s not just about tempos (though in every case Paray has more urgency), rather about getting out of your orchestra playing of character, charisma and the right degree of wit and gusto. Thus the most famous item, the ubiquitous España, gets what must be the most sparkling and good-humoured performance ever committed to disc, Beecham notwithstanding. The lovely Suite pastorale is beautifully shaped, its disarming simplicity played straight and for the best,

although the swift, almost aggressive, pace of the ‘Sous bois’ third movement may pull some listeners up short. The gloriously Wagnerian overture to ‘Gwendoline’ gets playing of great swagger and theatricality, and a truly uproarious performance of Bourée fantasque finishes the Chabrier items in fitting fashion.

The Roussel Suite in F is more than just a filler, it’s a real find. Anyone who responds to this composer’s particularly vital, bustling brand of neo-classicism (such as the Third and Fourth Symphonies) will love this. A Koussevitzky commission, it dates from 1926 and is in perfectly balanced three-movement form. It opens with a driving, propulsive Prelude (marvel at the unanimity of the Detroit strings), which gives way to a lovely Sarabande, where the chromatic harmonies and angular melodic lines have a Prokofiev-like intensity. The closing Gigue reverts back to the toccata-style drive of the opening, and makes for a memorable 13 minutes, especially in a performance of such brilliance and virtuosity. ---Tony Haywood, musicweb-international.com

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