

A.J. Kernis, J.N. Howard – Violin Concertos (2018)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)
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Kernis: Violin Concerto 1. I. Chaconne 16:09 2. II. Ballad 10:28 3. III. Toccata 5:45 J.N. Howard: Violin Concerto 4. I. 10:12 5. II. Andante semplice 7:48 6. III. Presto 8:37 7. Bramwell Tovey - Stream of Limelight 9:21 James Ehnes - violin Seattle Symphony Orchestra (1 - 3) Ludovic Morlot - conductor (1 - 3) Detroit Symphony Orchestra (4 - 6) Cristian Macelaru (4 - 6)

This program features the world premiere recordings of three works written for violinist James Ehnes. Familiar to movie fans the world over, James Newton Howard has composed over 120 film scores. Upon being commissioned to write a violin concerto, Howard admitted to feeling, 'thrilled, excited, expectant and ultimately terrified.' Pulitzer Prize winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis first composed for Ehnes in 2007 and a few years later his Violin Concerto followed. Bramwell Tovey and James Ehnes's musical relationship dates back to 1990, and they have performed together countless times. Stream of Limelight gives James's incredible technique ample opportunity to dazzle, and is a superb finale to this fascinating album of new compositions. ---Editorial Reviews

The music on this Onyx release wasn't conceived as a single presentation: the three works were recorded in Seattle, Detroit, and Monmouth (U.K.), over a period spanning almost a year and a half, and there are two violin concertos, performed respectively with the Seattle and Detroit Symphonies, and a programmatic violin-and-piano piece. Yet Canada's James Ehnes is one of the hottest violinists on the planet, and it's hard to fault Onyx for grouping three works that have in common extremely fluent virtuoso writing that displays his talents to the hilt. Indeed, the album garnered a pair of Grammy award nominations, for Ehnes for Best Classical Instrumental Solo, and for Aaron Jay Kernis for Best Contemporary Classical Composition, and

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won both categories. The three works are attractively varied, from the straight neo-Romanticism of film composer James Newton Howard (who scored, among other works, *My Best Friend's Wedding*) to the general 20th century idiom of the prolific Kernis, to the *Stream of Limelight* of British composer Bramwell Tovey, where Ehnes is joined by pianist Andrew Armstrong. To these ears, the last is the most distinctive of the three works, which break no new ground but would in all cases be thrilling to hear played by Ehnes in person. Onyx engineers have knitted the various sound sources together reasonably effectively, and the album is a genuine crowd-pleaser from start to finish. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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