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PAGANINI 24 Caprices

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PAGANINI 24 Caprices

(24) Caprices

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How on earth does one transfer Paganini's Op 1, a vade mecum of idiomatic violin pyrotechnics, to the flute? Though some inevitably work better than others, a high proportion of the 24 Caprices, perhaps surprisingly, sound in Marina Piccinini's resourceful arrangements as though they might have been specially written for the instrument. Among the best are No 5 in A minor, the presto section of No 11, No 17 (its sostenuto opening rewritten to provide an alternative to the violin's long held minims) and the famous final A minor variations of No 24 (Var 8 uses staccato tonguing to convey the violin's pizzicato and arco exchanges).

Ms Piccinini is the Heifetz of the flute. Her fluency and articulation are quite literally breathtaking - no cheating in any of the innumerable and lengthy pages of rapid passagework, every note as clear as a bell - putting one in mind of the great John Amadio. With a liquid, honeyed tone throughout its considerable range (down to a low B natural at the end of Caprice No 2) and superbly recorded, I have rarely heard the solo flute sound quite as beautiful as this. The Caprices in her hands emerge as a collection of miniature tone-poems each with its distinct character.

Just five seconds shy of 100 minutes is too much at a single sitting, no matter how beguiling the playing - I suggest a disc at a time - but whatever, do try and hear Marina Piccinini who, as well as being an extraordinary musician, is also, I learn from the booklet, 'a 36th generation Shaolin Fighting Monk'. No, really.



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@Paul_Kasner He does look a bit like David Gower...

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