

Forgotten Records: Russian and East European Adventures

by Rob Barnett

[Forgotten Records](#), based in Brittany, is a French enterprise headed by Alain Deguernel. It looks as if they have access to a very large library of French market 1950s LPs and beyond. More to the point, its vinyl is in good heart. Minimal processing is applied although not as minimal as Pearl and less agreeably 'interventionist' than Pristine or Dutton. The end result is that the accustomed aural ballistic detritus is meticulously interdicted. As for background and surface 'shush' these are left in place. The catalogue ranges far and wide and is worth a browse; just set aside an hour or two. The following selection culled from FR's forays into Russian repertoire and other Soviet Bloc LPs pleased me, including as it does more than a few otherwise lost treasures. Their CDs are usually presented without notes - just the basic details on a card insert.

BALAKIREV

Thamar [21:49]

Russia [13:39]

Islamey, Fantaisie orientale [9:29]

BORODIN

Prince Igor: Overture [9:56]; Prelude [4:55]; Danses polovtsiennes [14:04]

Philharmonia Orchestra/Lovro von Matačić

Original edition: Columbia CX 1280 and SAX 2327

rec. 1954-58. Mono and Stereo, Kingsway Hall

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR980 [73:57]



Amongst the legion of 1950s and 1960s conductors the Croatian, Lovro von Matačić (1899-1985), while busy in concert hall and studio, left only a light mark on history. Glamorous names with boxed sets, editions, series and even societies of their own have cast an obliterating shadow. Testament and Supraphon have done their bit and this disc further evens up the balance or at least produces accessible testimony so that people can make up their own minds.

This typically colourful Russian nationalist collection is among FR's longest runners at 73:57. There have been more intensely colour-suffused *Thamars* but this is a most carefully disciplined reading - low key at first but spreading its emotional wings wide at the climax. It is not as darkly drawn as some but is most beautifully recorded. The same goes for *Russia* and the yet more exotic *Islamey*. This is wildly rapped out in a feral orchestration by Brucknerian Franz Schalk, of all people. The Borodin pieces are equally eloquent and go with a lilt and a whirl even if the beat does become rather inflexible towards the end of the overture - more abandon and less rigidity would have helped. A good marriage of these virtues is struck in the excellent *Polovtsian Dances*.

More than half a century old, the sound is not hi-fi but does not sell Matačić or the listener short. This is a specialist issue that stands as a fearless witness for a conductor whose reputation thrived some fifty years ago.

TCHAIKOVSKY *Manfred Symphony* op. 58

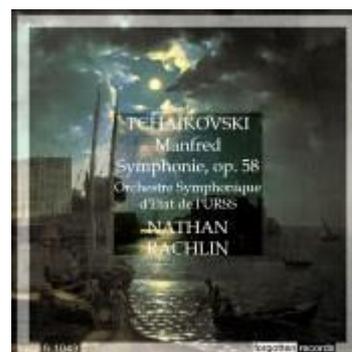
Orchestre Symphonique d'Etat de l'URSS/Nathan Rachlin

rec. 1959, Moscow

Original edition: Melodiya D-4884

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR1043 [58:47]

Given that his LPs are not numerous Nathan Rachlin appears not to have been the conductor of first or second choice at Melodiya. Even so, he left behind some major landmarks including a good Glazunov



Fourth Symphony and Glière Third. His *Manfred* recording makes a virtue of braying brass (6.40) and a sweet warble from the French horns (7:20). Wild and impulsive accelerations are there (13:43) but this reading is not as possessed or as raw as Svetlanov's mid-1960s USSRSO recording. Rachlin can be enjoyed in pretty clean sound but there is some crumble and blast at 16.00. He reserves some strikingly haughty, cruel majesty for the very end of the first movement. The second is a fly-away *Vivace* followed by a tender *Andante*. He adheres to a rigid tempo in the finale and brings out the movement's rather nationalist writing (something which Tchaikovsky reviled) contrasting with the lodestone style of the last three numbered symphonies.

TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 4 in F minor

Philharmonia/Thomas Schippers

rec. 1957

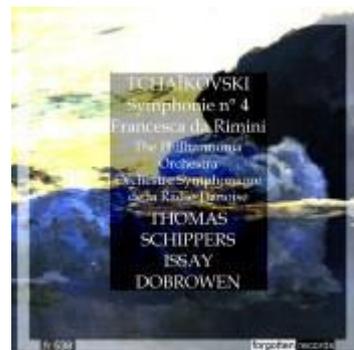
Francesca da Rimini

Orchestre Symphonique de la Radio Danoise/Issay Dobrowen

rec. 1949

Original edition; Columbia CX 1609 - Blue Bird LBC 1010

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR538 [65:17]



Schippers is a better known and more accustomed face in the opera house. Here is a Tchaikovsky Fourth from London in 1957. Its virile and the dynamic terracing is done with great sensitivity by Schippers' players and engineers. Listen to the third movement with its pizzicato crescendo. In this and other respects Schippers falls not far short of Mravinsky's 1960s deflagration, just with the manic meter turned a notch of two down. Still, it's virtuoso playing. This is grandstanded Tchaikovsky playing which no Tchaikovskian should be excused the opportunity of hearing. I rather liked Marin Alsop's Colorado version ([Naxos](#)) which I reviewed ten or more years ago but the fervour of this reading rather puts that one in the shade.

Turning now to Dobrowen's *Francesca*. He is up against the possessed pyroclastic onslaughts of Ovchinnikov on Olympia, Mravinsky on various labels, Stokowski's New York Stadium Orchestra on Everest and HDTT and an RFH concert performance from the late 1970s by Ahronovitch. Issay Dobrowen is heard here in 1949 with the DRSO so it's the most venerable of the recordings here. He does tend to take the slow sections very slowly, a bit like Yuri Ahronovitch, but the fast sections fairly fly. The great romantic arch swoons splendidly at 9:32 and the closing pages whirl and gallop like the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Impressively good but it's still not as awesome as Ovchinnikov.

RACHMANINOV

Symphony No 1 [41:28]

Orchestre Symphonique de la Radio de Stockholm/Jacques

Rachmilovich

Symphonic Dances [34:00]

Orchestre Symphonique de la Radio de l'URSS/Alexander Gauk

rec. 1952-56

Original edition: Mercury MG 10111 and Decca LW 50087

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR1063 [75:29]



This fully-packed disc pairs 1950s readings of Rachmaninov's ill-fated First Symphony with a masterwork from the composer's last years. It's a spicy mix with a Russian-born USA-domiciled conductor directing a Scandinavian orchestra. Add to this an out-and-out Soviet production of the *Symphonic Dances*. Both were sourced from USA-originated LPs.

Rachmilovich (1895-1956) was, for much of his life, a California resident. He made some well recognised recordings of Russian works including Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 2 (Shura Cherkassky), Khachaturian Violin Concerto (Louis Kaufman), Glière *Ilya Mourametz*, Glazunov's Fourth Symphony and Kabalevsky's Second Symphony. His Rachmaninov First Symphony was an early recording and it was an interesting choice to pair Rachmilovich with the Stockholm Radio Orchestra. This is a lively version, with flighted fantasy in the second movement and imperial haughtiness in the finale. The recording is necessary to an understanding of how Rachmaninov's music emerged from sniffy disapproval. These were, after all, early days and only six years after the composer's death in California which was also Rachmilovich's accustomed stamping ground.

Gauk's *Symphonic Dances* have all the requisite virtues and it should be remembered that when this LP was made the Soviet Union had only just completed its rehabilitation of a composer who had initially abandoned his homeland in the wake of the Revolution. Gauk shows sound judgement in applying sharply defined rhythms but his *Tempo di Valse* is unfeeling. In this he does not match up to one of the glories of the Melodiya catalogue: Kondrashin's Moscow RSO stereo recording from the 1960s. That version is nothing short of thrilling. Quite apart from the emotional kick it also pours dazzling colour into the sound. Gauk might not be as well served by the recording technology of the 1950s but the parts where he shows a possessed approach and absorption in this brilliant score surely exercised a measure of influence on Kondrashin. Certainly Gauk allows the tam-tam at the close of the vertiginous hay-ride of the third dance to resonate for almost as long as Kondrashin does. Of today's conductors only Yuri Temirkanov has come anywhere near as close as Kondrashin to finding, sparking and igniting the tinder in this master-work.

As for the present disc - it's all fascinating stuff not least for its testimony to early Soviet embrace with a composer once denigrated in the USSR. He was sneered at by the Western intelligentsia in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s - try his entry in the 1950s edition of Grove.

RACHMANINOV

Symphony No 2 [54:44]

Orchestre Symphonique de la Radio de l'URSS/Alexander Gauk
rec. 1956, Moscow

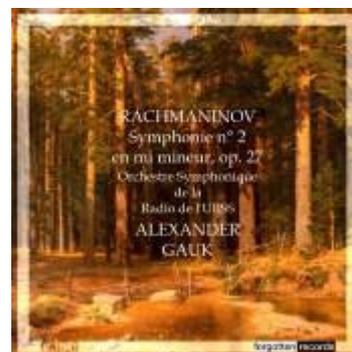
Original edition: Westminster XWN 18424

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR1041 [54:44]

Rachmaninov's Second Symphony is now much recorded and performed. It has achieved this despite its length and large orchestra. Gauk lets rip in a performance that allows little space for repose except in the accustomed dreaminess of the *Adagio*. This is a great performance - impulsive, not short on over-toppling excitement, swooning sway, ardour and exultation. An earlier - the first - Soviet recording (Golovanov) - is exceptional, being typically possessed, wild-eyed, breathless and dizzyingly fast. Gauk turns the notch down from hysteria but retains the ardour and pours the accelerant onto the conflagration yet retains control. From the analogue stereo, he is by no means as broad as Sanderling in one of my favourite epic readings but he has more personality than the starry atmospherics of the complete Previn on EMI. From the digital age do try Rozhdestvensky and the LSO which can be the most-Russian sounding of orchestras outside the Federation.

Rachmaninovians should make it their business to hear this recording. It is of far more than mere archival interest. It always sounds, cuts and all, like a risk-taking performance. A reading on the edge and not a studio controlled assemblage of takes.

I am not sure whether Gauk ever got to record the Third Symphony but it makes an intriguing prospect if Forgotten Records could track the material down.



ENESCU

Dixtuor for wind instruments op. 14 [24:54]

Sinfonia da camera for twelve instruments op. 33 [17:26]

CONSTANTINESCU

Piano Concerto (1952) [25:33]

Valentin Gheorghiu (piano)

Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision

Française/Constantin Silvestri

rec. 1958

Original edition: La Voix de Son Maître FALP 508 and FBLP 1095

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR859 [67:54]



Here are three works by two Romanian composers conducted by a Romanian conductor. Silvestri has been celebrated in a ten-disc box by Disky, in a Warner EMI collection and in individual discs by BBC Legends and Testament. These FR products of 1958 derive from vinyl from Electrecord and Voix de Son Maître.

The two large ensemble works by Enescu are accorded fairly treble-tame recordings. The sound is neither brilliant nor glaring; not by any stretch of the aural imagination. The effect in the Dixtuor for wind instruments is low key and ruminatory with music and performances to match. I am not sure that Enescu wanted brilliance anyway. This is cheery, affable and slightly folksy - even the Dixtuor finale, an *Allegrement*, is marked *mais pas trop vite*. The *Sinfonia da Camera* - separated from the Dixtuor by 20 opus numbers - follows a similar mood pattern even if the idiom is a little less directly romantic. The language is more subtle and tracks the same brackish waters and shaded creeks navigated by Honegger and by Constant Lambert in his Piano Concerto. Once again Enescu flaunts his true colours with a central movement *Allegretto* - again with the qualifier *Molto moderato*. This is flanked by two thoughtfully unhurried outer movements the latter of which is something of a soft focus surreal dream-world. The *Sinfonia* is for twelve instruments, mixing piano with stringed and wind instruments including horn and trumpet. The dominance of the trumpet in the texture suggests *primus inter pares* status with a Scriabin-like hieratic role.

The pianist in the Enescu *Sinfonia* is Valentin Gheorghiu who is also the pianist in the three-movement Constantinescu Piano Concerto. The short-lived Constantinescu - he died age 34 - might well be known to long time adherents of Olympia for two discs with contents licensed from Electrecord. He is inclined to traditional tonal ways. It's rather like a meeting of Kodály, Ravel and de Falla. The music is vigorous, and it does come across a true display concerto. Before a blistering *Presto* finale there's a gently musing *Andante*. Silvestri's orchestra here is the Orchestre National de RTF at sessions presumably located in Paris. The finale recalls the Shostakovich Second Piano Concerto although without that work's indefatigable catchiness.

OSTRČIL

Summer, Symphonic Poem op. 23 [16:06]

RÍDKÝ

Cello Concerto No.2 op. 36 [32:35]

Nocturne from *Sérénade pour cordes*, op. 37 [9:05]

František Smetana (cello)

Orchestre Symphonique de la Radio de Brno/Bretislav Bakala (Ostrcil)

Orchestre Philharmonique Tchèque/Rídký (Concerto) Karel Sejna

(Nocturne)

rec. 1955

Original edition: Supraphon LPV 427 and LPV 417

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR940 [57:27]



Forgotten Records lean on Supraphon as a break from their dominant reliance on French LPs of half a century and more ago.

The repertoire is far from the usual fare. Otakar Ostrčil, who in old age conducted a 1933 recording of *The Bartered Bride* (Naxos) has had some more recent attention from Supraphon including the [Calvary Variations](#) and [Symphony](#).

Ostrčil's *Summer* is a two-part symphonic poem (two tracks here). It's an exultant piece which shouts the joys of the sun and summer storms. It's not quite as static or idyllic as Bridge's *Summer*, Schoeck's magical *Sommernacht* or Delius's various summer miniatures - much shorter pieces anyway. Even in the *Lento* the music ripples with activity and there is yet more cart-wheeling and cavorting in the final *Allegretto scherzando*. Fellow countryman and coeval Josef Suk's even longer *Summer's Tale* is a natural parallel but as with his fully mature *Harvest* it tends towards a dreamy heat-haze rather than Ostrčil's overt celebration which trumpets high summer without reserve.

Jaroslav Rídký has even less of a profile, so it's all the more welcome that the adventurous can meet his Cello Concerto No. 2 head-on with the composer conducting the then- Czechoslovakia's prime orchestra. This is a vigorous work with plenty of lively spice to keep it flying along. He has the courage to mix this with some luxuriously romantic moments especially in the lengthy first movement. This nevertheless ends peacefully and this mood carries over into the slightly sentimentally tinged *Andante*. Lively activity returns for the very attractive, catchy and gimlet-eyed finale. The exuberance and upbeat lyricism of this work places it closer to the later Finzi concerto than to the more static and lower key reflective concertos of Bax and Moeran.

The disc ends with quiet confidence in a single movement of Rídký's *Serenade for Strings*. This *Nocturne* is dreamy and melodic. Here the conductor is Karl Sejna who was in the van of the movement to promote the orchestral works of Novak, Martinů, Suk and Fibich. I hope we will get to hear more Rídký - presumably there's a First Cello Concerto somewhere and what about the whole of the *Serenade for Strings*?

This is a triumphantly attractive disc. I do hope we can expect further FR discoveries from Supraphon's far-back catalogue. It would be wonderful if FR have access to one of the finest LPs from that era (Supraphon SUC 10020). It's a seemingly unpromising anthology but its Fibich overture *A Night in Karlstein* leaves the later Vajnar-conducted stereo effort well recessed in the shade. Also on that LP is a scorching March from Fibich's *Hippodamia*. The conductor in both cases is Václav Smetáček.

There's a more detailed review of the present FR disc [here](#).

KODÁLY

Sonata for solo cello, op. 8 [27:48]

János Starker (cello)

Sonata for cello and piano, op. 4 [20:01]

János Starker/Otto Herz

Duo for violin and cello, op. 7 [24:49]

János Starker/Arnold Eidus

rec. 1950

Original edition: Period SPL 602, 720, 510

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR453 [72:41]



There's magical playing to be heard here from the now forgotten Otto Herz (piano) in the two-movement op. 4 sonata alongside Starker's expected brilliance and artistry. The music is very much in the Bax and Moeran sphere. The *Allegro con spirito* fairly flies along with Starker as commanding at

speed as he is soulful at *Adagio*. The sound of the op. 4 work is - by comparison with the opp. 7 and 8 works - treble-tame. This is a function, I suspect, of the Club Mondial du Disque original LP.

I have long wanted to renew my memories of the Saga original of the opp. 7 and 8 works. In fact, this FR transfer is absolutely superlative with its sixty-plus years worn very lightly. The surface burble, which is a forgettable but discernible presence in op. 4, is certainly there but now it's far more discreet. The intrinsic sound is clear with only the faintest hint of nasality in the penetrating stropped edge of the violin in the duo. These works are full of incident and a mesmerising emotional topography. Starker (b. 1924) in the op. 8 work is completely splendid: woodily growling, generous with rosin abrasion, violin-sweet at the top of cello's range and steadfast in tonal production. Starker is not so much a Heifetz of the cello as an Oistrakh. He infuses emotional character into a work that could easily have seemed rather severe but is not. What's more he grips the attention. Memory did not cheat me and this turns out to be one of FR's strongest discs. Such attractive works.