

lo Cortis, and Franco Calabrese. They sing with better expression and with fuller, richer, and more alluring voices. While I wrote favorably about Pastori's Rosina, Berganza has a fuller and more beautiful voice (she is, of course, a mezzo) and offers a more detailed and complete characterization of that spunky girl. Alva, a fine lyric tenor, has a more attractive and more flexible voice than Nicolai Monti; he's also a better vocal actor. Ivor Vinco's huge black bass is more effective in 'La Calunnia' than Calabrese, and Corena expresses Bartolo's predicaments better than Cortis.

Paneral sings Figaro in both performances. As I wrote in my previous review, his singing lacks humor and ebullience. Giullini's tempos are a bit faster for RAI, but that may be due to the absence of an audience; this audience is clearly enjoying the performance. The monaural sound of the London recording is better than RAI's but there's still a bit of distortion in a few places.

No text; the notes aren't helpful.

MOSES

ROTA: *Cello Concertos 1+2*

Silvia Chiesa; RAI Symphony/ Corrado Rovaris
Sony 92410—50 minutes

I listened to this album immediately after reviewing the piano concertos of Charles Widor (in this issue). It took a while to adjust—but not long—from a composer much of whose life was devoted to the seriousness of the organ to one who was heavily involved in writing for films. True, Nino Rota isn't as inclined toward the introversion and complex sentences of counterpoint; he deals mostly with lyricism, modulations, and orchestral colors. In Concerto I it feels more like he's on the outside seeing the core from many angles as he rotates around it, rather than on the inside wrestling with the materials themselves. At least, that was my impression in the first movement, which nonetheless flows effortlessly. II, a lovely *Larghetto Cantabile*, flows beautifully with an evolution of highly lyrical material. III is short and *Waltonesque* in its playful melodic lines and progressions with, at last, a fugue for woodwinds.

Concerto 2 is also in the key of D, but here it's major, not minor, and has a pulsing smile written all over it. The cello is set perfectly amidst rich orchestration that uses woodwinds and brass to color the string textures. In II, a theme and variations, the cello immediately states the theme, which has a modulation essential to its structure. The way Rota moves from one variation to the next is extremely clever—no breaks, coming almost to the end of a cadence but not quite. He made me recall how Britten seamlessly links his variations in

March/April 2012

Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra. I couldn't help smiling as Rota simply slips without a break into the felicitous four-mine *Allegro Vivace* final movement. Here's a work that will be working its way into my listening repertoire—and probably Concerto 1 as well, as long as it's on the same album!

Why? Because these performances are very compelling. There's not a useful word on Silvia Chiesa's background in the liner notes, other than the usual laundry list of people she's worked with (including her husband, pianist Mauricio Baglini) and works she's performed. Nor is her website of much help. While she doesn't have much variety of tone color, her shading, phrasing, and forward thrust keep the music constantly alive, even in the quietest sections. Corrado Rovaris has been music director of the Opera Company of Philadelphia since 2004. Judging from his work here with this Turin-based ensemble, the quality of orchestral playing in Italy has advanced rapidly in recent years, and the interpretation here is absolutely vital. The engineering is full and balanced but with a brash quality that makes the orchestra sound somewhat raw; whether that's a comment on the orchestra's tone or on the engineering I cannot tell.

Mark Lehman thought highly of the premiere recordings of these concertos by Dmitri Yablonsky (as cellist, not conductor—Chandos 9892, Nov/Dec 2001). It was time for another terrific recording of these fine works.

FRENCH

RUBIN: *Piano Concerto; Viola Concerto; Celebrations*

Marcantonio Barone, p; Anthony Orlando, perc;
Brett Deubner, va; Orchestra 2001/ James Freeman, p

Centaur 3119—78 minutes

Once known for imaginative electronic music, Texas-born Andrew Rubin now writes colorful, atmospheric orchestral works. The three concertos here, from 2007, 8, and 9, are basically tonal but spiced with enough dissonance to put them on the edge of atonality. All three pieces offer virtuosic turns for the pianists, percussion players, and viola soloist. This is resolutely serious, somber stuff, but the rhythmic energy of the fast movements, the eloquence of the slow ones, and the orchestral colors, particularly for percussion, are quite appealing. The program notes invoke Crumb, and the elegant slow movement of the piano concerto is an homage to Ravel, but the sound-world seems distinctly Rubin's own. All the players acquit themselves well, and the recording, made at Swarthmore College, has a cushiony acoustic.

SULLIVAN

American Record Guide