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The GRAMOPHONE

Barber. Korngold. Walton

Barber Violin Concerto

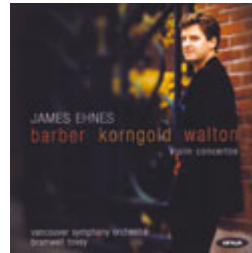
Korngold Violin Concerto

Walton Violin Concerto

James Ehnes *vn* Vancouver Symphony

Orchestra / Bramwell Tovey

Onyx Classics ONYX4016 (79')



A fine violinist excels himself in an outstanding trio of romantic concertos

It's an inspired coupling, as well as a generous one, to have these three high-romantic concertos together. James Ehnes gives superb performances, bringing out their full emotional thrust without vulgarity or exaggeration. His playing has always been impressive on disc, but here he excels himself in expressive range as well as the tonal beauty, with expressive *rubato* perfectly controlled.

The concertos date from the late-1930s and '40s, and though at such time their romanticism might have seemed outdated, the strength and memorability of the musical ideas in each amply justifies the composers' stance. In the Barber, Ehnes more than usual brings out the contrast between the first movement - improbably marked *Allegro* when the impression is of a slowish piece - and the *Andante* slow movement, strengthening the work's impact. The Korngold, drawing its striking main themes from some of the composer's film scores, is just as richly lyrical, prompting from Ehnes some ecstatic playing of the many stratospheric melodies above the staff, using a wide dynamic range with wonderfully delicate half-tones.

The Walton is just as memorable, for unlike most latter-day interpreters Ehnes has taken note of the example of the work's commissioner and dedicatee, Jascha Heifetz. Where the work is generally spread to well over half an hour, Ehnes takes exactly 30 minutes and the result is all the stronger. This is one of Walton's most richly inspired works, and Ehnes brings that out strongly, helped by the powerful playing of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra under its music director Bramwell Tovey. Textures are not always as transparent as they might be, but the power of the orchestral playing in all three works adds greatly to the impact of the performances. An outstanding disc in every way.

Edward Greenfield