

ORIGIN • Gwendolyn Masin (vn), dir; ORIGIN Instrumental Ens • TIME ZONE 1169 (47:53)

FALLA (arr. Deane) *La vida breve: Danse espagnole*. **BLOCH** (arr. Deane) *Baal Shem: Nigun*. **LUKÁCS** *Bartók Impressions*. **BARTÓK** (arr. Masin) *Rumanian Folk Dances*. **RAVEL** (arr. Walter) *Tzigane. Pièce en forme de habanera*. **SARASATE** (arr. Deane) *Zigeunerweisen*. **KREISLER** (arr. Deane) *La Gitana*. **DINICU** (arr. Heifetz) *Hora Staccato*

Gwendolyn Masin's collection, *Origin*, presents gypsy, Jewish, and Rumanian folk music in fresh arrangements (most of them by Raymond Deane) for a small string orchestra including cimbalom. This kind of thing could be saccharine, but the arrangement of Manuel de Falla's *Danse espagnole* from *La vida breve* sounds stylistically as masterly and effective in performance as Joseph Joachim's versions of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*; Masin darts in and out of the textures with sparkling arpeggios. The orchestra also plays a significant obligato role in the *Nigun* from Ernest Bloch's *Baal Shem* (Bloch himself



orchestrated the composition in 1939, but it's more commonly heard in its version for violin and piano), although it never threatens to overshadow Masin's intensely rhapsodic solo. Miklós Lukács's *Bartók Impressions* may be based on Bartók's *Rumanian Folk Dances*, but this fantasy, played by Lukács himself on cimbalom, amounts to almost a new composition. It's at times jazzy and at times New Age in inspiration, but consistently virtuosic and thoroughly captivating. Bartók's original follows, but in a zesty arrangement by Masin. Ravel wrote his *Tzigane* for violin and a piano fitted with a luthéal attachment after hearing Jelly d'Aranyi improvise gypsy tunes, and so giving it a further timbral twist seems natural. Masin's freely wandering opening cadenza amounts to a virtual reimagining that could make listeners wonder why more violinists don't try more often to channel its gypsy soul, rather than simply playing it as a French pastiche. Ravel's own orchestration of the second half may suggest a Gallic rather than a Magyar ethos, but Masin and the orchestra show how appropriate the latter sounds to the same melodies and harmonies, moving them from the concert hall to the campfire. The timing of 10:41 hardly seems slow, considering how much expressivity and how many thrills, musical and technical, Masin and the ensemble pack into that duration.

Pablo Sarasate's blockbuster, *Zigeunerweisen*, may benefit from Masin's transformative reading more than does anything else on the program. Sarasate's only recording made the work sound like very good Sarasate but pretty middling gypsy improvisation. Then it fell into the hands of violinists who played with Slavic ardor, who not only didn't sound like Sarasate but didn't sound much like gypsies either. Masin sounds a lot like a gypsy and a bit like Sarasate in the stratospheric chirping passages. She almost achieves a similar effect in Fritz Kreisler's miniature *La Gitana*, but Kreisler proves as hard to assimilate as he does to play idiomatically. (Can you even count on one hand violinists who extract from his bon bons the charm he invested in them?) In any case, she makes a valiant attempt with some colorful exotic touches. Ravel's *Pièce* similarly resists assimilation, but again she makes her reading emotionally redolent and deeply affecting. *Hora Staccato* lacks in her reading some of Heifetz's electricity, but the ethnic timbres almost compensate for it; some listeners may even feel that it's "apples and oranges" and so beyond comparison.

At the same time generally accessible, timbrally bracing, deeply affecting, and highly entertaining, Masin's sense of fantasy should carry listeners along with her. There are also video performances of several of these pieces online at gwendolynmasin.com/media/video, and those should be highly desirable as well. But this CD will be just fine in the meantime. In fact, it's just fine, period. Strongly recommended to all but the hidebound. **Robert Maxham**