

ists of string pizzicato (for both  
that should have merited a booklet  
In *Madhars*, the Diotima Quartet  
stively evokes a sun-drenched  
landscape.

l's recording – a pleasure in itself –  
es the players' every nuance.

MARÍA SOLARE

**PAGANINI 24 Caprices for violin solo op.1**  
(Schumann)

**Benjamin Schmid (violin)**

**Andriana Mirnova (piano)**

3 0674-2



Arrangements of solo  
works to include piano  
accompaniments are still  
regarded with suspicion,  
although Schumann's  
'harmonisation' of Paganini's op.1 is  
typically interesting. Schumann's respect  
for Paganini is evident, although such is  
the simplicity of his piano writing that  
it is added by its inclusion.

al impressions indicate Benjamin  
Schmid's prowess and powerful tone, but  
rather tight sound all too easily  
slips into distortions, as in nos.1, 4 and  
where off-string strokes can lose clear  
definition. The recording is closely  
listening, picking up quite a lot of surface  
noise while the piano is kept respectfully  
in the background.

As said, there is some impressive  
Paganini-style playing here and the disc  
improves as it goes on. Schmid, winner  
of the 1992 Carl Flesch competition, is  
an agile violinist, with wonderfully  
articulated 10ths in no.4, tidy and well-  
controlled up-bow staccatos in no.7 and a  
wide range of tonal contrasts in nos.22  
and 24. It is debatable as to how much  
of the recording or his own ideals  
is reflected, but once again, Schmid shows us  
that Paganini's works are rarely a challenge  
for today's virtuosos. An interesting and  
valuable disc.

NILSOM

**PROKOFIEV Violin Sonatas no.1 in  
D major op.80 & no.2 in D major op.94a,  
and Five Melodies op.35b**

**Yehudi Menuhin (violin)**

**Leonid Breznev (piano)**

3 0674-2



Prokofiev's two violin  
sonatas are so stylistically  
contrasted that they could  
virtually be the work of  
different composers. No.1

is dark, almost unremittingly grim, and  
driven by manic sforzando rhythms for  
much of the Allegro brusco second  
movement and finale, which Berman and  
Mamikonian thrust home with alacrity. Turn  
the coin over and one encounters in no.2 a  
warmth and optimistic playfulness that in  
context sounds like a musical restorative.

Berman's Kremer-like micro-  
responsiveness and ability to tame his  
tone down to a mere whisper via a series  
of delicately inflected bow strokes is  
ideally suited to no.1. Where Perlman (RCA)  
occasionally sounds ill at ease applying  
19th-century rhetoric to a score tearing to  
be let off the leash, Berman embraces each  
thorny aside as though intoxicated by its  
vehemence, slimming down his sound so as  
to avoid any hint of tonal voluptuousness.

The D major Sonata sits tantalisingly  
between neo-Classical cool and  
neo-Romantic espressivo. Here Perlman  
is in his element, whereas Berman tends  
to shy away from any passing moments  
of overt tenderness, almost as though  
they were applied by the composer with  
a strong sense of irony. That said, Berman  
magics the *Five Melodies* with a profound  
sense of their underlying lyricism, and the  
engineering captures every nuance with  
ear-tweaking precision.

JULIAN HAYLOCK

**RODE 24 Caprices en forme d'études**  
**Elizabeth Wallfisch (violin)**

CPO 777 129-2 (TWO DISCS)



First printed in 1815,  
Rode's 24 Caprices are  
charming pieces, far more  
than the didactic exercises  
that the term 'étude' might

suggest, with moments of real beauty  
amid their extreme virtuosic demands.

Elizabeth Wallfisch, playing on a 1750  
Petrus Paul de Vitor violin, gives spirited  
performances, but doesn't always achieve  
the supreme clarity of tone that these  
highly difficult works demand. There is  
undoubtedly some wonderful playing here.  
Her control of the slower, more expressive  
caprices is often thrilling: the lamenting  
strings of 3rds in the regal Siciliano of

Caprice no.4, and the flowing Adagio  
opening to Caprice no.6, for example, are  
lilting; and the contrast between racing  
spiccato and bursts of legato is perfectly  
judged in no.18. The relentless pace,  
the fire and energy, of nos. 8 and 15 are  
brilliantly incisive; the lithe dance of no.5  
is delicately described; the Presto of no.22  
bubbles and sparkles.

Throughout, however, there are  
imperfections that make the collection  
uneven: the odd moment of sour  
intonation, noise from other strings and  
too-audible shifts mar the overall effect.  
Occasionally the sheer effort involved  
in mastering the technical difficulty of a  
phrase means that the music isn't allowed  
to speak, so that despite the warmth and  
shine of the recording, this pair of discs is  
ultimately disappointing.

CATHERINE NELSON

**VIEUXTEMPS Violin Concertos no.4 in  
D minor op.31 & no.5 in A minor op.37**  
**'Grétry'; Fantasia appassionata op.35**

**Viviane Hagner (violin) Royal Flemish  
Philharmonic/Martyn Brabbins**

HYPERION CDA 67798



The dull booklet cover,  
with the strap-line 'The  
Romantic Violin Concerto –  
nos. 4 & 5', hints at a didactic  
purpose. In this the disc

is successful, as Viviane Hagner fiddles with  
considerable brilliance, the Belgian orchestra  
plays well under its British principal guest  
conductor, and the music is taken seriously.

As an artistic enterprise, it is less  
convincing, although Hagner plays  
with freedom and flair in the *Fantasia  
appassionata* and seems to enjoy herself  
more than in the two concertos. Her  
phrasing in the celebrated Largo is lovely  
and she is delightful in the final Saltarello.

The problem in the concertos is one of  
consistency. Hagner can turn on dazzling  
virtuosity of a kind, although her tone colour  
is not varied enough and she can even be  
pedantic, as at her entry in the finale of the  
Fourth Concerto. She makes nothing of  
the horn calls in the trio of its scherzo.

In the weirdly constructed Fifth  
Concerto Hagner plays nicely when she  
relaxes, but too often displays a steely  
determination that I find less attractive.  
I am no more sure about the Eindhoven  
Musiekcentrum acoustic than I was when