

of these CDs (let alone the appalling MP3 downloads) come close to reproducing what Martzy sounded like on LP, which is not the case with this remastering, which in both DXD and DSD128, played in native format, has far more presence, projection, body and better reproduces the Abbey Road acoustic.

Of course behind all of this and the decline in her career lies the question, just how good was Johanna Martzy? Well other than for her huge South Korean and Japanese fan-base, where Martzy is a cult figure, apart from the Bach none of her records are outstanding. In the Dvorak Concerto she recorded for DGG in 1951, Milstein, Oistrakh and Suk, to name but three, offer far more focused, vividly characterised renditions and much the same can be said of the Columbia Mendelssohn (both versions) and Brahms Concertos. Live, Martzy is interesting as opposed to inspired, in slow movements her emotional reticence can lapse into superficiality, her intonation can be awry, the bowing inexact – which leaves the Bach.

Recorded at Abbey Road Studios in 1954/5 by a variety of Producers and Sound Engineers, in terms of speed Martzy does nothing extreme, being 2 minutes slower than Menuhin in 1934-6 and 2 minutes faster than Podger in 1999, thankfully she uses variable vibrato (a vital tool in a violinists armoury, despite what period instruments bores might think) when appropriate weaves eloquent legato lines in the slower movements and clearly delineates the dance rhythms and polyphony. As mentioned, occasionally her intonation is slightly awry and sometimes her bowing and attack could be crisper, which can be a disadvantage given the scores proliferation of multiple stopping and yet behind every note there is a profound sense of humanity, depth of feeling and immense conviction; furthermore there are no perfect complete performances of these seminal masterworks and Martzy ranks with the best. As an added bonus, the sound is exceptionally rich and focused.

Rob Pennock

Johanna Martzy



Johann Sebastian Bach Sonatas & Partitas BWV 1001-1006



Johanna Martzy was born in 1924 in what was then the Hungarian city of Temesvár, as a child she studied with the celebrated violinist Jenő Hubay before entering the Budapest Academy of Music, she was only 13 when she made her first public appearance and graduated from the Academy in 1942. A year later she appeared with the Budapest Philharmonic under the great Willem Mengelberg and married the violinist and conductor Béla de Csilléry. Being Jewish, when the Nazis invaded Hungary in 1944 they fled only to spend the rest of the war in an Austrian internment camp.

Her big break came in 1947 when she won 2nd prize (not 1st as sometimes stated) in the Geneva Competition, where she settled. She then began to appear with some of Europe's finest orchestras and formed a partnership with the pianist Jean Antonietti (chamber music was always important to her). Between August 1951 and June 1953 she made a small number of LPs for Deutsche Grammophon, which included works by composers such as Milhaud and Szymanowski, who were little known in the West at the time. In 1953 she toured the UK, which may have led to her moving to the British Columbia label, where again she recorded a small number of discs in London and Berlin, the last of which date from December 1955 and that was the end of her recording career.

The split with Columbia was probably down to her refusing to sleep with the immensely powerful and influential Record Producer, Walter Legge and her recordings swiftly disappeared from the catalogue (although not allowing her first recording of the Mendelssohn E minor Concerto with Wolfgang Sawallisch to be released was hardly likely to have endeared her to EMI who owned the label). She was also reputedly very difficult to work with and given that the post-war world was awash with well-established and up-and-coming fiddlers, it may be that the likes of Leonid Kogan and David Oistrakh were less volatile, far more exciting and marketable prospects.

Nevertheless in 1957 she toured America, however in 1959 at a time when the horrors of the Second World War were – entirely understandably – still bleeding sores for many, the Czech Philharmonic refused to appear with her at the Edinburgh Festival, alleging that she had supported the government of the Nazi stooge Miklós Horthy, who was Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944, On the personal front, at around the same time she separated from her husband and married Daniel Tschudi, a music and violin lover who had given her a 1733 Carlo Bergonzi, which became her favourite instrument, but from that point on her career didn't really amount to much.

Yes she continued to appear intermittingly with great orchestras and conductors in both Europe and America and give chamber recitals, but you can say that about many soloists and then as now, if you made no recordings, unless you were already established as a great and/or controversial figure, the invitations would slow down. It has also been suggested that the birth of her first daughter placed further constraints on her performing career, but as with so much to do with Martzy, in the absence of a biography or extensive interviews this remains conjecture. Then in the late 1960s she contracted Hepatitis and in August 1979 died of cancer in Glarus, Switzerland a virtually forgotten figure.

Turning to the present day, because her recording career was so short, for record collectors Martzy is one of the most sought after violinists and if you wanted to buy – always assuming you could find them – perfect copies of the British Columbia LPs the Sonatas and Partitas first appeared on (33CX 1286-8) you could end-up paying more than \$6500 for them and even the more modern Coup d'Archet (a defunct label dedicated to issuing live and studio performances by Martzy on CD and LP) and 180gm remasterings cost serious money. So for most digital will be the only option, of which – in amongst various Japanese and Korean versions – only those by EMI France, Testament and Hänssler are widely available and none

Johanna Martzy

Johann Sebastian Bach

Sonatas & Partitas BWV 1001-1006

Violin Sonata No. 1 In G Minor, BWV 1001

- 1 Adagio 5:01
- 2 Fuga 6:03
- 3 Siciliana 4:15
- 4 Presto 2:39

Violin Partita No. 1 In B Minor, BWV 1002

- 5 Allemanda 6:19
- 6 Double 3:20
- 7 Courante 3:24
- 8 Double 2:47
- 9 Sarabande 2:16
- 10 Double 1:40
- 11 Bourrée 2:38
- 12 Double 2:40

Violin Sonata No. 2 In A Minor, BWV 1003

- 13 Grave 5:08
- 14 Fuga 8:42
- 15 Andante 4:55
- 16 Allegro 4:29

Violin Partita No. 2 In D Minor, BWV 1004

- 17 Allemande 4:21
- 18 Courante 2:56
- 19 Sarabande 2:56
- 20 Gigue 3:20
- 21 Chaconne 15:19

Violin Sonata No. 3 In C Major, BWV 1005

- 22 Adagio 5:46
- 23 Fuga 11:19
- 24 Largo 4:02
- 25 Allegro Assai 4:07

Violin Partita No. 3 In E Major, BWV 1006

- 26 Preludio 3:51
- 27 Louré 2:4
- 28 Gavotte en Rondeau 3:13
- 29 Menuett I & Menuett II 4:28
- 30 Bourrée 1:42
- 31 Gigue 1:51

Recorded at Abbey Road Studios, London by EMI Records 1955



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