

Rodrigo. Concierto serenata . Concierto pastoral

Nancy Allen (hp); Lisa Hansen (fl); Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Enrique Bátiz. HMV (F) digital EL270363-1; EL270363-4 Concierto pastoral-comparative version: Galway, Philh, Mata (4/79) RL25193

It is difficult to think of a twentieth-century piece with a more engaging opening than Rodrigo's *Concierto serenata*, with its trickling stream of notes like a mountain stream running delicately over the pebbles. It was written for Nicanor Zabaleta who provides the only other available recording, on a Walkman Classics tape (DG 413 156-4GW, coupled with the Guitar Concerto, *Fantasia para un gentilhombre* and Falla's *Nights in the gardens of Spain*). The almost equally agreeable *Concierto pastoral* was composed for James Galway who has also recorded it for RCA. I think neither of these new performances is quite so distinctive as those by their respective dedicatees, but the coupling is ideal, as it involves no duplication with other works. Moreover, Bátiz is at his finest, providing highly idiomatic and sympathetic accompaniments. The RPO are very responsive indeed and the wind playing is a delight, while the string ensemble has refinement and a nicely delicate touch. This is very important in the Harp Concerto, for Nancy Allen is an unassertive soloist, seeking to beguile the ear with gentleness—which she certainly manages to do— though she almost disappears altogether in the cadenza of the first movement (which Zabaleta plays more robustly). But I cannot think anyone could fail to enjoy this music. The Flute Concerto is also winningly played. Lisa Hansen does not quite display James Galway's breathtakingly easy bravura in the outer movements, but she is a fine flautist and is particularly sympathetic in the *Adagio*. Both works follow the usual Rodrigo formula with its mixture of ostinatos, catchy rhythms and simple yet indelible, short-breathed melodies. They are nicely touched with piquant harmonies, with even a little pungency at times in the *Concierto pastoral*. Some might say this writing is simplistic, but it is endearingly well crafted and I would far rather take it to a Desert Island than some of today's contemporary diet of musical barbed wire. The recording is flawless, beautifully balanced and vividly clear; surfaces are immaculate—even after about six playings (this repertoire wears uncommonly well) the background remains silent, an almost essential requisite of this particular approach to the *Concierto serenata*.

I.M.