

EDITOR'S CHOICE

MARCO BORGREVE



Thrilling and poetic:
Tanja Becker-Bender



Caprices of sparkling clarity – Paganini would have been delighted

Paganini

24 Caprices, MS25 Op 1

Tanja Becker-Bender *vn*

Hyperion © CDA67763 (80' • DDD)

After nearly 200 years, the Paganini Caprices still present a formidable challenge to violinists. The character of the music may persuade them to adopt a bold, theatrical approach (without minding too much about small imperfections of tuning or passages of rough tone); others may prefer a more careful, considered attitude, striving for accuracy and beauty. Tanja Becker-Bender belongs to the second camp. For a few minutes I wondered if she was missing something of the virtuoso thrill transmitted, for example, by Marco Rogliano's devil-may-care recording (*Tactus*, 6/02), but I was soon won over.

Adopting generally slower speeds than Rogliano, she has time to turn the music more gracefully, articulate more cleanly, achieve remarkable purity of tuning, and use variations of tone-colour to open up the music's expressive potential. This results in a sparkling, cleaned-up version of Paganini, sounding the more amazing for its polish and clarity, and bringing into focus the poetic, romantic sensibility that enthralled the composer's contemporaries. I can't remember hearing the flute and horn imitations in the Ninth Caprice more persuasively performed, and in No 21, marked *amoroso*, Becker-Bender manages to retain a tender, intimate tone where many of her rivals equate amorousness with crude intensity. The more brilliant pieces are just as successful, with thrilling passages in octaves (No 17), beautiful *staccato* bowing (Nos 7 and 15) and lovely, delicate scales in thirds (No 18). I'm sure Paganini himself would have been impressed and delighted. **Duncan Druce**



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