



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Michael Rabin on the Bell Telephone Hour, Volume 2. Parnassus.

If you have a sweet tooth for violin bonbons, the Parnassus confectionary has quite the selection for you. Rabin, one of America's most talented violinists, died tragically at age 35, leaving behind a relatively small recorded legacy, which has been expanded by the unearthing and restoration of archival recordings (see my article in Issue 311). Some of his earliest work was done on NBC's Bell Telephone Hour, a program featuring classical and Broadway artists that ran for nearly three decades. Americans got to know the young violinist and his mellifluous tone via dozens of short pieces and concerto movements, all accompanied by the program's orchestra under Donald Vorhees. These mono performances have been restored quite well—only rarely does a bit of distortion or tape artifact poke through. Showpieces like Kroll's "Banjo and Fiddle," stalwarts like Mendelssohn's "On Wings of Song," and sentimental tunes like Brandl's "Old Refrain" are all played with affection and polish, and there are four tracks that, to my knowledge, haven't appeared anywhere else: Kreisler's "Liebeslied," Sarasate's "Romanza Andaluza," Gardner's "From the Canebreak," and the most famous variation from Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. I, for one, will always welcome more Rabin. **SE**

Further Listening: *The Magic Bow* (Michael Rabin)



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The Playfair Sonatas. Ethan Iverson. Ulricht.

Albums by the band the Bad Plus have almost always landed in the jazz bins at record stores, but the remarkable output of the stunningly virtuosic group has giddily defied true categorization, often quite jazzy, but also rocking in an indie kind of way, and serving up generous dollops of classical influences, most notably in their version of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Ethan Iverson, the group's co-founder and original pianist, has an academic musical background and has infused his career with a desire to blur esthetic boundaries. Iverson, who has since left the band (which is now a quartet), conceived of the Playfair Sonatas (named for the patron of this project, the impresario Piers Playfair) as a pandemic project. Each of the six sonatas consists of Iverson and a duet partner, including violin, marimba, trombone, trumpet, clarinet, and alto sax, mostly constructed in a traditional fast/slow/fast format, with each middle movement dedicated to a famous jazz figure. The album opens and closes with ensembles for all of the performers. The overall vibe of the six sonatas is pleasantly low key, with little overt drama or emotional depth, but displaying a good deal of TBP's trademark whimsy, quirky rhythms, and jaunty melodies, minus David King's driving drumming. **PB**

Further Listening: The Bad Plus: *The Rite of Spring*; PRISM Quartet: *The Curtis Project*



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Shifting Ground. Alexi Kenney, violin. Bright Shiny Things.

This imaginative project is one musician's broadly eclectic interests stretched over a sturdy scaffold of the music of J.S. Bach. The concept is intriguing in theory, and it is vibrantly brought to life by the superb playing of Alexi Kenney, a young California native and New England Conservatory grad. There are six movements from Bach sonatas and partitas for solo violin while the 15-track program concludes with the mighty *Chaconne* from the Partita No. 2. Sandwiched in between are Kenney's arrangements of diverse music by Robert Schumann, Eve Beglarian, Joni Mitchell, and Ariana Grande; quite a mix. Kenney also champions rising composers of his generation and includes several world premieres in this surprisingly seamless and stimulating program. The one departure from solo violin is a setting of a dreamlike poem (a sort of musical version of the classic "I forgot to do my homework" nightmare) by Puerto-Rican composer Angélica Negrón, with spoken narration and electronic effects. This kind of crossover programming is a risky venture and often comes across as gimmicky, but Kenney's utterly sincere artistry is disarming and hard to resist. Perhaps we will get an all-Bach album from him in the near future; you can bet that it is on his wish list. **PB**

Further Listening: Bach: Complete Partitas and Sonatas for Violin (Henryk Szeryng/Deutsche Grammophon)