

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

AUDIOPHILE AUDITION

TCHAIKOVSKY: Variations on a Rococo Theme; Pezzo capriccioso; Nocturne; SHOSTAKOVICH: Cello Concerto No. 1 – Zuill Bailey, cello/ San Francisco Ballet Orchestra/ Martin West, conductor – Telarc 80274, 60:36 **1/2**

Tchaikovsky, very nice. Shostakovich, WOW!

Published on January 23, 2009

An unknown cellist and unknown conductor directing an unknown (or little heard) orchestra in works that are anything but. Quite a challenge, right? And just a little bit forward, no? According to the notes, Mr. Bailey, "one of the pre-eminent cellists of his generation" (a surprise to me, and I am pretty much on top of these things) has a combination of "compelling artistry, technical finesse, and engaging personality..." That my friends, he does, and his early [training](#) at the Peabody Institute and the Juilliard School served him well in a mushrooming career that is taking him all over the world, making excellent chamber [music](#) discs (the Beethoven Sonatas), and even as a recurring actor on the HBO series OZ (weird, but true). So how does he play? The Tchaikovsky works are all very well done, the *Variations* alone played with a fine mannerism and unshackled aggressiveness that suits the music very well. Okay, there are 20 other recordings out there as good as this one, but Bailey holds his own. Where he loses out is in comparison to Ormandy's Philadelphia Orchestra playing with a power and precision that the San Francisco band, good as they are (and small as they are) cannot quite match. But I was happy with this, and Bailey knows the work very well. It is also nice to have the little chestnuts here, two works never or rarely heard, composed at the inspiration of a recently graduated cellist from the Moscow Conservatory, Anatoly Brandukov, who hit it off with Tchaikovsky. These are lovely small pieces that make for some lyrical moments in the cello, and nice filler here. But **when I file this [CD](#), it shall be under Shostakovich, for it is in the composer's first Cello Concerto that Bailey makes his splash.** This is long known as a bear of a work for emerging grad students who must test their mettle by getting through it, **and Bailey proves a master of the art by giving us one of the finest readings I have yet heard of this wondrous score!** The orchestra also seems more attuned to this work's jaunty rhythms and scarecrow meanderings than the more straightforward neoclassicism of the Tchaikovsky. But this piece has neoclassic moments of its own, and one of the challenges is keeping the style in context—Russian rhythmic mania with Stalinist trappings of schizophrenia, coupled with a heartfelt slow movement that begs the world for attention. **Bailey's big rounded tone is perfect for this work, as is his innate sense of rhythmic dexterity.** I can't say that I will retire the Rostropovich/Ormandy recording anytime soon, nor would I want to be without the dark and dramatic Gutman/Temirkanov readings of 1 and 2 on [RCA](#). But this one is special, and should receive accolades as such. Telarc's great sound only adds to the excitement, and bravo to all concerned for piecing together these strange and unusual combinations of forces to make an exceptional recording. But why not SACD? And if it is to come later, please stop that practice immediately unless you plan on reimbursing consumers who want to upgrade! -- **Steven Ritter**

Colbert Artists Management

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019
www.colbertartists.com ~ 212-757-0782

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

Colbert Artists Management

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019
www.colbertartists.com ~ 212-757-0782