PAGANINI: *Guitar Pieces*

Marco Tamayo—Naxos 557598—61 minutes

If one has to listen to an entire recording of Paganini guitar works, the sensational Marco Tamayo is the player to listen to. As on his Giuliani release on Naxos (Nov/Dec 2005), Tamayo demonstrates here his stunning combination of world-class technique, impeccable musicianship, and devil-may-care interpretive flair. Tamayo plays this music with such mischievous delight, caprice, and flash—yet never overstepping the bounds of taste—that one can almost imagine the music being improvised. It is very near how I imagine Paganini sounded playing the guitar.

The program includes the well-known Grand Sonata in A (adapted from its original guitar and violin version). Many players have recorded the piece in solo guitar versions, including such luminaries as Bream and Williams, but I can safely say that this is the greatest solo guitar performance of the work on record. It is simply astonishing, both technically and musically—full of surprises and risks, yet all held together by a riveting musical and dramatic continuity.

In addition to the Grand Sonata there are several shorter sonatas and many delightful, quirky miniatures I had never heard before, called *ghiribizzi* (caprices or whims). There is little musical substance in these pieces, but there is much delightful play, and they never overstay their welcome.

Tamayo concludes the program with breathtaking transcriptions of three of the violin caprices (including 5 and 24). His teacher, Eliot Fisk, recorded transcriptions of all 24 caprices, and Fisk's daredevil approach is certainly in evidence here. But Tamayo is a player of far greater taste and balance than Fisk, and his sound is much fuller, without Fisk's rough edges.

Naxos's sound is first rate. The packaging is slight as always, with engaging notes from Colin Cooper.

RINGS