

Bach Partita No. 1 in B flat, BWV825^a; Violin Sonata in E, BWV1016 – Adagio ma non tanto^b;

Beethoven Violin Sonata No. 5 in F, Op. 24, *Spring*^c. **De Séverac** Vers le mas en fête; Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia; Bagneuses au soleil^d.

^{bc}**Joan Massià** (vn); **Blanche Selva** (pf).
St Laurent Studio mono (M) (D) YSL78-103
(58mins; ADD); rec. ^b3/1/29; ^c11/1/29, 9/1
& 13/5/29, 2/6/30; ^d7 & 11/1/29; ^a4/5/29.
(www.78experience.com.) Item marked ^a
from French Columbia D15234/35, ^bFrench
Columbia LFX108, ^cLFX105/08, ^dD15140/02.

Franck ^aPrélude, choral et fugue; ^bViolin Sonata in A.

^b**Joan Massià** (vn); **Blanche Selva** (pf).
St Laurent Studio mono (M) (D) YSL78-213
(45mins; ADD); rec. 5/1/29; ^a10 and 12/1/29.
(www.78experience.com.) Item marked ^b from
French Columbia LFX100/03; ^aLFX194/46.

Blanche Selva (1884–1942) had made only these few records when, in 1930, she suffered a stroke

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during a concert and had to give up playing. She got the most amazing sound out of the piano, full and round but never at the expense of forward movement. The Bach Partita is played with lovely tone, plenty of chiaroscuro and a light touch. The rhythm is delicious, especially in the Gigue. In the Minuets you can hear someone clear their throat! The three pieces by Déodat de Séverac, of whom she was a champion and his biographer, are played with marvellous colours. She must have been good at Debussy.

In 1923 Selva linked up in a duo with the Catalan violinist Joan Massià and they gave many performances together. After her catastrophe he wound down his playing career in favour of teaching – he suffered terribly from nerves. Beethoven's *Spring* Sonata is their most reissued recording but not their best: the expression is applied from the outside and Massià's phrasing in particular becomes very predictable. The Adagio is the most rewarding movement – they completely miss the wit in the tiny Scherzo. The Bach movement, which I had never before identified, is agreeably played.

Newcomers should head for the Franck disc. Selva plays the *Prélude, choral et fugue* with great depth of tone where appropriate. There is lovely soft playing at the start. She speeds up for effect in the Fugue, where Cortot's tempo is more consistent. The A major Sonata is played absolutely beautifully by Massià and Selva, with singing tone from both. This is the real thing: his portamento is meltingly persuasive, her sound is beautiful and they phrase flexibly but convincingly. They take quite a simple view of the opening to the finale, then fly along, with the violin as free as a bird, the piano piling up a rocky landscape as the ideal backdrop. My love for Thibaud and Cortot is unshakeable but I always return with pleasure to this recording.

Yves St Laurent's transfers are truthful, keeping the surface noise but also giving you the full depth of Selva's tone. Even if you have the French disc with seven of these pieces (Malibran (D) CDRG177), you should consider these two. The Beethoven and its Bach filler are also on an interesting anthology of Catalan violinists (LMG (D) 3061). The Franck Sonata is on CD for the first time. Three fine photos of Selva are reproduced but there are no notes – the Malibran disc is useful in that regard.

Tully Potter