



**GEORGE GERSHWIN**

Second Rhapsody

**FERDE GROFÉ**

Mississippi Suite; Grand Canyon Suite; Gallodoro's Serenade

Lincoln Mayorga (piano); Al Gallodoro (saxophone)

Harmonie Ensemble

Steven Richman

Bridge- 9212(CD)

Reference Recording - None for this coupling

*Artistic Quality* **10/10** *Sound Quality*

Ferde Grofé's arrangements for Paul Whiteman's band constitute a treasure-trove of early- to mid-20th century Americana. Usually we only get to hear his epoch-making original arrangement of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, but here we are treated to the rarely-performed Second Rhapsody, as well as Grofé's own Grand Canyon and Mississippi Suites. The results are both delightful and ear-opening. In this arrangement the Second Rhapsody sounds remarkably light and sassy, and notably less "cinematic" than in its original form (the music began life as a film score). Oddly enough, the small ensemble's smoother dynamic profile gives the piece greater coherence and flow, aided by Lincoln Mayorga's elegant playing and Steven Richman's idiomatic and alert conducting.

The same observations hold true for the Grofé works. If the final "Cloudburst" from the Grand Canyon Suite isn't as obviously overwhelming as it can be when played by a full orchestra, movements such as "On the Trail" gain in terms of sheer charm. Throwing the balance of tone onto the winds and brass rather than the strings produces a far less heavy texture overall, and the music sounds somehow more modern, less dated. It's also great to have the chance to hear the Mississippi Suite once again. It's really a fine piece of descriptive work and it deserves to be popular.

As a bonus, we have Gallodoro's Serenade, a characterful bon-bon offered by Mayorga and the piece's dedicatee, Al Gallodoro himself, something of a living legend. He played clarinet and saxophone in Whiteman's band for several decades and is still going strong well into his 90s. Bridge's sonics are typically terrific, while Richman and the Harmonie Ensemble deserve lots of credit for digging up these arrangements and bringing them back to life with such gusto and polish. More titles are promised, and we can only look forward to them with enthusiasm. [11/8/2006]

--David Hurwitz