A Life in Music - Vintage Tommy Reilly

Tommy Reilly (harmonica)
rec. 1945-1988
CHANDOS CHAN20143 [77:20]

Tommy Reilly recorded prolifically for Chandos and manyroy
...ed to be grateful for the preservation of a
large swathe of his repertory, both classical and lighter:
Vaughan Williams, Vilém Tausky, Malcolm Arnold, the music of
long-time collaborator James Moody, the folk song album with
harpist Skaila Kanga, all those wonderful arrangements with
Neville Marriner and the ASMF and so much more.

It must have been tempting to call this disc 'The Life of Reilly'
but fortunately perhaps the title is somewhat more sober-
suited. It contains no fewer than 30 tracks recorded over a
four-decade period from 1945 (a demo recording) to the 1988
Golden Girl with Moody accompanying. An exciting feature –
one of many in this splendid salute to the great harmonica
player - is that so many pieces are released for the first time.
A substantial number (eight titles) do come from the Polydor
LP he recorded in Oslo in October 1970 called The Harmonica
of Tommy Reilly and several from sessions presided over by
George Martin – well before The Beatles – for Parlophone 78s.
But by my reckoning fifteen of the thirty tracks, largely culled
from live broadcasts, are being made available for the first time.
Not a bad haul.

In his youth Reilly had played the violin and it's often said he played the harmonica like a fiddler,
something that his son David touches on in his affectionate and wide-ranging booklet notes. Reilly's hero
was Heifetz, a hard act to follow, but Reilly strove to emulate and translate Heifetz's virtuosity to his own
instrument. It's unsurprising that one of the unused tracks should be the Dinicu-HeifetzHora staccato,
dispatched with virtuosity and rhythmic wit.

The colours Reilly managed to produce, the technical barriers he overcame and the unrivalled musicality
he evinced on the instrument are stunningly audible throughout this disc. His multi-coloured exploration
of articulation and range on Zigeunerweisen – perfect for a fiddler manqué, though saucily cut in size – is
matched by throaty yelps and stratospherically high notes, all garnished with a deliberately
cloying 'gypsy' vibrato. No wonder it provoked applause from the studio audience in this Oslo recording
from 1953. His Polydor album explored stylistic versatility, hence the Baroque strictures of a Scarlatti
movement and the Gigue from Bach's Partita No 3, as well as the sultry romanticism of Rachmaninov's
Serenade, with fine pianist Kaare Grum. In that album he was also supported by the Norwegian Opera
String Quartet, notably in a very beautiful performance of the David Reilly-Robert Farnon music from the
Age of Innocence.

It's fitting one should hear a number of Moody's own compositions, as well as Reilly's own originals and
transcriptions. His colleague Alan Langford composed a raunchy and in places knowingly Dinicu-like piece
called Firebrand that would have appealed to Reilly and which he recorded in his Polydor LP. Some of his
warhorses are here, notably Smetana's Dance of the Comedians from The Bartered Bride, and the
outpouring to The Marriage of Figaro (yes indeed) heard in 1949 BBC Light Programme broadcasts with
Billy Tremain and his Orchestra. Some of the George Martin recordings are subjected to his trickery, either
speeded up or slowed down – I wondered if Joe Meek was listening – and though the sound isn't quite
the finest there's some supremely articulate playing on a broadcast with Tausky directing the
Northern Variety Orchestra in 1953 where Reilly plays Donald Phillips' Firefly.

Reilly hints at his swing prowess on Gin Ginger, though clearly he was a very different kind of performer
than Larry Adler in this metier. Instead there's novelty, medley, humour in eighteenth century pastiche, or
in evocations of Bulgarian wedding dances, courtesy of James Moody.

There is, in short, a huge amount here to entertain the keen listener. Reilly's commercial discography is
saluted but the archive is successfully mined for off-air material that summon up a time, a place and an
era. Reilly was the wizard at the centre of it all, a supreme colourist, the George Malcolm of the
harmonica. Or perhaps Malcolm was the Tommy Reilly of the Harpsichord.
Jonathan Woolf

Contents
1. Zigeunerweisen ( Sarasate, arr. Reilly)
   - Norwegian Radio Orchestra / Øivind Bergh (NRK Radio, Oslo, 21 November 1953)
   - Sonata in G minor, L338 (D. Scarlatti, arr. Moodly)
   - Kaare Ørnung (piano)
2. Gigue from Partita no.3, BWV1006 (JS Bach, trans. Tommy Reilly)
   - harmonica solo
3. Serenade (Rachmaninov)
   - Kaare Ørnung (piano)
4. Italian Dance (Madeleine Dring)
   - Kaare Ørnung (piano)
5. Age of Innocence (David Reilly/Robert Farnon)
6. Russian Dance no.2 in G minor (Moszkowski)
7. Gigue from Partita no.3, BWV1006 (JS Bach, trans. Tommy Reilly)
8. Voice from the Past (Tommy Reilly/James Moody)
9. Firebrand (Hernandez, arr. Reilly)
10. Deep Purple (de Young)
11. Dance of the Comedians, from "The Bartered Bride" (Smetana, arr. Reilly)
12. The Marriage of Figaro, overture (Mozart, arr. Reilly)
13. Midnight in Mayfair (Newell Chase)
14. El Cumbanchero (Hernandez, arr. Reilly)
15. Jealousy (Jacob Gade, arr. Reilly)
16. Dinah (Lewis/Young/Akst, arr. Reilly)
17. Bop! (Donal Phillips)
18. Firefly (Donald Phillips)
20. Gin Ginger (Bobby Young)
21. No Limit (Tommy Reilly/Bobby Young)
22. Bulgarian Wedding Dance (James Moody)
23. Hora Staccato (Dinucu-Heifetz)
24. 18th Century Rock (Jimmy Leach, arr. Reilly/Moody)
25. Irish Medley (trad., arr. James Moody)
26. The Breeze and I (Lecuona, arr. Reilly)
27. The Edward Rubach Quartet
28. The Red Flame (Tommy Reilly/Maurice Arnold)
29. Waltz in D flat major, op.64 no.1 "Minute Waltz" (Chopin)
30. Golden Girl (Tommy Reilly/James Moody)

Tracks 2-9 and 29-30 are Stereo, the rest Mono