Julián CARRILLO (1875-1965)  
Symphony No.2 in C major Op.7 (1905 – rev 1957) [46:46]  
A Isabel: Schottisch (1890) orch. Uiriel Luna Herrera [4:27]  
Matilde ó México en 1810: excerpts (1910) [15:18]  
Marcia Nupcial No.2 (1910) [2:52]  
Luis Guillermo Hernández Ávila, baritone (Matilde)  
Chorus of the Orquesta Sinfónica de San Luis Potosi (Matilde)  
Orquesta Sinfónica de San Luis Potosi, José Miramontes Zapata  
Recorded: December 2010 (Matilde) and the remaining items October 2015. Teatro de la Paz, San Luis Potosi, Mexico.  
TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0583 [69:29]

Toccata Classics have scored a first here, everything on this desirable disc is a first recording of music by a composer little known outside his native Mexico. Up till 1910 his music was of a traditional late romantic character, but later he became best known for his experiments and composition of microtonal music. There is none of that included here, and the CD starts with the very interesting second symphony, played here in the 1957 revision. I think that it would be useful to quote the booklet here: “The symphony includes elements of late Romanticism, but Carrillo also experiments openly with sonorities that approach French tendencies, including some sections characterised by Post-Impressionist harmony and, more radically, some polytonal effects closer to such modernist twentieth century composers as Schmitt and Ives.”  
  
I really think that my liking for the work is rather split between the first two movements and the last two, much favouring the latter. For the most part, I find the first movement to be rather amorphous in character, with not particularly memorable or contrasting themes. The first subject opening is a dreamy affair morphing into a second subject allegro, which although much quicker is thematically not all that much different from its predecessor and which rapidly lapses into more dreamy doodling and brooding. There is much thematic repetition, which does give the ear something to latch on to, and I immediately recognised one of the themes when it reappeared in the 4th movement peroration. This 1st movement reaches an effectively dramatic coda, but I think that 16 minutes is too long for its material. Having said that the whole movement is very pleasant, and I found myself appreciating it more after a week or so had elapsed from the several initial listening sessions – perhaps my subconscious had assimilated the themes in the meantime.  
  
The composer of a late Romantic symphony should (imho) go to town with the slow movement, striving to create memorable themes, and Carrillo opens with a very nice melody that leads to an effective climax for the orchestra in full flight, but the music then transits into a less interesting re-working of the initial themes of the movement. It is all conventional enough, until the ending section in which the composer indulges (if that’s the word) in some polytonal sequences, that sound just plain odd when compared with what has gone before.  
  
The scherzo opens in light dancing mood, a good contrast with the slow movement, but the allegro marking soon allows the composer to write more flowing music, highly romantic in character, with the strings being quite prominent. After reverting to the capricious opening manner, the horns make an effective entry, and from that point on, there is much brass writing, with the horn section being given a major role, with the composer’s demands equalling those of Richard Strauss. The movement gradually builds up a head of steam, with occasional jaunty relapses, leading to a surprisingly docile ending.  
  
The last movement begins quietly, but quickly moves into an allegro that carries it forward into the most exciting music in the entire work, with brass to the fore trying to dominate massed strings, and I found myself thinking that it is the sort of music that brings an audience to its feet during its closing pages.  
  
The orchestra plays well throughout the symphony, an occasional slight untidiness in the strings notwithstanding. The recording is a little boomy, with some of the lower instruments sounding indistinct, but all in all the production and playing serve this interesting work very well indeed, and I have been delighted to make its acquaintance and will return to it with anticipation.  
  
The opera Matilde ó México was composed at the behest of the then Mexican President to commemorate the Mexican War of Independence in 1810. Carrillo completed it in 1910, but a revolution began in the same year, and the work was not performed until 2010 after the score had been edited by the conductor on this CD. There are four extracts performed here, and I can easily hear that the composer obeyed the injunction from his President, to create a Verdi-like opera for the celebrations. Memorable tunes, vibrantly orchestrated make for pleasant listening. The last excerpt features a short solo by the baritone proclaiming the glory of the fight for independence. His singing leaves only a mildly favourable impression, his voice being grainy and once or twice slightly unsteady. The text of the vocal section is included in the booklet.  
  
There are two short fillers, the first A Isabel: Schottisch is a salon piece composed by Carrillo when he was 15. Contrary to my expectations, the work has nothing to do with Scotland, the term Schottisch being of Bohemian origin denoting a slow polka. As one might expect this is a colourfully orchestrated dance piece. The other is a Marcha Nupcial from 1910. Carrillo composed it for a specific wedding, and it is rather Mendelssohnian in character.  
  
The booklet accompanying the disc is very informative of both the music and the composer’s life. It is well up to Toccata’s usual standard and complements the CD nicely.   
  
**Jim Westhead**  
  
A desirable disc of first recordings