

## FANFARE REVIEW

### For RUNAWAY BUNNY

What follows may disqualify me as a reviewer of the above. First, I never grew up, and at age 62, I have no intention of doing so. Second, I still occasionally watch an episode Mr. Roger's Neighborhood solely on the grounds that he likes me just the way I am—one of the most empowering benedictions ever bestowed upon a child of any age. As the father of two grown and quite accomplished daughters who were daily regaled during their formative years by the choicest examples of children's lit that my late wife, a children's librarian, could obtain, I am well acquainted with the texts that so eloquently inform this release. The Runaway Bunny is from Margaret Brown's classic 1942 children's book of the same title; Paddington Bear's First Concert is based on Michael Bond's series of children's books about a marmalade eating bear "from Darkest Peru"; and Tubby the Tuba is the word-half of the 1941–1945 collaboration between author/actor Michael Tripp and composer George Kleinsinger, which over the years has been successfully disseminated via multiple recordings and film animations, and which has been cited by the Library of Congress in 2006 as a landmark in audio history. The Runaway Bunny was originally conceived by composer Glen Roven as a piece for solo violin, singer, and orchestra—designed as a vehicle for Israeli violinist Ittai Shapira. In the course of the project's development, Shapira suggested substituting a narrator for the singer. Given the results, it was an excellent choice that spotlights the powerful eloquence of the seemingly modestly unpoetic words. I found the music coupled with Brooke Shields's narration deeply moving. Most of the "audio product" aimed at children which has come across my desk over the years has been plagued by mawkishness, condescension, terminal cuteness—afflictions that most children I know find

inherently repulsive. On that topic I recently had a conversation with my eldest daughter, who is currently continuing her anthropological studies of Central Asia on a Fulbright grant in Helsinki. I asked her if she, like me, ever felt embarrassed when adults spoke to us, when we were children, in baby talk. Her answer, "I felt more sorry and embarrassed for the adults than for myself." The texts on this release are self-recommending and are delivered by Brooke Shields and Stephen Fry as one ageless human being speaking to another, and in ways that uncannily convey the metaphorically richness of the words. The music is witty, urbane, often ironic, and as sophisticated as all children inherently are until our adult-controlled world succeeds in dumbing them down. The music to *The Runaway Bunny* proves to be a fine ad hoc violin concerto that highlights Ittai Shapira's estimable skills. One of this offering's agendas is to introduce children to the joys and richness of the symphony orchestra. To put this into a larger perspective, this offering is, in its own way, on the exalted level of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, or Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. The sound is up to the highest of current standards, and the performances by the Royal Philharmonic conducted by Barry Wordsworth show them in fine fettle, as have so many others by him that currently grace my library. In searching for a way to close this piece, I was tempted to say something to the effect of "recommended to the child in all of us." Instead I will take my leave by saying that it helps us to respect the child in all of us, especially that which resides in our children.

William Zagorski