The latest trawl of radio recordings from Melo Classic is typically eclectic and revelatory. Among the featured pianists is Samson François (MC1045), who never recorded Liszt’s Sonata commercially, but whose highly flammable, grandly rhapsodising 1965 account recorded in recital as part of a mostly Liszt–Chopin programme will make you wonder again about the design of Romanticism’s greatest piano work.

One of Liszt’s most dazzling 20th-century exponents was György Cziffra (MC1046), and though some Liszt is included in a 1961 Besançon recital, the highlights are by Schumann (Toccata; Sonata No 1) and Chopin (F minor Fantasy; A flat Polonaise). This is barnstorming pianism, often beefed up with augmented chords. It may potentially be subject to the law of diminishing returns, in terms of appreciation, but it has an undeniably high wow factor. Edith Picht-Axenfeld (2 CDs, MC1043), whom I always thought of as a rather sober exponent of harpsichord music, is boldly assertive on the piano in Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms’s Op 76, Schumann’s Humoreske and Chopin’s Op 10 Études – though her Chopin Op 68 Mazurkas lie dead in the water. Cortot pupil Reine Gianoli (2 CDs, MC1044) offers a set of Chopin Op 28 Preludes which is every bit as involving as Cortot’s own: like him, she swallows the cycle whole, treating it as an integrated sequence. Liszt’s 11th Hungarian Rhapsody (not No 9, as stated) is again reminiscent of Cortot, and Beethoven’s Sonata Op 31 No 3 approaches a benchmark, its progressive opening only just short of sounding ‘cool’, its galloping finale kicking up dust. Wilhelm Kempff (2 CDs, MC1042) defies expectations with a 1959 performance of the same work which is both urgent and restless, an assessment that can apply just as readily to his Brahms Op 118 and Handel Variations, and Schumann Fantasy. This is Kempff uncaged, keenly spontaneous and light years away from the chiselled perfectionist we know from so many of his commercial recordings.

A set dedicated to Walter Gieseking (2 CDs, MC1041) at the Hollywood Bowl 1955–56 has some unforgettable highlights.

Best of all is Mendelssohn’s Rondo capriccioso, where Gieseking’s lightness of touch spins a magic not present on any other version I’ve heard. Two Schubert impromptus (D 935 No 3 and D899 No 4) are also memorably poetic (especially the warmly expressed B flat major from D935), as is Mendelssohn’s Lied ohne Worte, Op 19 No 1. This is vintage Gieseking indeed. Other solo pieces include Scott’s Lotus Land and Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s Cipresi (both new to Gieseking’s discography), Gieseking’s own transcription of Strauss’s Lied Ständchen and some rather careless Ravel (Alborada del gracioso – spoilt by premature applause – doesn’t really pass muster). The concertos here are variable: Grieg under Izler Solomon features vibrant string playing from the Los Angeles PO and thrilling projection from Gieseking, whereas Schumann (Erich Leinsdorf) and Rachmaninov No 2 (Solomon again) find him playing to the gallery, often in a rather haphazard fashion. But the Schubert and Mendelssohn items are precious finds.

More consistent by far is a stunning set of performances (1965–68) by Jascha Heifetz’s star pupil Erick Friedman (2 CDs, MC2034). The luminous, speaking tone is reminiscent of Heifetz’s own, particularly in Debussy’s Sonata (with Mischa Elman’s accompanist Joseph Seiger), where the similarities are at their most striking. Other works of varying lengths again recall ‘his master’s voice’, whether brilliant (Paganini Moto perpetuo) or passionate (Brahms Sonata No 3). Concertos by Beethoven (under Wolfgang Sawallisch, with an acrobatic first-movement cadenza and a ravishing slow movement) and Mendelssohn (Serge Baudo) – although generally less finely tooled than the works with piano – subscribe to a similar aesthetic of keen-edged attack and sweetened classicism.

An Ossy Renardy album (MC2037) includes the Brahms and Tchaikovsky violin concertos (the latter is cut) in poor sound, but Ernst’s Concerto, a real wrist-breaker, is given the performance of a lifetime, and the sound isn’t at all bad. Then there’s Tibor de Machula’s distinctive cello playing (MC3014) – fast, tremulous vibrato, tonal warmth and a consistently musical approach to phrasing. The CD opens with Boccherini’s Concerto No 9, the central Andantino grazioso being a highlight. The Schumann Concerto with Karl Böhm and the Berlin Philharmonic was recorded in January 1945, and although frequently eloquent it lacks the depth of feeling that characterises his earlier wartime version under Furtwängler. Best is Saint-Saëns’s First Concerto under Hans Rosbaud, the closing Tempo primo extraordinarily virtuosic. Tchaikovsky’s Rococo Variations (also from 1952) under Hans Müller-Kray takes a similar interpretative route that straddles the border between brilliance and introspection.

A 1960 recording of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto by Lola Bobesco (MC2036) is also deeply affecting. In fact, it rather humbled me in light of recent comments I made when reviewing Christian Tetzlaff’s latest recording – about slow and reverential accounts of the work that suggest a sort of Holy Grail. If Tetzlaff provides a strong case for the fast-lane prosecution, Bobesco’s argument for the slow-coach defence could hardly be more powerful. The first movement is a broadly paced 25’34”, with lovingly drawn phrasing and a triumphant account of Kreisler’s ingenious cadenza. The Larghetto, though less intense than Friedman’s, is hardly less beautiful, the finale appropriately rumbustious. Also included are Bach’s A minor Concerto, whose eight-minute Andante harks back to the days when Bach slow movements were played religioso, and an orchestration of Vitali’s Chaconne by Bobesco’s friend and musical collaborator Jacques Genty. Müller-Kray and the Stuttgart RSPO provide sober but effective accompaniments and the mono sound is generally excellent. As with all these Melo Classic releases, Michael Waiblinger’s annotation is hugely informative. This is a fabulous bundle of discs.