

# Chamber

## La Rêveuse

New

**Buxtehude** Sonatas – C, BuxWV266; F, BuxWV269; G, BuxWV271. Ciacona in C minor, BuxWV159 (arr. composer). **Reinken** Hortus Musicus – No. 1 in A minor; No. 4 in D minor.

**La Rêveuse** (Stéphan Dudermel, Simon Heyerick, violins; Florence Bolton, viola da gamba; Angélique Mauillon, triple harp; Bertrand Cuiller, harpsichord/organ; Emmanuel Mandrin, organ)/**Benjamin Perrot** (theorbo).

**Mirare MIR074** (full price, 1 hour 7 minutes).

Website [www.mirare.fr](http://www.mirare.fr). Producers/Engineers Hugues Deschaux, Aline Blondiau. Date July 2008.



**IRR**  
OUTSTANDING

It used to be thought that Johann Adam Reinken (more commonly

spelled 'Reincken') was born in 1623, making him 99 years old when he died in 1722. However, he was probably born in about 1637, the same year as his good friend Dietrich Buxtehude. The latter, having been appointed the organist of St Mary's Church in Lübeck in 1668, often travelled to nearby Hamburg to visit his affluent and sociable colleague, who was the organist of St Catherine's Church there and whose house was always open to musicians, artists and scholars. *La Rêveuse's* fascinating programme allows us to compare the musical personalities of these two giants of North German music.

Somewhat surprisingly given their occupations, neither composer published any organ or church music. Reinken's only printed work was a set of six so-called partitas for two violins, viola da gamba and basso continuo entitled *Hortus Musicus*, which he published at his own expense in 1687. Buxtehude's only publications were two collections of trio sonatas issued in about 1694 and 1696, also at his own expense. Both composers' sonatas are deeply influenced by the Italian style so popular among North German musicians of their time, which gave them expressive freedom, emancipating them from the requirements of strict polyphonic writing and encouraging brilliantly virtuosic writing overflowing with theatrical gestures, passionate affects, contrasts and variety. Their Italophilia did not mean, however, that they abandoned counterpoint, for it is also a prominent and very attractive feature of both composers' fantasy-filled music.

All six of Reinken's partitas follow the same pattern, opening with a lengthy 'sonata'

consisting of multiple slow and fast sections (the second always a strict three-part fugue in reversible counterpoint), followed by the same sequence of four short dances (*Allemand*, *Courant*, *Saraband* and *Gigue* [sic], the last of which is always fugal). The sonatas of Partitas I and IV, written with great rhythmic, harmonic and melodic variety, have solemn yet festive slow introductory sections full of grand rhetorical gestures. Partita IV's sonata is especially richly chromatic and full of harmonic tensions.

Buxtehude's sonatas are structurally much more varied and rely more on ostinatos and variation movements. The three in *La Rêveuse's* programme are not from Buxtehude's published Opp. 1 or 2 collections but from the enormous manuscript collection compiled by his other good friends, the father-and-son team of Gustav and Andreas Düben, who worked for the Swedish royal court. They have the same scoring as Reinken's partitas. Both Reinken's and Buxtehude's sonatas have extensive solo passages that remind us that the violin and gamba virtuosos of Lübeck and Hamburg were famed throughout Europe.

Buxtehude's substantial C minor organ *Ciacona* divides the recital in two. Bertrand Cuiller and Emmanuel Mandrin perform it with magnificent panache in an arrangement for chamber organ and positive organ. In the partitas and sonatas, these instruments join *La Rêveuse's* harpsichord (played by Cuiller), theorbo and Baroque triple harp to provide a sumptuous continuo perfectly complementing the highly burnished and almost chocolate-like tones of the two violins and gamba.

*La Rêveuse's* supremely skilled and ecstatic performances give full force to both composers' extraordinarily rich musical personalities and overflowing imaginations. The ensemble is particularly successful in conveying each work's mounting excitement, the violinists' and gambist's profuse yet organic ornamentation aiding to build to a rapturous finale. Buxtehude emerges as the slightly more serious-minded and profound composer of the pair, despite the prominence Reinken gives to strict counterpoint. He also has a marginally greater imaginative freedom, Reinken's roiling profusion of ideas and greater theatrical brilliance never completely hiding a more relaxed and sunnier disposition.

Exemplary audio engineering capturing the warmth and richness of the instruments' gloriously full-bodied tones and interesting notes on the two composers and their music by the seemingly ubiquitous Gilles Cantagrel complete this marvellous production. This disc is a necessary addition to the musical library of any true Baroque music fan.

*Christopher Price*

## Falla

New CD/SACD

*La vida breve* – Spanish Dance. El amor brujo<sup>ab</sup>. El sombrero de tres picos<sup>ab</sup> – Danza de la molinero; Danza de los Vecinos; Danza de la Molinera. Siete Canciones populares españolas<sup>a</sup>. Homenaje. Tus Ojillos Negros (all arr. Katona Twins)<sup>a</sup>.

**Peter Katona, Zoltán Katona** (guitars) with <sup>a</sup>Juanita Lascarro (soprano); <sup>b</sup>David García Mir (percussion).

**Channel Classics CCSSA28809** (full price, 57 minutes). Website [www.channelclassics.com](http://www.channelclassics.com)  Producer/Engineer C. Jared Sacks. Date 2008.

This is a zippy collection of works by Manuel de Falla arranged for the dynamic Katona guitar duo, with percussion and the soprano voice of Juanita Lascarro for good measure. It's exhilarating, and the Flamenco-tinged playing of the Katona Twins changes the music's timbre to such an extent that even in something as familiar as the Introduction to *La vida breve* one wonders exactly what one is listening to. It sounds somehow 'uncomposed', like genuine folk music. In this case, of course, the Katonas are emphasizing the Spanish element already present in Falla's music, rather than pursuing the route taken by the Irishers of Vivaldi or the Africanizers of Bach. Use is made also of eerie atmospheric sounds from the guitar synthesizer and the mysterious throbbing of the electric guitar for 'En la cueva' (the former is also used in 'A media noche', together with percussion, to brilliant effect, and in the 'Escena', track 10).

Then there is the darkly passionate voice of Lascarro for the songs – but in spite of the arrangements and new instrumentations, I do not want to give the impression that the recording relies on a box of tricks – its musicianship is beyond dispute. Percussionist David García Mir and Peter and Zoltán Katona have an extraordinary singularity of musical vision and effortlessness of technique, and both are used in the service of the score: one never has the sense that they are trying to 'improve' Falla's work.

In addition to *La vida breve*, we are given three dances from *El sombrero de tres picos*, of which I found the 'orchestral' guitar textures of the 'Danza de la molinera' particularly impressive, and the lovely *Siete Canciones populares españolas*, which Lascarro sings as to the manner born. They sound as though they must really have been originally conceived for this new instrumentation. The disc ends with Falla's only genuine guitar work, *Homenaje*, and another song, *Tus Ojillos Negros*.

Channel's SACD sound is absolutely glorious, even on a standard CD player. Given such a fine recording, then, I feel entitled to ask: why no sung texts in the booklet?

*Ivan Moody*

**Ge Gan-Ru**

New

String Quartets – No. 1, 'Fu'; No. 4, 'Angel Suite'; No. 5, 'Fall of Baghdad'.

**ModernWorks** (Airi Yoshioka, Mayuki Fukuhara, violins; Veronica Salas, viola; Madeleine Shapiro, cello).

**Naxos Chinese Classics 8.570603** (super-budget price, 1 hour 1 minute). *Website* www.naxos.com **D**  
*Producer* Bonnie Silver. *Engineer* Norbert Kraft. *Dates* May 12th-14th, 2008.



Ge Gan-Ru

Philip Tsai

Of all the contemporary Chinese composers who grew up during the Cultural Revolution and subsequently settled in the West – as often as not the USA – Ge Gan-Ru is the least concerned with fusing the Occident with the Orient. While many others pursue a compromise between musical elements drawn from late twentieth-century Europe and America and the traditional sentimental and stylized picture-painting of traditional Chinese art, Ge has always been sufficiently comfortable with his Chinese-ness in a Western context to avoid laying it on with a trowel.

In other works he has made use of aspects drawn specifically from his Chinese roots, but in the string quartet medium, as shown in these three works dating from 1983, 1998 and 2007 respectively (and thereby spanning Ge's entire creative period since his arrival in the USA), he reveals himself to be a master of the idiom and able to produce music which, while distinctive, avoids overly blatant references, musical or otherwise, to China. When I suggest that there is a passage in the second movement of the glorious Fourth Quartet of which Shostakovich would surely have been envious, I don't consider Ge to have struck lucky by imitation. These

quartets, widely varied as they are in language and style, are nothing short of contemporary masterpieces of the idiom irrespective of the composer's nationality or background.

The single-movement First Quartet, subtitled *Fu*, can be excused its titular references to Chinese calligraphy and poetry since Ge started it before leaving his native Shanghai for New York City in 1983. However, reading the booklet notes on the work is the only way in which these Chinese references are made immediately apparent. The music itself, apart from a somewhat tiresome penchant for high sustained notes on the first violin (something which crops up again only in the final movement of the Fifth Quartet where the violin climbs up so high before tumbling down – as with the famous image of the tumbling statue of Saddam after the Fall of Baghdad), can be appreciated entirely on its own terms, making highly effective use of the quartet medium.

By the time of the Fourth Quartet, Ge was obviously far more at ease with the Western idiom and is quoted in the booklet note as accepting that 'this piece is the closest to the Western classical music tradition'. Even unashamed references to a familiar Western theme (the third movement refers frequently to Schubert's *Ave Maria*) fit comfortably into the musical language, while in that tremendously spellbinding second movement, only the absence of the DSCH motif would prevent casual listeners from suspecting that they have come across a hitherto hidden masterpiece from Shostakovich.

The headline piece, as it were – the Fifth Quartet subtitled *The Fall of Baghdad* – is perhaps weakened by the sense of anger Ge obviously felt at the Second Gulf War; his understandable emotions are in danger of getting the better of his musical judgement. There's no sense, though, of this being weaker because of its very obvious modelling on Crumb's *Black Angels*. Like Crumb, Ge is attempting to write out of himself his feelings at a contemporary war. Extreme emotions – we veer from spitting rage to dark tragedy – are probably more potently expressed by subtlety and understatement in such an intimate medium as the string quartet, but the instrumental effects Ge calls for are nevertheless impressive, and are delivered with astonishing conviction by the members of Modern Works.

On every front, this is a magnificent disc. The music is outstanding and deserves the widest possible audience. The performances from ModernWorks, a New York-based quartet specializing, as their name suggests, in the performance of contemporary works, are absorbing and delivered with tangible intensity and involvement. The Naxos recording is of the highest order.

*Marc Rochester*

**Handel 12 Sonatas, Op. 1 (Walsh).** New

Violin Sonatas – A, HWV361; G minor, HWV368; F, HWV370; A, HWV372 (Roger); E, HWV373 (Roger). Oboe Sonatas – G minor, HWV364a; F, HWV363a (Op. posth.); C minor, HWV366. Flute Sonatas – E minor, HWV359b; G, HWV363b; B minor, HWV376b. Recorder Sonatas – G minor, HWV360; A minor, HWV362; C, HWV365; F, HWV369.

**Academy of Ancient Music** (Rachel Brown, flute/recorder; Frank de Bruine, oboe; Pavlo Beznosiuk, violin; Richard Egarr, harpsichord).

**Harmonia Mundi USA HMU907465.66** (full price, two discs, 2 hours 27 minutes). *Website* www.harmoniamundi.com **D** *Producer/Engineer* Brad Michel. *Engineer* Chris Barrett. *Date* September 2007.

**Comparisons:****Op. 1:**

Beckett, Beznosiuk, Goodwin, Wallfisch, Tunnicliffe, Nicholson (Hyperion) CDA66921/3 (1994, three discs)

**Violin Sonatas. HWV361, 370, 372 and 373:**

Manze, Egarr (Harmonia Mundi) HMU907259 (1998)

**Violin Sonatas. HWV361, 370 and 372:**

Kurosaki, Christie (Virgin Veritas) 5 45554-2 (2002)

**Flute Sonatas, HWV359b, 363b and 367b:**

Beznosiuk, Tunnicliffe, Nicholson

(Hyperion) CDA67278 (2001)

**Flute Sonatas, HWV359b and 363b:**

Wentz, Musica ad Rhenum

(Challenge Classics) CC72046 (1997)

**Recorder Sonatas, HWV360, 362, 365 and 369:**

Nicolas, Ens Fitzwilliam (Zig-Zag Territoires)

ZZT030201 (2002)

Thorby, Egarr (Linn Records) CKD223 (2003)

**Recorder Sonatas, HWV360, 362 and 369:**

Oberlinger, Ens 1700 (Marc Aurel Edition)

MA20024 (2003)

As Richard Egarr explains in his engaging booklet notes, Handel's Op. 1 Sonatas present considerable challenges for a complete recording. There were, in fact, two editions of Op. 1. The first, undated but issued around 1722, bore on its title-page 'à Amsterdam chez Jeanne Roger'. Egarr agrees with the scholarly consensus that this was the London publisher John Walsh's pirate edition trying to circumvent Handel's exclusive right to publish his own music, granted by the King in 1722. Around 1732, Walsh issued a second edition identifying himself as the publisher on the title-page, which also stated, 'This is more correct than the former Edition'.

The 'corrections' present the greatest difficulties, for the contents of the two editions are not identical. The greatest difference is that the 'Roger' Violin Sonatas Nos. 10 and 11 are completely different works from their 'Walsh' counterparts. Apart from other differences in the two editions, there are also different manuscript versions of several sonatas, some in Handel's hand and others of less clear authenticity, with different or additional movements or different instrumentation from what is in the printed

## Chamber

collections. The musicians who recorded the Hyperion set in 1994 attempted to address these problems by recording many of the variant versions, which explains their set's title, *20 Sonatas 'Opus 1'*.

Egarr and his three colleagues from the Academy of Ancient Music have chosen to record only the 12 'Walsh' Op. 1 Sonatas as published (making corrections only where really necessary) and retaining their published instrumentation, adding only the two 'Roger' violin sonatas. Doubts as to the 'Roger' sonatas' authenticity Egarr dismisses, despite Andrew Manze's and his own previous rejection of the 'Walsh' Sonata No. 10 and an F major oboe version of the G minor Flute Sonata No. 5.

The most immediately striking feature of this recording is the basso continuo, which Egarr realizes on solo harpsichord without any supporting instruments, as he previously did with Manze and Pamela Thorby. Most other versions reinforce the harpsichord's bass line with at least one melody instrument such as the cello or viola da gamba, and many also add lute, theorbo, organ, bassoon and harp. Dorothee Oberlinger's fairly large continuo team even included a bass recorder.

For Egarr, such strengthening of the continuo is both unhistorical and unnecessary. Several of Handel's autographs clearly specify only the 'cembalo' to accompany the soloist. The Walsh edition, in keeping with many contemporary collections, indicates either 'the Harpsichord or Bass Violin', not both, for the thorough bass. Egarr does not even occasionally switch to the organ, as did William Christie with Hiro Kurosaki.

Another factor is that Handel's powerful, highly melodic bass lines are far from being subservient to the principal melody line and constantly interact with and comment on it, challenging Egarr to provide dense, florid realizations bristling with harmonic, rhythmic and contrapuntal ideas. As this recording also demonstrates, a single continuo harpsichord enhances transparency and flexibility in performance, as well as ensuring a better balance between the upper and bass parts. The sound engineers' more distant than customary microphone placement underlines this, while also situating the instruments organically within the recording venue's mildly resonant acoustic.

This approach to the continuo has had an interesting effect on the soloists' performances. There are many flamboyantly virtuosic recordings of the recorder sonatas from Op. 1 in particular, featuring dazzlingly fast tempos, quirky phrasing and exuberant ornamentation. Egarr's colleagues, while by no means slow-paced or parsimonious with their embellishments, do not engage in such extroverted display and over-the-top vivacity. Thus, Rachel Brown, who performs both the recorder and transverse flute sonatas, is more measured and softly expressed than the sometimes frenetic and sizzling Oberlinger

or the more sharply articulated Thorby – although Brown and Egarr give a rather boisterous account of HWV365. Her approach is closer to Ensemble Fitzwilliam's Jean-Pierre Nicolas, but with a more refined and less edgy sound and, aided by Egarr's thoughtful continuo support, phrased with greater eloquence. In the flute sonatas, while far from the captivatingly aggressive virtuosity of Jed Wentz, Brown's performances compare well with both versions by the somewhat characterless Liza Beznosiuk, principally owing to her more rounded and supple tone.

This tendency towards moderate expression and rationality is most clearly manifested in the Violin Sonatas (HWV361, 368, 370, 372 and 373), in which Pavlo Beznosiuk is much less spirited than the mercurial and sometimes nervy Manze, the muscular Catherine Wallfisch and buoyant, brilliantly characterful Hiro Kurosaki. His understatement and restraint can occasionally verge on stasis in the slow movements, but overall his reflective phrasing combined with his violin's comparatively dark hue, textured sound eliminates any risk of ennui.

On a first hearing, Frank de Bruine seems equally muted in the Oboe Sonatas, HWV364a and 366 and the arrangement of the Flute Sonata, HWV363b, but he outshines his colleagues with his smooth yet flexible tone, fluent phrasing and delicate but arresting ornamentation. Of the three soloists, he seems the most closely attuned to Egarr's richly inventive continuo. Next to de Bruine, even the Hyperion set's animated Paul Goodwin seems paradoxically plain and under-expressed.

This is a solid and very attractive addition to the Handel Op. 1 discography.

**Christopher Price**

### Trio Paian

New CD/SACD

**Juon Piano Trio, Op. 17. Trio-Miniaturen. Shostakovich Piano Trios – No. 1 in C minor, Op. 8; No. 2 in E minor, Op. 67.**

**Trio Paian** (Carl-Magnus Helling, violin; Marin Smesnoi, cello; Alexandra Neumann, piano).

**Coviello Classics COV50502** (full price, 1 hour 11 minutes). [Website www.covielloclassics.de](http://www.covielloclassics.de)  **Producer/Engineer** Moritz Bergfeld. **Producer** Olaf Mielke. **Date** 2005.

#### Comparisons:

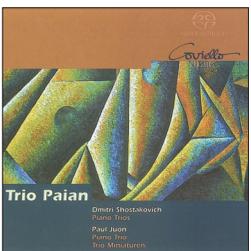
**Shostakovich:**

**Piano Trio No. 1:**

Chung Trio (EMI Classics) 7 49865-2 (1988)

**Piano Trio No. 2:**

Beaux Arts Trio (Philips) 475 171-2 (1974, four discs)



This disc made me doubly happy because not only did it introduce

me to a new and talented trio, it also introduced me to Paul Juon (1872-1940), whose music I inexplicably have not encountered before. Born in Moscow, he started out at that city's conservatory but completed his studies at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. He remained in Berlin until his retirement in 1934 and spent the rest of his life in Switzerland.

His Op. 17 Piano Trio (1901) was his first; the *Trio-Miniaturen* the last to be published (in 1920), but based on piano works from 1902. 'The missing link between Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky!', proclaims the (unattributed) quotation on the International Juon Society website's home page, and that description is a good place to begin one's explorations, although the works on this disc are closer to Tchaikovsky. In fact, parts of Juon's Piano Trio are eerily reminiscent of Tchaikovsky's work in that same genre. The mood and the musical gestures, anyway, are close, although Juon doesn't reach Tchaikovsky's level of melodic distinction nor his grasp – admittedly not always tight – of structure.

The *Trio-Miniaturen* are indeed miniatures – the longest ('Rêverie') lasts 3'47" and the final 'Danse phantastique' is an almost disappointingly short 1'49". I mean these shorter works no disrespect when I describe them as salon works of high quality. (Tchaikovsky, after all, wrote charming salon works too.) Both the Trio and the *Trio-Miniaturen* strike me as works that would be welcomed wherever they went.

Shostakovich's First Piano Trio is not played as often as his Second. The First is far from negligible, however. It was composed in 1923, pre-dating even the First Symphony. It is in a single movement and lasts 13 minutes. This is some of the most Romantic music Shostakovich wrote, although it owes more to Impressionism than to Tchaikovsky (for example). The Second, composed in 1944, is filled with sarcasm and desolate grief. It was dedicated to the memory of his close friend Ivan Sollertinsky, whose brilliant and sometimes savage intellect supposedly is depicted in the second movement. The fourth is dominated by what sounds like klezmer music. Here Shostakovich stirs the pot until it boils over with bitterness, the klezmer tune's superficial flippancy – at least initially – notwithstanding. The bleakness of the ending is unusual even for Shostakovich.

This appears to be Trio Paian's debut recording and, incidentally, also appears to be the first time that these works have been released on SACD. The booklet notes do not indicate how long these musicians have been playing together, but these are uncommonly fine performances. They are distinguished by a quality of communication among the three musicians that one hopes to hear – sometimes in vain! – from much more seasoned trios. Trio Paian also has a mature personality, and their playing has a point of view. Younger musicians tend to show off their muscle, but

here we get something more, and that is a willingness to rethink received notions about the music without being untrue to it. As a result, Shostakovich's First has a warmth and appeal it doesn't achieve even in the Chung's acclaimed version. Similarly, the Second is less brittle than on the Beaux Arts Trio's first recording. For example, Trio Paian downplay the horrifying insistence of the finale's klezmer music and humanize it, making it more vulnerable. It is less shocking but no less affecting.

The engineering is warm and ideally balanced, and the instruments have been given a realistic presence. The only shortcoming, and it is minor, is a booklet note that is translated into less than fluent English.

Raymond S. Tuttle

## Martinů

New

Piano Quartet, H287<sup>a</sup>. Oboe Quartet, H315<sup>b</sup>. Duo No. 2 in D, H371<sup>c</sup>. Piano Trio No. 3 in C, H332<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>b</sup>George Caird (oboe); Schubert Ensemble (Simon Blendis, violin; <sup>a</sup>Douglas Paterson, viola; Jane Salmon, cello; <sup>abd</sup>William Howard, piano).

**Chandos CHAN10551** (full price, 1 hour 7 minutes). Website [www.chandos.net](http://www.chandos.net)  Producer Jeremy Hayes. Engineer Jonathan Cooper. Dates January 19th-21st, 2009.

### Comparison:

Piano Quartet:

Ensemble Calliopée (Alpha) 143 (2008, two discs)



The Schubert Ensemble

John Clark

The characteristic Martinů ingredients are relatively simple and (thankfully!) increasingly familiar. His faster music (although his trademark tempo marking is *Poco Allegro*, appearing four times in these 11 movements

– five if *Moderato poco allegro* counts) is characterized by a seemingly inexhaustible syncopated energy and punchy modal progressions surging relentlessly right up to the double bar. (Sometimes the simplest ingredients have the most pleasing results.) His slower music is a little less easy to pin down: often wistfully lyrical but with a sure harmonic touch.

The Schubert Ensemble offer elegant performances of these four small-scale works, allowing the music to make its own points rather than forcing the issue with Martinů's sometimes enigmatic material. Both the instrumental and recorded sound are warm and blended, with a rather close perspective. Vibrato and phrasing are relatively restrained, suiting Martinů's neo-Classical leanings.

The largest-scale work here is the Piano Quartet (sometimes called No. 1, although it does not appear to have any companions). The spicy dissonances and scurrying upward scales of its first bars make for an apt beginning and epitomize the Schubert Ensemble's approach: although it is certainly possible to imagine the beginning more vigorously projected, the version here is just as valid and has its own appeal. The Quartet's slow movement makes little use of the piano and the strings rise to the challenge with full-toned warmth. By way of comparison, Ensemble Calliopée's recent Alpha disc is outstanding among recent Martinů offerings. In their quite different, much more crisply articulated account of the Piano Quartet, the strings are characterful – especially poignant in the *Adagio* – and Frédéric Lagarde's account of the piano part is extraordinary, light in touch but completely authoritative.

The Piano Trio No. 3 is likewise projected with fullness and warmth rather than jauntily clipped articulations; the dissonant slitherings of the central *Andante* are appropriately disquieting and the perpetual motion finale has the necessary affirmative energy, despite a few moments of slight raggedness. In the comparatively brief Quartet, H315 George Caird's oboe brings a welcome touch of brightness. The little Duo for violin and cello is presented with comparable care. All in all, this is a quietly satisfying release rather than an immediately gripping one, but none the worse for that.

Carl Rosman

# Chamber

## Meyer

New

**Complete Works for Cello and Piano.** Cello Sonatas – No. 1, Op. 62; No. 2, Op. 99<sup>a</sup>. Canzona, Op. 56.

Evva Mizerska (cello); Emma Abbate, <sup>a</sup>Katarzyna Glensk (pianos).

**Toccata Classics TOCC0098** (full price, 1 hour 5 minutes). Website [www.toccataclassics.com](http://www.toccataclassics.com) 

Producers/Engineers Antoni Grzymała, Ewa Lasocka. Dates January 28th-30th, 2008.

Toccata Classics is a label we need right now. Since 2005, it has been releasing what it calls 'top-notch classical music that the concert halls and major record companies are ignoring', and the boast is not idle.

Krzysztof Meyer was born in Kraków in 1943. He was among the many composers who studied with Nadia Boulanger, but his other mentors were Poles, and included Krzysztof Penderecki and Witold Lutosławski. After completing his studies with Boulanger, he remained centred in Poland for more than a decade. Since the 1980s, however, he has had a more international presence, teaching and serving as composer-in-residence in Köln and lecturing in Europe and South America.

Meyer's early works mirror avant-garde compositional trends in Poland during the 1960s. Like Penderecki's, Meyer's style has changed radically since then – although 'radically' might be precisely the wrong word, because the experimentation of the 1960s has been succeeded by a more traditional style of composition. These three works for cello and piano – a 'complete' collection, although Meyer has written several works for solo cello – are in the composer's later style. The *Canzona* dates from 1981 and the two sonatas from 1983 and 2004. Sonata No. 2 receives its first recording here. In his note accompanying this release, Meyer lists several prominent cellists with whom he has collaborated – Ivan Monghetti, David Geringas, Lynn Harrell and so on – as an explanation for the cello's prominence in his works.

This is intellectually and emotionally imposing music. I listened to the First Sonata several times and pegged its atmospheric first movement as 'mysterious' before I actually read the inlay card and learned that Meyer's tempo marking for this movement is *Misterioso*. In the 1990s Meyer wrote an important biography of Shostakovich and listeners comfortable with that composer's cello works should feel at home here. The second movement is aptly named *Feroce*, and the third and final movement is a dark-toned *Con moto*. At the sonata's end, Meyer satisfyingly brings it full-circle by reintroducing material from the first movement. The Second Sonata's four movements are marked *Mesto*, *Delicato*, *Grave* and *Feroce*. If that suggests a narrative, the suggestion is not dispelled by the composer's booklet note. The music is more kaleidoscopic than in the earlier sonata,

# Chamber

although Meyer's voice remains identifiable, and the intensity of expression remains high. Meyer's interest in unusual sonorities, immediately displayed in the earlier sonata, returns here, particularly in the second movement. The *Canzona* is intelligently programmed between the sonatas. Written for Geringas, who requested a work that referenced Mozart, it is based on the C-D-F-E motif that begins the finale of the *Jupiter* Symphony. The reference notwithstanding, the *Canzona* is as intense, serious and concentrated as the two sonatas.

A booklet photo suggests Meyer was present during rehearsals for this CD, although the actual recording was in Warsaw. Not having heard these works before, I have no basis for comparison, but these three young performers (two Poles and one Italian, and all alumnae of London's Trinity College of Music) play these works as if they owned them, with complete assurance and clear dedication. Evva Mizerska produces a beautiful sound, no matter what Meyer asks of her, and Emma Abbate and Katarzyna Glensk leave a similarly attractive impression – never mind that the piano parts are very challenging!

Little of Meyer's music is currently available on CD. Many titles, including an Ambitus recording of the First Sonata (with cellist Reimund Korupp, accompanied by the composer) and the *Canzona* (with Geringas and pianist Tatjana Schatz on ConBrio) are currently unavailable. This warmly yet transparently engineered CD whets one's appetite for more. What about it, Toccata Classics?  
*Raymond S. Tuttle*

## Reger

New

**Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 49 – No. 1 in A flat; No. 2 in F sharp minor. Albumblatt in E flat.**

**Florent Héau** (clarinet); **Patrick Zygmanski** (piano).

**Zig-Zag Territoires ZZT090303** (medium price, 40 minutes). *Website* www.zigzag-territoires.com. *Producer/Engineer* Franck Jaffrès. *Engineer* Alban Moraud. *Dates* July 1st and 4th, 2002.

Ever since Schoenberg published his (surely unintentional) provocatively entitled essay 'Brahms the Progressive', admirers of the younger composer have tried – often rather tortuously – to find connections between the two, overlooking the one great composer who unites them, Max Reger, of whom Schoenberg wrote 'I consider him a genius'. Reger certainly was a genius, but his early death in 1916 aged 43 (he was born a year before Schoenberg) deprived the world of a figure whose continuation of the tradition maintained by Brahms did not prevent him from embracing late-Romanticism, and a more fluid approach to tonality such as we find – especially in the works on this disc – in Alban Berg's *Four Pieces* for clarinet and piano of 1913.

Reger's first two Clarinet Sonatas (the third is his Op. 107) comprising his Op. 49 on this disc date from 1900 and should certainly be heard more often than they are in concert. The influence of Brahms's sonatas of 1894 is palpable, in shape and general colouration, but underlying Reger's language is a greater willingness to modulate more frequently and the consequential destabilization of the tonic. We find this more in the A flat major Sonata than in the F sharp minor companion piece: I do not know if Schoenberg heard these sonatas in the early 1900s, but he could well have done, in which case he would have admired the extraordinary fluency of this composer, whose chamber music especially bestrides the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in a remarkable manner.

These sonatas do not only look back, as it were: they look forward to a time, the anticipation of which was to be destroyed by the aftermath of the Great War – in art as well as elsewhere. Because of this, the reputations of those masters of the first decade of the twentieth century – Reger and Mahler especially in that Austro-German 'tradition' – were to be dismissed for decades, until they have gradually (in Mahler's case, dramatically and triumphantly) become established in the repertoire. For Reger, that time has not yet come, for his greatness lies not in massive orchestral works (though he could write them, too) but in his chamber music, which always takes longer to become absorbed (witness *Verklärte Nacht*). Thus it is that discs such as this can play an important part in that general absorption, not least, among clarinetists, although the general Brahmsian language may mislead some into thinking that these are mere copies of those late masterpieces.

I therefore welcome the enterprise of these gifted young players in their choice of repertoire and for including the little *Albumblatt* almost as an encore, for – by and large – they have the measure of these works. The A flat Sonata may be the less intellectually demanding in terms of structural subtleties and emotional range (not that Reger storms the heavens in many of his other works), but the F sharp minor Sonata finds Florent Héau and Patrick Zygmanski at their best. This is by no means easy music to interpret, and therefore convey to the listener, but these are both highly accomplished and convincing readings which are excellently balanced in a warm and natural sound. The result is a highly recommended disc.

*Robert Matthew-Walker*

## Schubert

New CD/SACD

**Complete Works for Violin and Piano, Volume 1.**

**Sonatas for Violin and Piano – D, D384; A minor, D385; G minor, D408. Rondo in B minor, D895, 'Rondo Brillant'.**

**Julia Fischer** (violin); **Martin Helmchen** (piano).

**PentaTone Classics PTC5186 347** (full price, 1 hour 5 minutes). *Website* www.pentatonemusic.com **D** *Producer* Sebastian Stein. *Engineer* Jean-Marie Geijsen. *Dates* January 3rd-5th and July 3rd-5th, 2009.

### Comparisons:

#### Sonatas:

Grumiaux, Veyron-Lacroix (Philips) 475 7825

(1955-78, six discs)

Stern, Barenboim (Sony Classical) CD44504 (1990)

Schubert's three sonatas (*Sonatas*) for violin and piano are invariably overshadowed by their more notorious sibling, the *Fantasie* in C major (written for the same combination). This is partly because they are not large-scale works that are particularly well suited to the rolling vistas of the modern concert-hall, but neither do they offer themselves as vehicles for virtuoso display or crowd-pleasing excess. As a consequence, they tend to be either neglected, dismissed as 'charming miniatures', or taken up by violinists, with varying degrees of success, whose best days are long gone (Isaac Stern with Daniel Barenboim on Sony, a recording made when the violinist was nearing his eighth decade, comes to mind).

It is therefore particularly refreshing that Julia Fischer, one of the younger generation of the world's most promising string players, has not only taken these works to heart, providing a scintillating account of the *Rondo Brillant* by way of an encore, but also given them the best possible new lease of life by making a persuasive and invigorating case for their continued promotion and enjoyment among violinists and audiences alike. She is aided in no small measure by the young pianist Martin Helmchen, who is enjoying a flourishing career as a soloist and also, on the evidence of this new PentaTone release, as an accompanist of stature.

From the first notes of D384, both violinist and pianist reveal themselves to be chamber music players of some distinction, although not quite of the elegance and peerless phrase spinning, perhaps, of Grumiaux (on Philips) but ever responsive to changes of mood and temper. The *Adagio* is an object-lesson in sustained projection of the melodic line, with both protagonists taking a lead as the music demands, seamlessly exchanging ideas with elegance and refinement. The closing movement is delightfully characterized, with a fine mixture of whimsy and pathos sympathetically dispatched.

The A minor *Sonatina*, a rather darker-hued work that repays repeated hearings, is played with restraint and understatement – the second subject is pure heartache – with both players assured and sufficiently relaxed to follow the musical arguments through some eerily stark textures and distant key changes. The *Andante* is played with alluring simplicity, making a vivid contrast with the more rumbustious *Minuet*. The concluding *Allegro* unfurls at a leisurely pace, with both artists encompassing changes of mood from innocent

charm to earnest entreaty, with complete technical command and impeccable musical taste.

In the G minor *Sonatina*, which also displays Mozartian traits, the opening military motif is played with great relish, Fischer even managing to make accompanying strings crossing sound compelling, while the soulful reflectiveness of the following *Andante* is finely honed and sustained. The concluding *Allegro* is a veritable scamper through obscure byways, to which this matchless pair are more than equal.

This finely recorded recital should appeal to Schubert lovers everywhere, being as refreshing as it is welcome. If the second volume in this series is as good, it will be worth the wait.

Richard Evans

## Schumann

New

String Quartet in A, Op. 41 No. 3. Piano Quintet in E flat, Op. 44<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup>Marc-André Hamelin (piano); Takács Quartet (Edward Dusingber, Károly Schranz, violins; Geraldine Walther, viola; András Fejér, cello).

Hyperion CDA67631 (full price, 57 minutes).

Website [www.hyperion-records.co.uk](http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk)  Producer Andrew Keener. Engineer Simon Eadon. Dates May 14th-17th, 2009.

### Comparisons:

String Quartet:

Zehetmair Qt (ECM) 472 169-2 (2001, rev. Apr 2003)

Piano Quintet:

Pressler, Emerson Qt (DG) 445 848-2 (1995)

This Hyperion release celebrates the chamber music composed by Schumann in 1842, the year in which he wrote the three String Quartets, Op. 41, the Piano Quintet, Op. 44 and the Piano Quartet, Op. 47. The Takács Quartet play the third of the String Quartets (in A major) and the Piano Quintet, in which the quartet is joined by Marc-André Hamelin. While Schumann was not the first composer to write a quintet for piano and strings, his Op. 44 is the earliest to establish itself in the repertoire, with its innovative combination of chamber-music intimacy and symphonic grandeur. The performance here is deeply satisfying.

The Piano Quintet is a work that needs a judicious mix of expressiveness and rhythmic control if it is to come across as powerfully as it should, and the Takács and Hamelin have just the right combination of tensile strength and lyrical ardour. Plenty of other recordings offer passion, but a surprising number of them sacrifice rhythmic discipline in the process. With the present performers, the poise and quality of the playing is exceptional throughout – nowhere more so than in the *Scherzo*, which is most excitingly done, not least because the playing has such discipline as well as energy. Among modern recordings, the most impressive competition comes from Menahem Pressler with the Emerson Quartet on DG. It is a performance that really soars,

and is very similar to the newcomer in terms of timings: both the Hyperion and DG versions offer accounts that are brisk without rushing, leaving plenty of space for warmly expressive phrasing where it's needed.

The DG version is coupled with the Piano Quartet, Op. 47, while the Hyperion coupling is the equally appropriate but much less familiar String Quartet, Op. 41 No. 3. While Schumann was at his most innovative in the Piano Quintet, his three Op. 41 String Quartets were written after an intensive study of the quartets by his greatest predecessors: Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. The Takács possess a poetry and fluency that make for very absorbing listening: this is compelling, concentrated quartet playing of very high quality. It makes an interesting contrast with the much-praised Zehetmair Quartet version of this work on ECM. That is more impetuous and rugged than the Takács, but I find both approaches very successful in their different ways, and the warmth of the Takács is extremely winning.

There are excellent notes by Misha Donat and both works benefit from wonderfully natural recorded sound. The result is a Schumann disc of great distinction.

Nigel Simeone

## The Terts Tradition

New

Bax Concert Piece<sup>a</sup>. Bliss Sonata for Viola and Piano<sup>a</sup>. Bliss Melody for the G string, Op. 47<sup>a</sup>. Melody for the C string, Op. 51 No. 2<sup>a</sup>. Rubbra Meditations on a Byzantine Hymn, Op. 117, 'O Quando in Cruce'. Vaughan Williams Romance<sup>a</sup>.

Roger Chase (viola); <sup>a</sup>Michiko Otaki (piano).

Dutton Epoch CDLX7231 (medium price, 1 hour 6 minutes). Website [www.duttonvocalion.co.uk](http://www.duttonvocalion.co.uk)  Producer/Engineer Michael Ponder. Dates June 6th-8th, 2007.



Roger Chase and Michiko Otaki

Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Romance* makes a heart-easing yet deeply personal opening to this very recommendable Lionel Tertis-inspired collection, Roger Chase producing a rich, sometimes deliberately acerbic sound from his viola (the very Montagnana instrument that Tertis played). It adds an edge to the work's emotional outbursts, and contrasts with those withdrawn soulful utterances that suck the listener in.

Arnold Bax's *Concert Piece* is a student work, an effective one, with traces of himself, something Franckian and a touch of Brahms. It's rather endearing and receives here a revealing performance that shades and enlivens the music over its 13-minute course. Indeed, Chase and Michiko Otaki are the best of partners throughout (the Rubbra is for unaccompanied viola) and have been admirably recorded. The two miniatures by York Bowen do not make the same impression, somehow missing out on being memorable despite their emphasis on 'melody', the one for the G string slightly the more engaging. Rubbra's *Meditations* (first heard in 1962, literally so, for the première was on the BBC Home Service played by Maurice Loban) proves to be a rich piece, subtly imaginative and with never a suggestion that ten minutes of solo viola can outstay their welcome.

The most substantial item here is Arthur Bliss's *Sonata*, an almost half-hour, four-movement piece from 1933. The volatility of the first movement is particularly compelling, music that changes its character at will (yet with an underlying logic) but also bountiful in ideas and sustaining them. In terms of timing, the slow movement, marked *Andante*, seems rather lengthy at 11 minutes, certainly in relation to the eight of the first movement and the nine that the two last movements collectively play for. Nevertheless, the elegiac restraint of this movement has an enveloping

quality, the listener taken on a journey before being electrified by the brilliant *Scherzo* that has its Prokofiev leanings (just as the first movement suggests Bartók). However, the surprise comes with the *attacca* into the finale, which Bliss terms *Coda*, and we are returned to the first movement and the mood of the *Andante*: a novel but successful idea and which has one rethinking the work's structure.

Colin Anderson

Michael Ponder