

## La Viola

New

**Le Beau** Three Pieces, Op. 26<sup>a</sup>. **Clarke** Viola Sonata<sup>a</sup>. **Decruck** Viola Sonata<sup>a</sup>. **Fuchs** Sonata pastorale. **Harrison** Viola Sonata. Lament. **Keal** Ballade in F minor<sup>a</sup>. **Soulage** Sonata for Solo Viola, Op. 43.

**Hillary Herndon** (viola); <sup>a</sup>**Wei-Chun Bernadette Lo** (piano).

**MSR Classics MS1416** (medium price, two discs, 2 hours 4 minutes). Website [www.msacd.com](http://www.msacd.com). Producers Kevin Clas, Julie Bélanger Roy. Engineers Bill Demkov, Harold Thompson. Dates April 2011, March 2012.

A two-disc package of music by seven composers will need a convenient marketing peg on which to hang it. 'Women composers' will do just as well as any other, one might think, but will the results of such varied creative figures appeal to the same music lover? Perhaps not always, but in this instance the music – almost all of it from the twentieth century, largely 'mainstream' in language – would seem to fit the bill.

Whereas 30 or 40 years ago much of this music would be unknown to all but specialists, including viola players, today several of these works are almost repertoire pieces, especially the leading work of its type: Rebecca Clarke's Sonata of 1919, which is one of the earliest examples in this collection. This Sonata is arguably the greatest, certainly the best-known work here. It is an extremely fine composition and is excellently played by this very gifted duo. This music deserves a place in any British music collection.

Much of the remaining music will be unfamiliar outside of specialists: Minna Keal's *Ballade* (1929) is an entirely serious composition, not so fully grounded in F minor as at times it appears to be, leading one to ponder on the extraordinarily varied life the composer experienced. Marcelle Soulage's unaccompanied 22-minute Sonata is less convincing: it sounds at times awkward to play, although she also wrote a companion work with piano. Although Soulage was a pupil of Nadia Boulanger, her solo work lacks the directness of utterance one might have expected from such tutelage, yet I was intrigued by what appears to be a definite 'English' quotation in the work's 'Scherzo'. Fernande Decruck's Sonata (1943, with piano) is a fine work which deserves wide circulation, as do Luise Le Beau's *Three Pieces* (1881, the earliest music in this collection), which have an immediacy of appeal. The opening 'Nachtstück' and succeeding 'Träumerai' are especially finely composed works indeed: the concluding 'Polonaise' does not sit quite so easily with its companions, being a shade more conventional formally, although Hillary Herndon plays it very well.

With Pamela Harrison's Sonata of 1946 we encounter another truly fine work by

a virtually unknown English composer, who died in 1990. This discursive four-movement piece is of high quality indeed and I urge it on all admirers of late twentieth-century British music. It receives a splendidly committed account here; Harrison's short *Lament* is less striking as a composition, somewhat anonymous in expression, fully engaging the attention only in the closing pages. Lillian Fuchs was the sister of Joseph Fuchs. Older collectors may recall their Brunswick recordings of Mozart's K364 *Sinfonia concertante*, a Duo and Martini's *Three Madrigals* from the early 1950s; her contemporaneous (1953) *Sonata pastorale* for solo viola is a splendidly-written two-movement work, faintly Hindemithian in melodic and structural cast. It is very finely played: a very good piece.

The booklet notes are also good, but do not detail the music itself; the recording quality is first-rate, nicely balanced between the two instruments. This uncommonly interesting issue is strongly recommended.

*Robert Matthew-Walker*

## In the South

New

**Paganini** 24 Caprices, Op. 1 – No. 6 in G minor; No. 24 in A minor (both arr. Cassidy). **Piazzolla** Four, for Tango. **Puccini** Crisantemi. **Turina** La oración del torero, Op. 34. **Verdi** String Quartet in E minor. **Wolf** Italienische Serenade.

**Brodsky Quartet** (Daniel Rowland, Ian Belton, violins; Paul Cassidy, viola; Jacqueline Thomas, cello).

**Chandos CHAN10761** (full price, 1 hour 6 minutes). Website [www.chandos.net](http://www.chandos.net)  Producer Jeremy Hayes. Engineers Jonathan Quilter, Paul Cooper. Dates October 28th-30th, 2012.

We might think of the string quartet as a northern European pursuit – the great German composers did, after all, have a habit of churning them out by the dozen – but the Brodsky Quartet's brilliantly programmed recital reminds us of those who tried their hand at the form in some of Europe's sunnier spots.

Wolf's *Italian Serenade* is a holiday piece, delivering fun in the sun and playing slippery games with rhythm and huge dynamic contrasts. The melodies flow as freely as we might expect from a prolific composer of song, but the Brodskys are alive to his darting counterpoint and flashes of wit, nowhere more than in the piece's final fleeting smile. Puccini's mournful *Crisantemi* offers an abrupt change of tone, but the players seem caught between sadness and seduction – beautifully distant at times but too often overusing their slithering shifts in pursuit of sultry sex appeal.

All of that ardour is much better served by Turina's *La oración del torero* ('The Toreador's Prayer'), whose vibrant Iberian colours make