

GRAMOPHONE

US SOUNDS OF AMERICA

RECORDINGS & EVENTS *A special eight-page section for readers in the US and Canada*

Beethoven

Complete Violin Sonatas

Duo Concertante

(Nancy Dahn *vi* Timothy Steeves *vc*)

Marquis Ⓟ Ⓢ MAR81517 (3h 38' • DDD)



Violinist Nancy Dahn and pianist Timothy Steeves do Atlantic Canada proud in their splendid new set of Beethoven's complete violin sonatas. Professors at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in the renowned seafood city of St John's, the married team take their Duo Concertante name from Beethoven's inscription over his *Kreutzer* Sonata, 'in stilo molto concertante'. The lasting impression they make, however, is of deeply integrated performances that flow naturally as if the music were being created on the spot.

Both Dahn and Steeves speak from within; they listen to where Beethoven is going and align themselves instantaneously to his direction. They can be engagingly rustic and emotionally sweet, as in the last movement of Op 12 No 3, or breathe fiery dialogues into easily clichéd heavyweights such as Op 23 along unconventionally lithe lines; their handling of the same sonata's curious *Andante scherzoso* middle movement is delectable and the concluding *Allegro molto* thrilling. Without sacrificing power or speed, they mine Beethoven's lyrical vein throughout, even in the *Kreutzer*. Dahn and Steeves both have a way with a turn and a trill, based on thoughtful study and practical experience, which they use as expressive devices to liberate the music's ebb and flow. The opening bars of the final sonata, Op 96, are a miracle of such knowledge and poetry.

The recording at the Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto, which was intentionally balanced to favour the violin, catches the velvet sounds and luminous colours of Dahn's 1983 Sergio Peresson and Steeves's 1968 New York Steinway D in an effortless audiophile display.

Laurence Vittes

PHOTOGRAPHY: IVAN OTIS

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GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Nancy Dahn

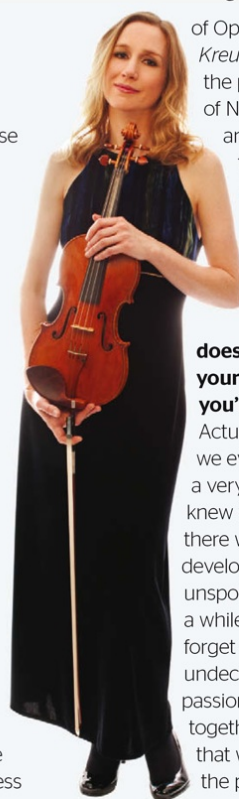
Duo Concertante's violinist tells of a meeting of minds in the *Kreutzer*

Some say that the early Op 12 sonatas are unnatural and ungratifying for violinists...

They are awkward in places (for me at least!) and it's partly because Beethoven uses the low register so often; you need to work more in order to project over a modern piano. Also, after the first two sonatas there seems to be a change in the way he uses both instruments. Op 12 No 3 is a real game-changer in terms of virtuosity – the piano part is like his concerto-writing and Beethoven also started rethinking the role of the violin, making it a truly equal and virtuosic partner. It becomes more 'violinistic' too.

Is it a clear journey or progression from the early sonatas to the late ones?

It is a journey but I wouldn't say it's a linear one. There's a quantum leap from the highly charged *Kreutzer* Sonata and the profound simplicity and tenderness



of Op 96. But then No 7 and the *Kreutzer* both seem to grow from the passion, fury and temperament of No 4. Even Sonatas Nos 1, 2 and 3 are all very different in terms of temperament and approach, as if Beethoven were figuring out how to best write for violin and piano.

Knowing the subtext of the *Kreutzer* Sonata, does it lend something extra to your performance given that you're husband and wife?

Actually this was the first piece we ever played together! It was a very intense time because we knew we loved playing together but there were also romantic feelings developing which were totally unspoken, even suppressed, for quite a while. I don't think we will ever forget the intensity of that time. That undeclared but incredibly strong passion we felt in that first year together is a kind of emotional layer that will forever be embedded in the piece for us.

Berenson

'Lumen - Chamber Works'

String Quartets - No 1; No 3. Transpersonal. *jinana* - 8; 10; 13; 18. Late 20th Century Stomp. Emotional Idiot. Prose Surrealism. Very soon mankind will no longer be a useless passion (Broadway melody of 1996). Rainer Maria Rilke. *Ricercar* (for Sven Nykvist). ...was near the black plague.... A little boy opened a window 3. ...searchingeverywhere.... Dithyramb. Treaty of dancing rabbit creek. 'I'. Respectable People. Stars 1. The Adytum. Tickled to Death. Ingrid Thulin. through this stillness. Ysaijiro Ozu. Spooky action at a distance

JACK Quartet and friends

Dream Play Ⓟ Ⓢ (156' • DDD)



Philadelphia-based composer/pianist Adam Berenson's self-produced

double-CD set surrounds his provocative new String Quartet No 3 with 25 tracks taken from 17 previous discs before concluding with his more conventional String Quartet No 1 from

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1997. Laid out in seemingly random order, and titled 'Lumen' by the composer who 'wanted to say "light" without saying light', this crazy-like-a-fox compilation transforms a myriad of contemporary, classical and improvised musical influences into a myriad of outcomes united by Berenson's own compelling absorption in the process.

Recorded live by the JACK Quartet, for whom it was written, Berenson's 15-minute-long String Quartet No 3 explores an intriguing collection of found-object sounds before ending with the chirps, whistles and faint sirens of a nearly inaudible silence. Halfway through *Very soon mankind will no longer be a useless passion* (Broadway melody of 1996), Berenson interrupts with a moment from Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata which miraculously if unaccountably leads to something hot and snazzy. His way hip *Ricercar*, dedicated to Bergman's black-and-white cameraman Sven Nykvist, reminds us we weren't alone in inventing modern jazz. Berenson's good natured *A little boy opened a window* 3, which opens with koto-inspired plucks on a gamelan of woodblocks and other synthesised instruments, magically devolves into traditional English nursery rhymes played by toy-soldier instruments. In the midst of *jnana* 8, wonderfully ominous sounds in the lower registers come to surreal life like a large transparent beast.

Throughout it is clear that, despite his serious aspirations, Berenson always has his ear out for a good time.

Laurence Vittes

Brahms

Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99

John Whitfield vc James Winn pf

MSR Classics © MS1516 (54' • DDD)



Two decades separate the two sonatas Brahms composed for cello and piano, and the works couldn't be more different. The E minor First Sonata, from the 1860s, is a three-movement score with an emphasis on elegance and introspection. A far more impassioned Brahms can be heard in the four-movement F major Second Sonata, from the 1880s.

What doesn't separate the performances of the sonatas on this disc featuring cellist John Whitfield and pianist James Winn is utmost commitment to the expressive

needs of the music. These are sterling accounts in every way. Whitfield's penetrating timbre and keen attention to nuance ensure that both sonatas emerge with vibrant purpose, however poetic or dashing the cello part may be. The tricky balance between instruments, especially when the cello dips into its lowest range, is never an issue – a manifestation both of the musicians' sensitivity and microphone placement that doesn't allow the keyboard to swallow the cello.

In Winn's hands, the piano part in each sonata beautifully fulfils its role as support system and eloquent colleague, depending on the music's specific demands. There are moments in these works when the pianist must negotiate torrents of notes without losing clarity of texture, a feat over which Winn consistently triumphs.

But it is the distinctive voice of Brahms that keeps the listener enveloped in the performances. Whitfield and Winn don't disappear into the music. Instead, they use their estimable artistic gifts to summon what was on Brahms's mind at these points in his career.

Donald Rosenberg

Little

Haunt of Last Nightfall

Third Coast Percussion with David T Little snare drum/clapping Melissa Hughes voc Eileen Mack cl

Andrew McKenna Lee gtr Toby Driver db New Amsterdam © NWAM054 (32' • DDD)



David T Little's dark, violent score depicting life on the ground during the massacre of 800 civilians at El Mozote, El Salvador, in December 1981 creates a compelling wasteland of fear, pain and mortality in HD-quality music as descriptive as any graphic novel. Although Little's nine-movement identification with the waves of terror that swept over the defenceless populace is expressed in a percussion-based and often very loud and oppressive aesthetic, he doesn't use sounds that are terrifying in themselves, like screams or cries; rather it's the energy and abruptness with which the Third Coast Percussion quartet throw alternating moods at each other that exposes the potential vulnerabilities. Following small moments of relief from pain and blinding epiphanies of faith, Little's notion of final relief comes

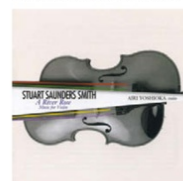
only when a person has been ground down fine enough to sparkle off infinitely into time; otherwise, the music ends with no conclusion.

Together with Third Coast Percussion, Little himself on snare drum and clapping, clarinetist Eileen Mack, vocalist Melissa Hughes, guitarist Andrew McKenna Lee and bassist Toby Driver combine in an experience that is primarily focused on unleashing the truth. The recording was launched at NYC's trendy Le Poisson Rouge in January 2014, for an audience probably brought up on Little collaborators such as the Kronos Quartet, eighth blackbird and So Percussion. It will be interesting to see how they respond to a CD only 32 minutes long. Collectors should snap it up. Everyone else with the courage should simply hear it.

Laurence Vittes

SS Smith

'A River Rose: Music for Violin' Hearts. Three for Two^a. A Gift for Bessie^b. Minor. A River Rose^c. I've Been Here Before^d Airi Yoshioka vn with ^bSue Heineman bn ^aMaria Lambros va ^{bd}John Novacek pf ^cJosé 'Zeca' Lacerda vib ^bLee Hinkle perc New World © NW80754-2 (62' • DDD)



The American composer Stuart Saunders Smith is unafraid to reflect aspects of his life in his music. Each of the works on 'A River Rose: Music for Violin' depicts a person, location or atmosphere he has transformed into sound. Smith's music manages to strike a winning balance between the highly experimental and the deeply expressive. In the six works on this disc, each score or movement has a title that points the listener in some precise direction, though the results are suffused with piquant and vivid surprises. The solo violinist not only plays in four of the pieces but also sings and occasionally hums.

The seven movements in *Hearts* – with such lower-case titles as 'the disembodied heart' and 'a couple having a picnic and watching the clouds go by' – are striking evocations of Smith's fertile, impressionistic mind. *Three for Two*, scored for violin and viola, describes locations in Maine. Improvisation drives the narrative in *A Gift for Bessie* for violin, piano, bassoon and percussion. *Minor*, whose title suggests both