

There are two other solo guitar works on this recording. Yang has transcribed the Prelude in C, BWV846 from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* for solo guitar, which she performs on a seven-string guitar by the British maker Paul Fischer, that is, on a guitar with an extra string in the bass to achieve a lower range than the standard six-string concert instrument. We hear this instrument again in the final piece, an arrangement of the popular 'Air on a G String' from the *Orchestral Suite in D*, BWV1068, which Yang plays with an elegant pathos.

Three different guitars are used on this recording to achieve the specific tonal colours which Yang had in mind. For the concertos she plays on a Greg Smallman guitar. The recording quality has a close presence for all the instruments during the ensemble pieces, where the guitar is given more than its natural weight, resulting in a comfortable balance between the strings and the guitar. The transition in sound and tone quality as the recording moves from ensemble to solo guitar is smooth, which is remarkable. The disc is so excellently engineered that one doesn't notice the absence of the string quartet but can simply luxuriate in the sound of the solo guitar. One can enjoy the positive aspects of the changes between ensemble and solo instruments in terms of tone quality, rather than having to adjust one's listening to accommodate the differences.

The Elias String Quartet has received critical acclaim for its recordings and is the recipient of a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award for its forthcoming cycle of Beethoven quartet recordings. This very special recording is Xuefei Yang's fourth for EMI and her arrangements here can hold their own alongside the established versions.

Thérèse W. Saba

Beethoven

New

Serenade in D, Op. 8 – Theme and Variations (arr. Karl Xaver Kleinheinz/ed. William Primrose)^{ac}. *Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano in B flat, Op. 11* (arr. Rysanov)^{abc}. *Cello Sonata No. 5 in D, Op. 102 No. 2*^{bc}. *Duet in E flat, WoO32, 'Mit zwei obligaten Augengläsern'*^{ab}. *Sonatine for Viola and Cello in C, WoO33 Nos. 4 and 5* (ed. Willy Hess)^{ab}.
^aMaxim Rysanov (viola); ^bKristina Blaumane (cello); ^cJacob Katsnelson (piano).

Onyx Classics ONYX4108 (full price, 1 hour 13 minutes). *Website* www.onyxclassics.com  *Producer* Valdemaras Kirsys. *Engineer* Laura Jugelionyte. *Date* April 2011.

As though it weren't enough to compose great works in every genre going, Beethoven stuffed his sketchbooks with charming half-formed ideas and enigmatic fragments, over which scholars have pored and pondered for a couple of centuries. A few of these loose leaves fall into place in this disc of chamber works – three of which have been recast

to fit the viola of Maxim Rysanov – alongside some better-known small-scale pieces from Beethoven's prolific pen.

Rysanov has assembled a fine team for the job. Kristina Blaumane is currently the principal cellist of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, while pianist Jacob Katsnelson is recital partner to both. His contributions, in the last three items on the disc, reveal him to be a strong Beethovenian, but some of the notebook fragments feature first. The first, the *Sonatina in C*, is speculatively presented for viola and cello; in reality, Beethoven's desired instrumentation of its two movements is not clear from the score. It's been grouped in the *WoO* catalogue with pieces for musical clock, and the interaction of its two parts suggests that of two hands, rather than two instruments. The little piece is full of character though, including a terse episode that carries the development off in an unexpected direction, and Rysanov and Blaumane give the following *Allegretto* a strutting pomp. The *Duet, 'Mit zwei obligaten Augengläsern'* ('With two obligate eyeglasses', thought to refer to a bespectacled cellist friend of Beethoven's), is much more obviously meant for two players, featuring a more equal exchange of ideas in the broad sweep of its first movement.

Roughly contemporaneous with these are the *C major Serenade* for string trio and the *B major Clarinet Trio*, featured here in subsequent arrangements. The 'Theme and Variation' from the *Serenade* – arranged by William Primrose for viola and piano – doesn't seem compelling enough in its own right to present out of context, while substituting the viola for the clarinet in the *B flat major Trio* (in place of the more obvious violin) suits the needs of the disc rather than the music, but alongside the two duos they add up to an interesting picture of what Beethoven was up to in the mid-1790s. The *Trio*, particularly, hints at the kind of rhythmic sleight of hand the composer was already slipping into his boisterous finales and both are played with vivid relish.

Sitting apart from the rest of the programme is the *D major Cello Sonata*, composed two decades later and really displaying the 'increased sophistication' that booklet note writer and Beethoven scholar Barry Cooper ascribes to the composer's late works. The first movement recalls the headstrong spirit of the 'Emperor' Concerto, but it's Beethoven's ability to slip between brusque argument and lyrically imploring music that sets it apart from the earlier works on the disc. There's also the overall formal daring: the long doleful *Adagio* – superbly sustained by Blaumane – and the wide-ranging but concise fugue that concludes the work show a composer rethinking the limits of the sonata. Maybe the inclusion of an intermediate stage would have rounded out this collection a little more, but as it stands it is a sunny and engaging listen, well recorded and annotated. *Andrew Morris*

Brahms

By Arrangement, Volume 1. *String Quintets – F minor, Op. 34* (reconst. Karttunen)^a; *B minor, Op. 115*^b. *Krysia Osostowicz* (violin); ^bJames Boyd (viola); ^aRichard Lester (cello); **Zebra String Trio** (Ernst Kovacic, violin; Steven Dann, viola; Anssi Karttunen, cello).

Toccata Classics TOCC0066 (full price, 1 hour 18 minutes). *Website* www.toccataclassics.com  *Producer/Engineer* Michael Ponder. *Dates* October 1st and 2nd, 2011.

Comparisons:

Quintet, Op. 34 (string version):

Amati Chamber Players (Biddulph) BID80227 (2007)

Quintet, Op. 115 (viola version):

Rysanov, Sitkovetsky, Brovtsyn, Deyneka, Blaumane (Onyx) ONYX4054 (2009, rev. July/Aug 2011)

When it was first published by Simrock in 1892, Brahms's *Clarinet Quintet* was described on the title page as a 'Quintet for Clarinet (or Viola), 2 Violins, Viola and Cello'. This was partly a way of increasing the work's commercial appeal, but Brahms clearly considered the viola to be a credible alternative in the *Quintet* in the same way as the two *Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120*, of which he made carefully reworked versions for viola. There is an exceptional performance of the *Op. 115 Quintet* on Onyx, with Maxim Rysanov as the viola soloist. This new *Toccata* disc is very good too. The *Zebra String Trio*, with Krysia Osostowicz and James Boyd, are spacious, expressive and eloquent advocates of this late masterpiece, making an impressive case for an arrangement that I find extremely persuasive in their sympathetic hands. Nothing is ever forced here: the first movement unfolds in the most natural way and the rest of the performance is similarly natural. Even so, were I forced to choose just one version of the viola transcription, I'd probably opt for Rysanov on Onyx – it's extraordinarily poetic and ardent, though the autumnal restraint of this new *Toccata* disc has a great deal to commend it too.

More intriguing is the first recording of a putative reconstruction by Anssi Karttunen (cellist of the *Zebra String Trio*) of the original version of Brahms's *F minor String Quintet* – the work that became the *Piano Quintet, Op. 34* and the *Sonata for Two Pianos, Op. 34bis*. Brahms first conceived it as a string quintet (with two cellos). Though it was played privately, the view of Clara Schumann, and, especially, Joseph Joachim, was that the piece didn't quite work in its strings-only form, and Brahms subsequently reworked it for two pianos, and for piano with string quartet. The manuscript of the string quintet version is lost, but it has been reconstructed before: a Biddulph disc called 'Brahms Rediscovered' included the reconstruction made by Sebastian Brown in 1947, played by the Amati Chamber Players. Since Karttunen's version is different, these two discs are not strictly comparable, and

I'd certainly encourage any Brahmsian with a sense of curiosity to explore the new realization. It's very intelligently done, and played superbly by the Zebra String Trio, Osostowicz and Richard Lester. Whatever Brahms's original may have sounded like (Joachim criticized its passages of 'great roughness'), Karttunen's version is convincing as a string quintet. The power, attack and depth of piano and strings (or two pianos) is missing, of course, but the texture – so much so that I found myself forgetting the more familiar authentic versions and enjoying this speculative but fascinating alternative.

With fine sound, intimate but with space around the instruments, and with absorbing and detailed notes by Malcolm MacDonald, the presentation of this release enhances the excellent performances. **Nigel Simeone**

Dvořák New CD/SACD
String Quartets – No. 9 in D minor, B75 (Op. 34); No. 13 in G, B192 (Op. 106).

Zemlinsky Quartet (František Souček, Petr Střížek, violins; Petr Holman, viola; Vladimír Fortin, cello).

Praga Digitals PRD/DSD250 292 (full price, 1 hour 10 minutes). *Website* www.pragadigitals.com. *Producer* Jiří Gemrot. *Engineer* Jan Lžičár. *Dates* March 24th and 25th, 2012.

Comparisons:

- Panocha Qt (Supraphon) SU4048-2 (1984, 1983, three discs)
- String Quartet No. 13:*
- Martinů Qt (Arco Diva) UP0133-2 (2011, rev. June 2012)

This Praga issue by the Zemlinsky Quartet comes hard on the heels of a recent CD from Arco Diva, in which the main work was also Dvořák's great String Quartet No. 13 in G major, Op. 106. The Martinů Quartet chose to pair the work with its immediate neighbour in the canon of Dvořák's quartets, Op. 105 in A flat. Its accounts of both works were entirely idiomatic and powerfully argued, with a spacious and naturally focused recording, notwithstanding minor pressing problems with early copies of the SACD disc, which nevertheless played perfectly on conventional two-channel equipment. This newcomer finds the Zemlinsky Quartet coupling Op. 106 with a much earlier work, the rarely heard D minor Quartet, Op. 34, written in the late 1870s, almost two full decades before the G major Quartet, widely considered Dvořák's finest.

The juxtaposition is an engaging one, however, for the technical advances the composer made during the period which elapsed between the composition of these works are easily gauged when hearing both quartets back to back. These performances are first-rate, leaving practically nothing to be desired and easily on a par with those of



Zemlinsky Quartet

Praga Digitals

its rivals in Op. 106. That should come as no real surprise, of course, since like the Martinů, the Zemlinskys can also claim their legacy from the illustrious Czech string quartet traditions of the second half of the last century, enshrined in recordings by the likes of the Prague, Pražác, Vlach, Talich, Suk, Panocha and Smetana Quartets.

This new reading of the G major Quartet is as emphatically and urgently delivered as almost any in the catalogues and, if anything, runs closer to the Panocha Quartet's model Supraphon version than the fine Martinů Quartet version, which only narrowly preceded it in the release schedules. In the opening movement, in particular, the music is pressed home with greater fervour and passion, with the pulsing first subject theme dramatically sculpted and yet with no holds barred in the coda, which sounds as headlong and vital as was the case with the Panocha performance.

Interestingly, the Zemlinskys deliver the first movement some 45 seconds faster than the Martinů, who take a somewhat more elastic approach to tempo indications during the less eruptive sections of the movement, though both ensembles match each other virtually to the second (10'21" and 10'22" respectively) in the magnificent *Adagio* slow movement of this work. Both ensembles give nobly crafted accounts, with little to choose between them. In the *Scherzo*, however, it is the Zemlinsky Quartet which seems more successful at counterpoising the melodic content of the two trios and, as Pierre Barbier in his estimable (though virtually unreadable without the use of magnification!) booklet notes adds, the first really does sound Brucknerian! As for the finale, it goes exceptionally well here, with these players attacking the notes with compelling relish and verve from first to last, completing a memorably accomplished reading of a work that's still not heard nearly as often as it deserves to be.

The earlier Quartet in D minor is placed first on this disc, and while there may be occasional reminders in the outer movements that Dvořák completed it with uncommon haste (in just 11 days), both its sombre choice of key and the valedictory feel of its searching *Adagio*, placed third, serve as reminders that it was written while the composer mourned the deaths of his second daughter Ružena and eldest son Otakar. Thus the piece has clear spiritual associations with Dvořák's *Stabat mater* and owes much to Smetana's Quartet, 'From my Life', completed less than a year earlier. Even though generously recommended by its dedicatee Brahms to his own publisher Simrock, Dvořák's Op. 34 String

Quartet was never highly regarded by many of his contemporaries, and yet it reveals tersely argued thematic material and a steely resolve in its outer movements, while the deeply affecting *Adagio*, to be played *con sordino*, is no less hauntingly beautiful than the slow movement of the 'American' Quartet, Op. 96.

It receives a splendidly calculated and intelligent performance from the Zemlinskys, lacking something of the subtlety and understatement the Panochas found in this work but played with arresting technical assurance throughout. One looks forward keenly to further Dvořák from them in future. Recommended, though downmarket booklet presentation and music notes typeset in an impossibly small font, possibly to reduce printing costs, detract from the overall appeal of an otherwise creditable issue.

Michael Jameson

Czech Flute Music New
Dvořák *Sonatina in G, B183 (Op. 100).*
Feld *Flute Sonata.*
Martinů *Flute Sonata, H306.*
Schulhoff *Flute Sonata.*

Jeffrey Khaner (flute); **Charles Abramovic** (piano).

Avie AV2219 (full price, 1 hour 5 minutes). *Website* www.avie-records.com **D** *Producer/Engineer* Da-Hong Seetoo. *Dates* June 8th-11th, 1999.

Comparison:

- Dvořák/Feld/Martinů:
- Galway, Moll (RCA) RD87802 (1987)

Jeffrey Khaner, principal flute for the Philadelphia Orchestra, has recorded several discs for Avie, two of which I have been fortunate to review previously in these pages. Earlier releases have been devoted to German, British, French and American composers, respectively. This time around, Khaner and pianist Charles Abramovic (his

Pickard

New

Piano Trio^a. *Insomnia*^b. *Chaconne*^c.
Violin Sonata^d. *Valedictions*^e.
Snowbound^f.

^fIan Mitchell (bass clarinet); **Rupert Marshall-Luck** (^{abd}violin/^cviola); ^{aef}Sophie Harris (cello);
^{abdef}Matthew Rickard (piano).

Toccata Classics TOCC0150 (full price, 1 hour 19 minutes). Website www.toccataclassics.com

^{bcd}Producer/Engineer Michael Ponder. Dates January 9th and ^{aef}10th, 2012.

Comparison:

Piano Trio:

Chagall Trio (Campion) CAMEO2053 (2004)

If not exactly a best-kept secret, the music of John Pickard (b.1963) remains less familiar than its intrinsic quality warrants – though the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain did include *Wildfire* in its programme at this year's Proms, and a follow-up to the BIS disc of his orchestral music (reviewed in May 2008) is imminent. In the meantime, this latest release from Toccata Classics is assuredly no stopgap: Pickard's chamber music is central to his output, as those familiar with the Dutton disc of his Second, Third and Fourth String Quartets (reviewed in September 2002) will attest, and the present selection ranges over two decades of his composing in an absorbing portrayal of an idiom in constant and unpredictable evolution.

Earliest is the Piano Trio (1990), a taut three-in-one entity whose impulsive outer sections elide into then out of a central section where the dialogue between the instruments has an eloquence matched by the ruminative poise of the work's closing pages. The present account is an impressive one, for all that a previous recording better conveyed the sense of a continuous underlying tempo, and with Pickard's resourceful handling of the balance problems inherent in this medium everywhere in evidence. Yet there remains a slight feeling of formal inflexibility that is entirely absent from *Insomnia* (1997) – a fantasia in which violin and piano pursue an intensifying discourse whose pivoting between relative stasis and dynamism brings about a powerful culmination; the 'stray thoughts' alluded to by the title having given rise to altogether more implacable feelings at the close. Although it follows a broadly similar trajectory, the *Chaconne* (1998) is inevitably more detached and objective in expression – solo viola outlining an upwards arc of intensity over the course of ten sections, with the climactic ninth section yielding to a final threnody in what was an inspired afterthought 12 years on.

Different again is *Valedictions* (2000), two paraphrases for cello and piano on poems by John Donne in which images 'of Weeping' and that 'forbidding Mourning' comprise a diptych of gentle supplication followed by understated fulfilment. The Violin Sonata (2004) can lay claim to being the most impressive work here, not least in its formal



John Pickard

Toccata Classics

unfolding whereby a trenchant opening *Allegro* segues into an explosive *Presto* that appears as if its 'alter ego' and makes contrast with the closing *Adagio* the greater; this latter movement, with its subtle interplay of scalic elements, transforms earlier motifs in music of sustained expressive rapture of which this composer only rarely avails himself. If *Snowbound* (2010) is a less involving experience, its evocation of the weather's transformative effect is still an engrossing one: bass clarinet and cello overlapping in register over piano as an oblique rhythmic motion emerges out of, then subsides back into, the prevailing textural miasma.

All these performances meet the often considerable challenges of their respective pieces head on. Rupert Marshall-Luck, in particular, proves as adept in an overtly contemporary idiom as in those of the early twentieth century with which he is most associated, while the contributions of Sophie Harris and Matthew Rickard lack nothing in commitment or insight. The warm acoustic of St George's in Bristol is heard to advantage throughout, and the composer's notes are highly informative. Paul Mealor pens an enthusiastic preface: Pickard may not be the most likely candidate for a Royal Wedding commission or a No. 1 hit, but his music has a substance and durability which make it, and the present disc, required listening.

Richard Whitehouse

Rachmaninov

New

Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 19^a. *Danse Orientale*, Op. 2 No. 2^a. *Lied in F minor*^a. *Études-tableaux*, Op. 39.

^aSteven Doane (cello); **Barry Snyder** (piano).

Bridge BRIDGE9347 (full price, 1 hour 17 minutes).

Website www.bridgerecords.com

^bProducer David Starobin. Engineers Adam Abeshouse, David

Dussman. Date August 1996.

Comparison:

Cello Sonata:

Kurtz, Kapell (Naxos Historical) 8.110767 (1947)

Rachmaninov's relatively early Cello Sonata, Op. 19 (1901) shares more with Chopin's late Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 65 than just the same key. Both composers are supreme melodists, yet, in comparison with many of their other works (most particularly Chopin's *Nocturnes* for solo piano and Rachmaninov's four Piano Concertos, Opp. 1, 18, 30, 40 and his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op. 43), the melodic ideas of both cello sonatas are less sharply chiselled, immediately recognizable and lastingly memorable, notwithstanding the fact that the cello is a superbly melodic instrument. Especially in the present Rachmaninov sonata, the listener often almost hears a cellistic version of Wagner's 'endless melos'. This is a description rather than a criticism, and I am saying it as an absolute lover of Rachmaninov's music (and of Chopin's). It is surprising because the Rachmaninov Cello Sonata was written immediately after his Piano Concerto No. 2 (which has the clearest, most unforgettable melodic content in all five concertos, and the Cello Sonata has the next opus number to the concerto).

Both composers were superb pianists, and in addition to his recordings of his own works (either as pianist or conductor), Rachmaninov recorded numerous solo works by Chopin for his regular label, RCA Victor. These are grouped together on an RCA CD entitled 'Rachmaninoff plays Chopin', wherein (if there were any doubt) his recording of Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35 confirms his status as one of the greatest pianists of the twentieth century. It is therefore unsurprising that the piano part of Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata is incredibly difficult. Here, it is in the very secure hands of Barry Snyder. His regular cellist duo-partner Steven Doane is just as authoritative and virtuosic.



Steven Doane

Bridge

Snyder gets an appropriate innings as soloist in Rachmaninov's nine *Études-tableaux*, Op. 39 (1916-17). The composer had already written a previous set of nine, Op. 33 (1911), but before its publication he withdrew three of the études, and one of them, in a revised form, became No. 6 (in A minor) of the Op. 39 set. It is enterprising of Snyder to have included