

Chamber

Bumper Beethoven from the Endellions • Rysanov and friends in Brahms

Bartók • Beethoven • Ravel • Say

Bartók Six Romanian Folk Dances, Sz56
Beethoven Violin Sonata No 9, 'Kreutzer', Op 47
Ravel Violin Sonata **Say** Violin Sonata
Patricia Kopatchinskaja *vn* **Fazil Say** *pf*
Naïve © V5146 (67' • DDD)

Radical, individual and exciting takes on sonatas old and new



This is far from being just another recording of the *Kreutzer* Sonata. Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Fazil Say share a radical approach, performing each musical gesture in the

most vivid way, with smoothness and tonal beauty a secondary consideration. It's undeniably exciting, especially the first movement which, after all, is quite a wild piece, but even here I was disturbed by the exaggerated shortness of many *staccato* notes. And in the finale, which though it shares something of the first *Presto*'s manic quality has a joyful aspect, Kopatchinskaja's ultra-short, rather splashy bowing of both main themes fails to project their full melodic élan.

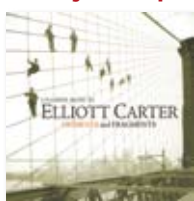
Like the Beethoven, the Bartók is a slightly frustrating mixture of the brilliant and the questionable, but in the Ravel the performance's radical edge is more completely successful. The first movement's out-of-key interjections are sharply characterised and drawn together by a powerful sense of line, and the spirit of the Blues movement is captured wholeheartedly, with some unusual piano sounds and spectacular violin-playing. Not surprisingly, Say's own Sonata is also beautifully played. Most imaginatively written for the two instruments and adopting a direct, uncomplicated style, four short movements chart a progression from romantic melancholy through an area of dark, grotesque struggle to an empty, bleak landscape, with a repeat of the gentle first movement as consolation. Daring, and highly individual playing – it's a CD worth investigating.

Duncan Druce

Carter

Cello Sonata^a. *Con leggerezza pensosa*: Omaggio a Italo Calvino^b. *Elegy*^c. *Enchanted Preludes*^d. *Gra*^e. *Scrivo in Vento*^f. *Fragment*^g – I & II. *Figment*^g – I & II
Johannes Martens Ensemble (^{df}Tom Ottar Andreassen ^{fl}bc Andjei Maevski ^d Joachim Kjelsaas Kwetziński ^{pf}bc Anders Nilsson, ^{co}Yi Yang *vn*s ^cAnders Rensvik *vn* ^{ab}cdg Johannes Martens *vc*)
2L © 2L545ACD (64' • DDD)

A top rank and highly vivid way in for anyone aspiring to get Carter



Even had there been more new releases in Elliott Carter's centenary year, this disc from the Johannes Martens Ensemble would rank among the finest. Certainly Martens's

account of the Cello Sonata (1948) is a perceptive one – he and pianist Joachim Kwetziński pointing up the productive disparity between measured and free time in the opening *Moderato* as the consequence of the ever-changing relationship between the instruments. The jazzy undertones of the *Scherzo* are vividly brought out, as are the *Adagio*'s high-flown rhetoric and the finale's strenuous unfolding towards its deftly ambivalent half-close.

All but one of the shorter pieces date from the past quarter-century, mostly being miniatures written for Carter's friends and advocates. The *Figments* give a good account of his expressive range, the first as imperious as the Ivesian tribute of the second is speculative, while the *Fragments* recall the glacial harmonics of the Fifth Quartet and the emotional conflict of the First. *Enchanted Preludes* and *Con leggerezza pensosa* are polyphonic pieces that wear their learning lightly, while *Scrivo in Vento* and *Gra* (Polish for "to play") are resourceful character-studies for flute and clarinet respectively. The disc concludes with the *Elegy* (1943) that mines a seam of appealingly Coplandesque repose.

All but the *Figments* and *Fragments* are on a fine Bridge disc from the mid-1990s (12/94). Yet the sound here has unmatched depth and clarity, while Stuart MacRae's booklet-note offers a penetrating overview of Carter's music as a whole. Anyone seeking a "way in" could not hope for better. **Richard Whitehouse**

Chopin • Kats-Chernin • Rachmaninov

Chopin Cello Sonata, Op 65^{ac} **Kats-Chernin** Phoenix Story^{ab} **Rachmaninov** Cello Sonata, Op 19^{bc}
^aPei-Jee Ng, ^bPei-San Ng *vc*s ^cDavid Tong *pf*
Melba Recordings © MR301113 (77' • DDD)

Cello twins, their instincts in the right place, tackle a mixed programme

The Ng brothers, twins, were born and brought up in Australia, prior to studying in the UK. David Tong, originally from Macao, moved to Australia as a child. All three artists show impressive technical accomplishment; Tong is



entirely at home with the virtuoso aspects of both sonatas, and the twins both possess beautiful, well centred, expressive tone – I'd not find it easy to tell them apart. The sonatas

are recorded with a spacious acoustic that allows the full splendour of the keyboard-writing (Rachmaninov's especially) to emerge, but without swamping the cello sound. As to the interpretations: all three players have the right instincts – projecting the intense lyricism of the Chopin and responding to the more dramatic contrasts of Rachmaninov's idiom.

And yet I find both accounts strangely impersonal and uninvolved, the expressive gestures somewhat generalised. Turn for comparison to Natalie Clein and Charles Owen in both works (EMI, 11/06) and you'll see what I mean. There's a more intimate tone – which may not suit some of Rachmaninov's grander moments so well – but also more warmth, more tonal variety and a deeper engagement with the character of each passage and with each detail in the texture.

The two pieces that comprise *Phoenix Story* sound wonderfully deep and rich in the Ng brothers' admirable performance. I can't imagine, however, wanting to return to them often; the over-extended ostinato figures, lack of harmonic movement and unvaried phrase-lengths soon become quite tedious. **Duncan Druce**

Elgar • Ravel • R Strauss

Elgar Violin Sonata, Op 82 **Ravel** Violin Sonata (1897)
R Strauss Violin Sonata, Op 18
Jonathan Crow *vn* **Paul Stewart** *pf*
ATMA Classique © ACD2 2534 (76' • DDD)

Elgar – selected comparison:

Hope, Mulligan (3/01) (NIMB) N15666

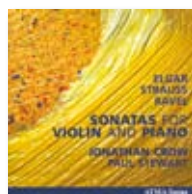
Ravel – selected comparison:

Juillet, Rogé (12/96^b) (DECC) 475 486-2DGR

Strauss – selected comparison:

Repin, Berezavsky (5/01) (ERAT) 8573 85769-2

Good performances of some varied late-Romantic repertoire



At first glance, the coupling of the solitary sonatas of Elgar and Richard Strauss with Ravel's single movement in A minor looks a little arbitrary. After all, there is no obvious expressive connection between them. The Ravel and Strauss are the products of composers in their