

will never hear them played better than they are here. The Viola Sonata was also written for Lillian Fuchs. It has more of the spirit of the Rhapsody-Concerto, with harmonies and big melodic gestures again borrowed from Copland, but lacks the earlier work's inspiration.

Maxim Rysanov and Alexander Sitkovetsky again show that they must be twins separated at birth. They were born to play together, and I hope that they never stop. Rysanov plays a viola made in 1780 by Giuseppe Guaragnini. Very good sound.

MAGIL

MARTINU: *Songs*

Jana Hrochova Wallingerova, mz; Giorgio Koukl, p
Naxos 573387—65 minutes

This program of song by Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu includes two cycles on traditional texts, *Songs On One Page* (1943) and *Songs On Two Pages* (1944); the cycle *Niponari* (1912), settings of texts by Japanese lyric poets; *Two Songs To Negro Folk Poems* (1932) and a selection of songs written from 1910 to 1912.

The performances are quite good; Wallingerova has a golden tone and crisp diction, and Koukl plays with warm and clarity. The two are particularly good in 'Stari' from *Niponari*, a gentle, melancholy piece performed with great sensitivity. The *Niponari* songs are my favorite part of the recording.

More than half the program consists of world premiere recordings, making this an invaluable addition to a library of Czech songs or works by Martinu. Notes but no texts or translations.

HEISEL

MATTHEWS, M: *Quartets 2+3; Miniatures*

Clearwater Quartet—Ravello 7910—72 minutes

Like his fellow Canadian Andrew Paul MacDonald (reviewed above), Michael Matthews (born 1950) has a sizable number of recordings, many sponsored by Canadian musical institutions. But Matthews is a far bolder and more adventurous artist, unconcerned with offering easy pleasures to an audience. He is, instead, fiercely transfixed on the great traditions of the quartet medium, particularly its evocation of inwardness—or *innigkeit*, as the Germans would say. The result of his efforts is complex, lapidary, deeply-felt music that penetrates at once into the individual psyche and outward to the vast, impersonal, and transcendent.

Matthews's Second Quartet (2003) is in

three movements that last about 25 minutes; I is moderate in tempo, II very fast, and III—by far the longest—very slow. The language is fully chromatic and often rugged, though it avoids the exploded discontinuities of pointillism. It could be loosely described as post-Schoenbergian in its free use of dissonance and intricately interwoven motives; listeners who know the quartets of such composers as Leon Kirchner, Gunther Schuller, Martin Boykan, Hugh Wood, and Andrew Imbrie, will have a general idea of the idiom, though Matthews never actually sounds like anyone else that I can identify.

I opens with sinuous pulsations that reappear through the movement though in different groupings and tempos; over and under these a volatile and entangled discourse threads its way, growing at several points to climaxes of impassioned urgency, then finally subsiding into a spare coda introduced by spectral harmonics and pizzicatos that concludes with the more humane and consoling sound of normal bowed strings: a tiny, epitaphium-like six-measure duo for viola and cello. This coda, in a way, epitomizes the worldview embodied in Matthews's aesthetic: the distant, the numinous, the unknowable both arises from and encloses the intimate, the personal, the human. Our tiny lives pull our gaze inward, even as doing so expands our vision into the infinite space and time around us.

There is no let-down in the following two movements. II is a biting and rather Bartokian scherzo (though there are no "Bartokian" fingerprints in the music). Triple-meter rhythms predominate but the treatment of meter, tempo, and pacing is so fluid and supple (in all his quartet music) that the repetitive patterns, though easily perceptible, constantly shift and mutate in subtle ways. The 13-minute final adagio takes the quartet to its most sustained expressive power, its impassioned metaphysical speculations at last resolving in a serene epilogue that returns to the quiet pulsations that begin the quartet—a heartbeat, like our own, that fades into silence.

The Third Quartet is the product of a long gestation; the score I was able to get from the (very helpful) Canadian Music Centre is dated 2005, but the composer's revisions continued until 2013. It's a long work, over half an hour, in four movements, the last three of them "attacca" (connected). The language is not as rugged or chromatic as in Quartet 2, though still, if not actually atonal, at least quite free

and unconventional harmonically. Motives and accompanimental figures are clear and memorable, though subject to considerable variation; textures are consistently imaginative but transparent, often following familiar standard procedures like imitative contrapuntal entrances; and the overall forms, despite many changes of tempo, complication, and intensity, are shapely—even, in an under-the-surface way, “traditional”.

All this is apprehensible in the first movement, which presents a complex of brusque motives as a kind of first theme, contrasting it to a tuneful second idea, followed by what could be seen as a development, recapitulation, and coda that together outline a more-or-less recognizable sonata form. The slow, quiet inner sections of the quartet are more intimate and explorative in sound. II, in particular, is remarkable—indeed, in my experience unique. It uses slow, long-drawn-out glissandos to accompany a florid and expressive melodic line that one might think would be disrupted by them, but is somehow, instead, intensified. Microtonal figures (as slow glissandos are) would seem to clash with conventionally tuned melody and counteract its effect, yet here Matthews audaciously combines them and makes the combination the basis of a slow, forlorn fugue. Amazing! The movement continues with yet more timbral counterpoint to its fugal entries as they grow and then subside—ghostly *ponticello* tremolos, glassy harmonics, long-held single-notes sounded and echoed. This passing strange conflation of melodic, microtonal, and timbral polyphony displayed with trance-like slowness achieves a somber majesty and grieving profundity of utterance found only in the great exemplars of Western music.

The last two movements offer somewhat more easily assimilated elements. III presents a string of intense episodes with strong dynamic contrasts surrounded and mitigated by a placidly flowing four-part canon. The final movement is lighter in mood and rondo-like, with a recurring, jaunty, three-note rhythmic figure pushing along a variety of interludes on ideas derived from the first movement.

A cycle of 11 short *Miniatures*, written in 2000, fills out this program of Matthews's string quartet music, the longest of them just under three minutes, the shortest 17 seconds. These musical aphorisms, inspired (as the composer says) by the synthesis of extreme concision and wide implication in the music of Webern and Kurtág, attempt to create “a

series of little worlds, each with its own atmosphere and landscape, each with its own inner logic, its own melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and timbral language”. Much, I might add, as Matthews does on a much larger scale in his full-size works for the same ensemble.

These quartets have made a powerful impression on me, as will be evident from my descriptions, especially in the Clearwater Quartet's magnificent performances and Ravello's richly detailed and powerful, immediate sonics. Anyone who cares about chamber music of the past few decades should hear them.

LEHMAN

MENDELSSOHN: *Quartets 1+4;*
Quartet in E-flat

Escher Quartet—BIS 1960 [SACD] 80 minutes

I loved the Escher's reading of Zemlinsky's first two quartets (Nov/Dec 2014), and I love this also. The Eschers play with a quick vibrato and in general have an understated intensity. On this release, as well as in their Zemlinsky, I notice a bubbling, just-beneath-the-surface intensity that never quite boils over. They have an old-world sound that recalls the recordings of the great quartets of the past century: dry, crisp, joyful, and very articulate.

The sound on this release is tight and close, also like older recordings, but of course it has digital clarity. On an SACD player (which I do not own), I expect it would be sublime.

In addition to the familiar Quartets 1 and 4, we get the very early Quartet in E-flat. It was written when Mendelssohn was a student of Czerny, and while it does not quite sound like the composer's mature work, it is an attractive piece worth hearing.

PAGEL

MENDELSSOHN: *Clarinet Sonata;* see WEBER
Double Concerto; see MACDONALD
Violin Concerto; see TCHAIKOVSKY

MESSIAEN: *Liturgies of the Divine Presence; O Sacrum Convivium; Rechants*
Marianna Shimyan, p, Thomas Bloch, celeste, ondes Martenot; Danish Vocal Ensemble, Choir, Chamber Orchestra/ Marcus Creed
OUR 6220612—59 minutes

The alternately beautiful and exciting *Three Small Liturgies of the Divine Presence* (1943), for female choir, piano, ondes Martenot, celeste, vibraphone, percussion, and string orchestra, is one of the composer's most enduring works. It is given a radiant performance by these forces and serves as a thoroughly competitive account. The brief and often