

ghosts of major figures from the 20th century haunt pages that are nonetheless informed by a dedication to Portuguese song and dance, and by the composer's distinctive character. Artur Pizarro's cant and urgently committed recital es widely through memories of Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Bartók, Debussy and Ravel. Spain, too, is recalled in the rhythms of Falla's *Fantasia bética* (the *ro giusto* from the Second Sonata) and all these influences are transmuted into a pungent singularity. And when you warm to the way the Second Sonata's finale swerves from earlier comedy into intricacy, or the widely used aphorisms of *Ao fio dos anos e das* ('About years and hours'), you are struck at every turn by the composer's pulsive and insistent voice.

Naxos gives us the complete works for cello and piano and solo violin, further evidence of both range and individuality. *Prelúdio e fuga* and *Esponsais* for solo cello are cruelly exposed and demanding, their difficulties dispatched with unflinching grace and eloquence by Bruno Carneiro. He is joined by João Paulo Santos elsewhere, a virtuoso partnership in the phantom chase of the *Presto* from the Second Sonata and in the Galop (*Preludio, Galop e galope*), where the composer seems close to relaxing into a *jeu d'esprit*, though not without a sardonic undertow. The discs are well recorded (the Naxos sound is close, though this adds to a sense of immediacy). Admittedly Lopes-Graça is an underrated taste but he is also a composer of great integrity. Highly successful records, and not just for explorers of music off the beaten track. **Bryce Morrison**

Martinů · Mustonen · Sibelius

Martinů Cello Sonatas - No 1, H277; No 2, H286; No 3, H340 **Mustonen Cello Sonata Sibelius Malinconia, Op 20**

Paul Isserlis vs Olli Mustonen *pf*
BIS2042 (78' • DDD/DSD)



Though certainly not unknown among cellists, the three Martinů cello sonatas don't get the frequency that they deserve, and due to any compositional deficits. However, the airy, expansive Martinů style in his symphonies is only glimpsed in certain chord-voicings and harmonic textures in these dense, heterogeneous pieces, bursting with ideas, maybe too

many for their own good, sometimes knocking into each other, particularly in the piano-writing. Tonal centres don't stay put for very long. Often a separate bitonal layer is in there. Only in the Third Sonata does one hear more codified, mainstream Martinů but that's only because the use of simultaneous tonalities is more a source of spice and wit.

Or so it seems in these performances, which unapologetically don't look back. Isserlis and Mustonen enjoy considerable chemistry and are so much in the moment that matters of continuity and architecture are mainly taken care of by their headlong momentum. Isserlis makes lower registers growl (especially apparent in the fine SACD sound). Mustonen relishes the interruptive qualities, the outbursts and abrupt changes of direction with a sonority that one might describe as aggressively crystalline. The one movement that's more expansive than busy is the Second Sonata's *Andantino* but Mustonen takes the music to a particularly anguished place, revealing it as some of the most singular music in all of Martinů's considerable output. Though only four minutes long, it feels epic.

The three sonatas are separated by Mustonen's own Sonata for cello and piano, dating from 2006, which, like Martinů, stands halfway down the road to modernism. There's adventure here but the thematic material is unexceptional in ways that becomes more apparent on repeated hearings. Then there's Sibelius's curious *Malinconia*, Op 20, whose rather good moments are buried behind what sound like parodies of Saint-Saëns and Chopin, with everything cut short by a whopping case of attention deficit disorder.

The Chandos disc by Paul and Huw Watkins takes a more balanced, lyrical view of Martinů's sonatas and is filled out by the *Variations on a Slovak Theme* and *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* – not major works but a better counterpoint to the formidable music around it. **David Patrick Stearns**

Martinů – selected comparison:
P & H Watkins (8/10) (CHAN) CHAN10602

Mendelssohn

'Complete Works for String Quartet'
Mendelssohn String Quartets - E flat²; No 1, Op 12²; No 2, Op 13^c; No 3, Op 44 No 1^d; No 4, Op 44 No 2^e; No 5, Op 44 No 3^f; No 6, Op 80^g. Four Pieces, Op 81^h. Twelve Fuguesⁱ. Frage, Op 9 No 1^j **Fanny Mendelssohn String Quartet**
¹Sophie Bevan *sop* ¹Julian Milford *pf* ¹Artea Quartet; ²Badke Quartet; ³Benyounes Quartet; ⁴Castalian Quartet; ⁵Cavaleri Quartet; ⁶Idomeneo Quartet; ⁷Navarra Quartet; ⁸Piatti Quartet; ⁹Sacconi Quartet; ¹⁰Wu Quartet
Champs Hill © 4 CHRCDO85 (4h 27' • DDD)



The six quartets of Mendelssohn, along with the assorted other pieces for string

quartet, form a firm point of reference for a number of works by other composers, including Schumann's monumental Op 41 Quartets of 1847. Those works, in particular, were dedicated to Mendelssohn, although both composers were fundamentally and directly influenced by Beethoven's late quartets. Although Mendelssohn's own father described them as an 'indecipherable, uncorrected horror', Felix and his sister Fanny studied them with almost the same degree of obsessive intensity that they reserved for JS Bach.

In this vastly enjoyable complete set of Mendelssohn's music for string quartet (and it really means 'complete', as it includes Fanny's String Quartet), the first distinct references to Beethoven can be found in the first of the numbered quartets. It is confusingly numbered No 2 (it was written in 1827, two years before No 1) and is cleverly ascribed here to the most experienced of the young groups to appear in this collection, the Sacconi Quartet. There is a strong sense of four distinct musical voices enjoying a conversation in their performance – No 2 is in no way an egotistical piece and the batsqueaks of romanticism do not ever interfere with what was, at this point, still a conservative style. As a result, No 2 throws up more questions than the other, more overtly complicated quartets, and the Sacconis, with their elegant and understated performance, give a strong impression of being best placed to answer them.

The newly formed Benyounes Quartet start the collection with the even earlier E flat major Quartet and a performance that has all the callow warmth that the piece needs, and with a reserve more commonly to be found in groups that have been playing together much longer. It is occasionally at the cost of some romantic flourishes that, used sparingly, can lift Mendelssohn's chamber music into a new realm of beauty. There is, in fact, very little *portamento* in any of the performances on these discs and whereas the overarching energy and drama of the Piatti Quartet's performance of the Fifth Quartet can support its lack, it is more noticeable, for instance, in the Idomeneo Quartet's otherwise beautifully blended performance of the Quartet in E flat, No 1.

The question of whether to play elements into the music that aren't there in

order to pep it up, or to draw back and let it speak for itself, is constantly bubbling under the surface in Mendelssohn's chamber music, and the first two quartets of Op 44, played by the established Navarra Quartet and the relatively young Castalian Quartet, inject a real sense of the change of direction between the earlier quartets and the late chamber works. The Castalian's sound can very occasionally veer to the verge of muddy in their eagerness to aim for the end of a phrase, also resulting in a general lack of anchored calm in the slow movement, but in general they continue with great accomplishment the immaculately executed white-knuckle ride set up by the Navarras in the first of the Op 44 set (and especially the *Presto*). These two quartets represent such a turning point that performances of them vary to more of a degree than the others, and both quartets here take a quietly mature approach but with the sense of foreboding and acceleration that aren't fully realised until the final two major pieces: the Requiem for Fanny of the Sixth Quartet and the Four Pieces, Op 81.

So it is quite right that at the end of the Op 44 set the tides of performance truly turn, and we're forced to sit up and listen. The Piatti Quartet open the E flat major Quartet, No 5, with such commitment and perfect ensemble that you might think you were listening to a small, perfectly homogeneous string orchestra; and to hear the final two works is to hear Mendelssohn fulfilling his potential as a great Romantic composer. Although there is a sense that the Badke's tempo is not entirely secure, especially in the opening movement, their performance of the Sixth Quartet and the Artea's of the Four Pieces are among the most insightful and moving on the disc.

The collection finishes with Fanny's own String Quartet, and is a dramatic illustration of how intense their conversations must have been, how they thought both similarly and differently, and how bereft Mendelssohn must have been without her. It's a shame, therefore, that the early, quasi-Bachian pastiche Twelve Fugues (played with appropriately detached insight and intelligence by the Wu Quartet) intervenes in the final portmanteau of the context and evolution of the greatest collection of Mendelssohn's work, in such an accomplished survey.

Caroline Gill

Moeran · Rubbra · Rawsthorne

'British Works for Cello and Piano, Vol 3'
Moeran Cello Sonata Rawsthorne Cello Sonata
Rubbra Cello Sonata, Op 60



Paul Watkins *vc* Huw Watkins *pf*
Chandos © CHAN10818 (59' • DDD)



Here's another absorbing volume of British masterworks for cello and piano, all three of which date from the 1940s and are played with understanding, commitment and irreproachable technical skill.

The account of the G minor Sonata that Rubbra wrote in 1946 for the cellist William Pleeth and his wife Margaret Good impresses by dint of its intrepid emotional scope and unfailing lucidity, these performers proving acutely responsive to this music's deeply nourishing contrapuntal and spiritual reach. Likewise, Moeran's gripping A minor Sonata receives hugely eloquent treatment, the playing as rich-toned and ardent as one could hope to hear. Moeran thought it one of his very best things – a verdict triumphantly borne out by the sustained intensity of expression of the anguished slow movement, which in turn plunges without a break into an excitingly taut rondo finale. If you don't yet know this riveting piece, let me urge investigation. Satisfyingly compact, neatly argued and impeccably crafted, Rawsthorne's 1948 C major Sonata represents another durably rewarding creation. It was written for Anthony Pini, and, like all three works here, will certainly repay closer scrutiny.

With ideally intimate sound emanating from Dunwich's Potton Hall and perspicacious booklet-notes by the late Calum MacDonald, this is a superlative issue in every way. **Andrew Achenbach**

RR Parry

'Music for Heart and Breath'
Quartet for Heart and Breath^a. Heart and Breath Sextet^b. For Heart, Breath and Orchestra^c. Interruptions I-VII (Heart and Breath Nonet)^d. Duet for Heart and Breath^e. Quartet for Heart and Breath^f

^aNadia Sirota *va* ^dAaron Dessner, ^dBryce Dessner *gtrs* Richard Reed Parry ^d*db*/^e*pf* Kronos Quartet; ^{ad}*yMusic*; ^corchestra / ^{abc}Nico Muhly *pf/celesta*
DG © 479 3061GH (66' • DDD)



Best known as arranger and multi-instrumentalist in the rock band Arcade Fire, Richard Reed Parry has also been building a classical catalogue of significance. The present disc comprises a cycle of pieces

entitled 'Music for Heart and Breath', its underlying premise being the playing of the musicians in both individual and collective, inhaling and exhaling set to tempo on both a localised and global basis. If this seems perilous, it's a gimmick (Heinz Holliger's *Cardiophonie* of four decades ago is something not so dissimilar). The outcome is logical and compelling.

After the capricious dialogue of *For Heart and Breath* (initially in its sextet format), the greater intimacy of *Heart and Breath Sextet* reveals the listener in through its timbral allure, and then *For Heart and Breath Orchestra* extends this profound and expressive canvas. Although, is *Interruptions* (Heart and Breath Nonet) – seven brief yet delectable pieces that effortlessly bridge any perceived gaps between Parry's experimental tendencies. *Duet for Heart and Breath* ostensibly rounds off the cycle with its touching interplay between Parry and the original *Heart and Breath Quartet*... is included to be played as deftly and appealingly full as possible.

These performances – featuring exponents of post-minimalist music like Bryce Dessner and the cult duo Nico Muhly – are formidable. Parry's requirements. They do not possess Edwin Outwater's grandiose orchestral work will have a bravely projected realisation. The present reading is of a piece with an inward focus of the music: here. Clearly and spacious, it offers a listening experience that is not dismaying but assuredly

Richard Whitehouse

For Heart, Breath and Orchestra – CD
Kitbener-Waterloo SO, Outwater (2013)

Purcell

Ten Sonatas in Four Parts, ZB
The King's Consort / Robert King
Vivat © VIVAT106 (78' • DDD)



Orpheus, so this survey of Purcell's four parts published posthumously by his composer's widow Frances is a most welcome. An eminent discography of exceptional versions by the King's Consort (Chandos, 10/89), London (Harmonia Mundi, 8/93), &