



Music at an exhibition: John Harle (right) and colleagues record the saxophonist's painting-inspired music



Trio play works by namesake composer and other mavericks

Fartein Valen began planning a trio in 1912 but only began serious work on it in 1917. Progress, as often for him, was painfully slow as within its modest frame he was starting to work out his 'new counterpoint', which would come eventually to embrace atonality, though this trio merely edges in that direction. This newcomer is not its first recording but is the equal of that on the old Norsk Phonogram LP from the 1960s.

Whereas Valen looked first to the music of Reger and then Schoenberg for practical guidance, Klaus Egge – a pupil of Valen – remained within a more traditional tonal idiom but without the trappings of late Romanticism or neo-classicism, and embracing, as controversially as Valen's atonality, an explicitly nationalist aesthetic. The music of his four-movement Piano Trio (1940) seems to have started out as a wind quintet but the trio provided a more apposite severity of texture, given the timing of its creation in occupied Norway.

Ketil Hvoslef's single-span Trio (2010) is a typical example of his maverick approach to genres and titles, the result being a very

different, more meditative work than Valen's and Egge's. It is also the work written explicitly for the relatively young Valen Trio, Hvoslef moved to do so by their performance of Tchaikovsky's A minor. The players' ensemble and intonation are flawless and their understanding of each other and the repertoire highly impressive. LAWO's sound is crystal clear and very natural. **Guy Rickards**

Enescu

'Complete Works for Violin and Piano, Vol 1'
Violin Sonatas - No 2, Op 6; No 3, 'dans le caractère populaire roumain', Op 25; in A minor, 'Torso'.
Impromptu concertant

Axel Strauss *vn* Ilya Poletaev *pf*
Naxos © 8 572691 (67 • DDD)



Strauss and Poletaev launch Enescu sonata series for Naxos

Enescu's Second Violin Sonata (1899) occupies a special place in his output, being the work in which he found his personal voice. Its three ardently expressive movements occupy a Brahmsian sound world convincingly achieved (he was just 18 at the time) with little or no hint of his native Romania in the melodies. Strauss and Poletaev take the work's virtuoso

challenges in their stride and at pace, too (suits the music), matching the Opreans on Helios and cutting three minutes off Mordkovich on Chandos.

Twenty-seven years later, Enescu's Third is the Second's diametric opposite, avowedly of 'popular Romanian character' (although not quoting any folk tunes) from bar 1. It has been recorded many times and with its combination of fearsome technical challenge, exotic Eastern European accent and perfect proportions it is not hard to hear why. Strauss and Poletaev prove formidable exponents of its many charms and if not perhaps as idiomatic as Sherban Lupu in either of his recorded accounts (that on Altarus was reissued on Continuum), Strauss's is still a sparkling account, superior to Szalai and a rival to Kavakos. Poletaev accompanies with fire and panache.

In between came the single-movement *Torso* Sonata in A minor (1911), though whether it was penned for a larger sonata that never materialised or as an independent work is unclear. There are Romanian elements – the wistful opening theme, for instance – neatly integrated within a mainstream late-Romantic idiom. The fleeter tempi here again pay dividends, as also in the short *Impromptu concertant* (1903), Strauss and Poletaev tauter

than Samouil and Bara. Naxos's sound is clear and natural though not as resonant as some rivals. **Guy Rickards**

Vn Sons Nos 2 & 3, Torso – selected comparison:

A & J Oprean (2/92) (HYPE) CDH55103*

Vn Sons Nos 2 & 3 – selected comparison:

Lupu, Gheorghe (8/01) (ELEC) EDC324/5

Vn Son No 2 – selected comparison:

Mordkovich, Fountain (9/08) (CHAN) CHAN10476

Vn Son No 3 – selected comparisons:

Lupu, Cymerman (11/88) (CONT) CDC1003*

Kavakos, Nagy (2/04) (ECM) 476 053-2

Szalai, Balog (5/11) (BRIL) 9165

Impromptu concertant – comparative version:

Samouil, Bara (4/12) (INDE) INDE036

Goehr

Since Brass, Nor Stone..., Op 80^a. ...around Stravinsky, Op 72 (incl Stravinsky: Pastorale)^b. Clarinet Quintet, Op 79^c. manere, Op 81^d. Largo siciliano, Op 91^e

^aColin Currie ^{perc} ^aPavel Haas Quartet;

^bNash Ensemble

NMC © NMCD187 (74' • DDD)



Pavel Haas lead chamber exploration of Goehr

Having enjoyed a disc of Goehr's orchestral works a few months back (Naxos, 3/13), I've found it instructive to turn to his chamber music. Unlike that last, wide-ranging recital, the works on this new disc date from the last decade, three of them bearing consecutive opus numbers. Goehr's use of opus numbers is indicative of a thread running through the collection – his engagement with the Western canon. (One of NMC's characteristic 'music maps' on the back of the CD booklet, showing Goehr's name at the centre of a circle surrounded by those of notable influences, colleagues and students, makes much the same point.)

The pieces' instrumentations spell this out too, of course. The most interesting and overt reworking is the couple of movements framing Stravinsky's early *Pastorale*, which precede and follow it more or less seamlessly. The references to known models are woven through both the Clarinet Quintet and the *Largo siciliano* – the latter significantly not entitled 'Horn Trio' but while there is no hint of pastiche, Goehr's later style seems anything but self-conscious in wearing its antecedents fondly on its sleeve. Standing apart in almost all these respects is the string quartet with percussionist *Since Brass, Nor Stone...*, not exactly a comfortable match instrumentally but intriguing in its approach to the problem.

These performances render the sound worlds of Goehr's sources so consummately that his own twists and turns through them come through persuasively. **Fabrice Fitch**

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Harle

'Art Music'

Painted Life^a. The Arrival of Spring^b.

Innocent^c. In nomine^d. Arcadia^e

John Harle ^{acde}sop sax ^bsaxes ^{bd}gtr ^abass gtr ^bpf

with ^bMarc Almond, ^{abd}Sarah Leonard ^{vocs}

^bRiccarda Kane ^{trbn} ^ePavel Šporcl ^{vn}

^bBill Hawkes ^{vn/va} ^{abe}Steve Lodder ^{pf}

^cDaniel Eisner ^{Harle sound design} ^aDoric Quartet

Sospiro © SOSJH100213 (60' • DDD)



Saxophonist Harle's music inspired by great paintings

John Harle quotes Picasso in suggesting that 'a painting should have an immediate, visceral effect', and tells us that his music came from 'both his memory of the paintings and his imagination'. He draws on a quintet of artists – three paintings by Lucian Freud, three by David Hockney (taken from his epic exhibition at the Royal Academy in 2012, which completely bowled me over), and one each by Francis Bacon, John O'Connor and the striking modernist John Craxton. The music itself is highly original, unpredictable, scalar and tonal, the themes seemingly interconnected. The first piece, *Painted Life*, opens with the somewhat minimalist but catchy 'Berlin Tango'. Then comes the lovely, lyrical 'The Interpretation of Dreams', followed by 'Memory and Imagination', which opens weirdly, then becomes *staccato*-spiky. The piano finale is hauntingly restful, and all four movements seemingly draw on the same musical ideas.

The first two movements of *The Arrival of Spring* are seductively vocal (Marc Almond) but the soprano Sarah Leonard joins the catchy, somewhat minimalist third movement and finally a vocal ensemble is added. The composer tells us that *Innocent* represents the Pope, with a curious, twittering opening and a richly atmospheric choral interlude finally 'falling into darkness'. The *In nomine* which follows brings a single line of music, beautifully sung by Sarah Leonard, and looks back to the 16th and 17th centuries.

Arcadia, which completes the programme, is in five sections: 'Invocation', 'Procession', 'Meditation', 'Evolution' and 'Dedication', the music much ornamented. It is scored for soprano saxophone with violin and piano, and its content varies in kaleidoscopic style and manner. I particularly liked the busy 'Evolution', which is a piquant contrast to the 'Meditation'. Then the work closes with a crisply busy, assertive, catchy rondo.

This is certainly a CD that is different and stimulating. Paintings which inspired the music are all reproduced in colour in the booklet. If you are intrigued by this adventurous experiment, why not try it?

Ivan March

Haydn

String Quartets – Op 20 No 2;

Op 54 No 1; 'Rider', Op 74 No 3

Schuppanzigh Quartet

Accent © ACC24223 (64' • DDD)



Third disc of 'period' Haydn from Schuppanzigh Quartet

This is the third of three volumes of Haydn from the period-instrument Schuppanzigh Quartet, in the course of which they have dropped in on most of the major corners of the composer's quartet canon (the most curious omission being anything from Op 33). Here we get the most serious of the Op 20s from 1772, one of the exuberant 'Tost' quartets of the late 1780s and the so-called *Rider* Quartet from the late, masterly Op 74 set.

The sound is unmistakably 'period' in its sinewy clarity. Vibrato is used with discretion and intonation is not always what you might expect (mostly when the violins go high, although there are some very peculiar-sounding G major chords at 1'52" in the second movement of Op 54 No 1). If you crave the coursing intensity of modern strings you may not go for all this, but these are certainly gutsy performances, full of life and stylistic understanding: the first movement of Op 54 No 1 has surely never been more *con brio*; the sharp rhythmic motifs of the *Rider* have a shapely spring to them; and the music's conversational energy is lucid throughout. The *Rider*'s slow movement may lack the tonal richness a modern quartet could have given it but these players really catch the darkness of its central section. But then, that is another of the gains of the period string sound: a wider range of colours, at times extending to a chilly bleakness that can enhance the emotional impact of a movement like the exploratory (surely CPE Bach-influenced) Capriccio of Op 20 No 2. The same work's fugal finale also comes over with compelling *sotto voce* stealth. In short, these performances are in no way academic or 'under-interpreted', and nor can they be described as anything less than profoundly refreshing. **Lindsay Kemp**

Janáček

String Quartets – No 1, 'The Kreutzer Sonata';

No 2, 'Intimate Letters'

Arcadia Quartet

Orchid © ORC100036 (43' • DDD)



Young Romanians record Janáček's two quartets

There are now plenty of recorded pairings of Janáček's two string quartets, in various versions. One, on Vol 4 of Supraphon's 'Janáček Unknown' series, even uses the viola

GRAMOPHONE NOVEMBER 2013 63