

US RELEASES

Duo Sonidos's unusual combination of guitar and violin proves winning; Gloríe Dei Cantores turns to Howells; plus contemporary oboe works

MUSIC US CHOICE

Spanish warmth

Duo Sonidos displays instinctive flair for Piazzolla and Falla, says *Julian Haylock*



ADVENTUROUS DUO: guitarist Adam Levin and violinist William Knuth



DUO SONIDOS

Works by Piazzolla, Brotons, Morales-Caso, Falla
William Knuth (violin),
Adam Levin (guitar)
Duo Sonidos 53.16 mins

Available arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic
A depressingly long list of classically-trained musicians has attempted and (mostly) failed to 'hang loose' with Piazzolla. How refreshing, then, to encounter two gifted young American musicians playing the *Historia del Tango* with a loose-limbed, easy virtuoso 'cool' and beguiling tonal warmth that combines laid-back intuitiveness

with classical sophistication. Paul Kochanski's transcription of Falla's *Suite populaire* for violin and piano has become a concert standard, but heard with guitar accompaniment it takes on a whole new dimension, taking it out of the concert hall into the sun-drenched vistas of Spain.

In his *Tre Divertimenti*, contemporary Catalan composer Salvador Brotons evokes an unmistakably Iberian sultriness that becomes deliciously earthy in the fast-changing meters of the finale. No less evocative is Eduardo Morales-Caso's *Voluptuoso*, a haunting fantasy inspired by Goya. Stunning performances from Duo Sonidos, complemented by state-of-the-art, engagingly tactile engineering. *Julian Haylock*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



HOWELLS

A Sequence for Saint Michael; Requiem; Take Him, Earth, for cherishing, etc
Gloríe Dei Cantores/
Elizabeth C Patterson
Gloríe Dei Cantores CD/CD 053
68.18 mins

Available arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

There's a slightly tremulous, quivery quality to the singing in the opening movement of Gloríe Dei Cantores's account of Howells's Requiem which won't tick everybody's boxes. It doesn't compromise tuning, but some may find it slightly enervating to listen to, and it affects the solo voices in Psalm 23 also. In other respects the work's emotions are strongly communicated, especially in the second setting of 'Requiem aeternam', where soft notes thrum in the bass register, and the central climax wells organically upward.

Among the shorter pieces *A Sequence for Saint Michael* is particularly successful – the choir precisely nails down some perilously narrow intervals in the part-writing. The tricky figuration launching the 'Te Deum' lacks a little bite and definition by comparison, and the sound is a trifle mushy. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★



DANCING ON IVORY

Romantic transcriptions for piano
Jue Wang (piano)
MSR Classics MS 1404 55.14 mins
Available arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

Jue Wang, a young Chinese pianist who studied in Shanghai and New York, certainly has good fingers,

and he needs them for such a lavish programme of Romantic transcriptions. But, finger technique is only the first requirement of this repertoire, and although he can get around the instrument with aplomb, certain other qualities – a singing line, a wide range of colour and a sense of musical time and space – prove more elusive. There is much impressive playing here, notably in the more lyrical pieces including two Gershwin songs (arranged by Grainger and Earl Wild respectively) and Zoltán Kocsis's arrangement of Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*. But such familiar warhorses come with their associated favourite recordings – whether Shura Cherkassky in Saint-Saëns/Godowsky's *The Swan*, or among Jue Wang's contemporaries Benjamin Grosvenor and Yuja Wang in Cziffra's *Trish-Trach Polka*. Such comparisons highlight the elements missing in these otherwise proficient performances. *Tim Parry*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★



OVERHEARD

Works for oboe and English horn by Goad, Kander, Lewis, Martin, Morris, Phillips, Silvestrini

Michele Fiala (oboe, English horn),
Martin Schuring (oboe),
William Averill, Donald Speer (piano)
MSR Classics MS 1403 74.03 mins

Available arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

Michele Fiala displays impressive command of oboe techniques traditional and new in these premiere recordings; she's well supported by her colleagues, but not flattered by uncomfortably close up sound. Erin Goad's *Overheard on a Saltmarsh*, for oboe, English horn and piano, really catches the ear, representing a sinister dialogue between a goblin and a nymph. Of three pieces for oboe and piano, Alyssa Morris's *Four Personalities* is a colourful depiction of different character-types, Susan Kander's *Pastcards from America* a poignant narration of the immigrant experience, and Theresa Martin's *Peaches at Midnight* an intimate account of a nocturnal feast shared with a toddler. For the rest, Silvestrini's Three Duos for oboes are hyperactive duet studies, and Lewis's *Funny Temperaments* uses English horn and piano to paint a New Brunswick seascape. *Anthony Burton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★

American Record Guide

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Guide to
Summer Festivals

a sprightly rhythmic command, and an elegant sense of phrasing. He even manages some nice coloristic effects, and has a firm command of the baroque and pre-classical style.

Weiss is the best-known of the three. He was a friend and an almost exact contemporary of Bach, and was regarded as the greatest lutenist of his age. He was prolific, and wrote extensively for his instrument. Not all of it is particularly interesting—this can be a problem with prolific composers who are not Bach—but at his best he can charm and even move; and the A-minor Sonata is one of his better works.

Kropfganss and Daube were part of the pre-classical transition (like Bach's sons), specifically the *Empfindsamer Stil*, the sensitive style. Their music avoids the profundity and depth of Bach's, striving for a simpler expression. There is a freedom of expression, particularly in the music of Kropfganss, that is the sensitive part. This is not my favorite era, but these two examples are charming. And all three are expertly performed.

There does seem to be an editing problem—the notes, by Kirchhof, refer to three composers, but discuss Rudolf Straube, rather than Johann Friderich Daube, who is given credit for the final sonata on the program. I would suspect a misprint if the first names weren't so different.

KEATON

Duo Sonidas

PIAZZOLLA: *Histoire du Tango*; **BROTONS:** *3 Divertimentos*; **MORALES-CASO:** *Volaverunt*; **FALLA:** *7 Spanish Folk Songs*
Adam Levin, g; William Knuth, v
Duo Sonidas 0—53 minutes
(CD Baby or 800-529-1696)

Do we really need yet another *Histoire du Tango*? Well, yes, when it's played this well. Indeed, all these performances are outstanding. Knuth plays violin with perfect intonation, a wide range of timbre, sprightly rhythm, expressive phrasing, and great sensitivity. He never overwhelms his partner (always a consideration when violin and guitar pair), and his affinity for this music is ideal. Levin is every bit as fine. This is exquisite music-making, and I look forward to hearing more from them.

Brotons's *Tre Divertimenti* has the clarity of neo-classicism and a fair amount of Stravinsky-like dissonance. Morales Caso's *Volaverunt* is an homage to Francesco Goya, a deeply expressive work given its world premiere on this recording.

Falla's *Siete Canciones* is usually performed in Emilio Pujol's transcription for guitar and voice (or any melody instrument). This is a different arrangement, which I presume was

done by the performers. (I could find no reference in the notes, but those notes do get this issue's "Death to the Elderly" award for ultra-tiny type on a dark picture background.) I prefer the Pujol—there are several changes of harmony and texture that are not improvements—and not closer to the piano original—but I'd rather have this excellent performance than a less involved performance of the Pujol.

This is an exciting discovery, recommended to all lovers of great chamber music playing.

KEATON

OverHeard: Michele Fiala

MORRIS: *4 Personalities*; **KANDER:** *Postcards from America*; **SILVESTRINI:** *3 Duos*; **LEWIS:** *Fundy Temperaments*; **MARTIN:** *Peaches at Midnight*; **GOAD:** *Overheard on a Saltmarsh*; **PHILLIPS:** *Elegy & Honk*
Martin Schuring, ob; William Averill, Donald Speer, p

MSR 1403—74 minutes

There is a certain personality Michele Fiala portrays not only in her choice of music, but her performance. She has depth, charm, and humor, a juxtaposition that makes for a well-rounded performer. This is her second release and a continuation of the eclectic programming from her first, an album she called "The Light Wraps You" (MSR 1217, July/Aug 2008), after a movement from one of the works.

Four Personalities, a musical depiction of the colors associated with personalities as characterized by an American psychologist, conveys quite a bit of her charm. While her performance of each movement makes clear which human temperament each color is, the listener will be hard-pressed to pick which one the performer most relates to.

My favorite work on the program, and one that conveys the depth of her style, *Postcards from America*, speaks to the tragic social and cultural influences of this country that have so profoundly and indelibly changed immigrants to the U.S. Susan Kander's composition tells the story of a poor immigrant who has just arrived in search of prosperity and the American dream. Though this poor soul may find a job and better wages, what he loses is far more valuable than what he gains. The spoken parts at the beginning of each movement set a stage for the music, in some cases alluding quite dissonantly to the irony of the American dream.

There is something about the English horn's timbre that, in *Fundy Temperaments*, sounds appropriate to music inspired by a seafaring tradition. With a touch of humor and a touch of atmosphere, the instrument works well to evoke images of lobsters, spiny crabs, and the rushing of the tide inspired by the composer's upbringing near the Bay of Fundy.

American Record Guide

Fanfare Magazine

DUO SONIDOS

William Knuth, violin

Adam Levin, guitar

I believe it was in one of Charles Baudelaire's prose poems that I first read about Niccolò Paganini's relationship with a Gypsy guitarist, with whom he toured the countryside of Italy. Paganini, who also played guitar on the side, was blown away by this fiery artist. Judging from the descriptions of their performances together, the music they made was probably not too much different from that produced a century later by Stéphane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt. The guitarist's name was Luigi Legnani; he was born in Ferrara in 1790, and in addition to touring with Paganini he also shared his home in Parma for a while. During his long career (he died in 1877) Legnani was also associated with the famous Viennese luthier Johann Stauffer, who trained C. F. Martin.

I bring this story up to draw an analogy with Duo Sonidos. At times relaxed and lyrical, at others fiery and exuberant, their playing reminds me so very much of a classically oriented Grappelli-Reinhardt collaboration. Both musicians involved are evidently highly trained virtuosos, but luckily for us, they don't let that training get in the way of their sheer enjoyment of this material. (I've heard several Latin pianists playing the music of Falla or Piazzolla with about as much energy as a cocktail pianist at a Howard Johnson's Motor Inn.) Never for a moment is this album dull, and often (listen particularly to the opening of Salvador Brotons's "Con Fuoco") they are so lively that they practically lift you out of your seat.

The one piece on this disc that is a premiere recording is Volavérunt, written by Cuban-Spanish composer Eduardo Morales-Caso. He describes his piece as "a fantasy for violin and guitar inspired by Goya's famous painting of the same title, which bases its structure on the principle of color as a generator of textural contrasts." The music builds modally around bitonality, the guitar in one mode and the violinist in another, depicting musically the mystery and menace of "Goya's eerie depiction of an airborne witch and her ghouls."

The recital ends with an absolutely fabulous transcription of Falla's classic Seven Popular Spanish Songs. Duo Sonidos plays them with exactly the right balance of elegance and élan, never once falling into cheap showmanship for its own sake. These are really dedicated musicians who want people to enjoy what they're doing, yet refuse to lower their standards in order to broaden that audience.

I can't say enough good things about this disc. It's an absolute gem.

-- Lynn René Bayley, September 16, 2012

Classical Guitar Magazine, November, 2011

DUO SONIDOS

ASTOR PIAZZOLIA *Histoire du Tango*.

SALVADOR BROTONS: *Tre Divertimenti*, Op68.

EDUARDO MORALES-CASO: *Volaverunt: Homenaje a Francisco Goya*

MANUEL DE FALLA *Siete Canciones Populares Espanolas*.

Duo Sonidos is William Knuth on violin and Adam Levin on guitar. '*Sonidos*' is the Spanish word for 'sound' and when split into *Son Dos* means something along the lines of 'they are two' ... rather clever that.

Although this disc does begin with a rather splendid interpretation of one of Piazzolla's most famous pieces, for me it is the rest of the programme, which holds the most interest due to the unfamiliar nature of the music. It would be a tough decision to settle on a highpoint in this programme as *everything* is of superb quality but if pushed I would go for the contemporary Catalan composer Salvador Broton's *Tre Divertimenti*, an impressionistic threesome mixing high drama, intensity and sombre and brooding moodiness.

Apparently Broton has written a guitar concerto and on the evidence of these three pieces the concerto would be well worth seeking out.

The balance between the two instruments is spot on and both musicians are high class in every respect with Knuth producing a tone quality on the violin to die for.

Highly recommended.

-- *Steve Marsh*

