

A minor string quartets of Schumann may be too swelling for some ears (as opposed to the harmonic wasteland it is commonly accepted to be) is therefore less a criticism than a minor frustration, simply because it misses an opportunity to lay even more bare the contrasts on this recording. That is, both the varying styles of the music and the ability of the quartet itself to paint staggeringly different pictures appear here as a virtuous combination which, despite the Kurtág coming from a late 1980s period where brash rhythm and melody were perhaps a little too fashionable, make this a set of truly special performances.

Caroline Gill

'Into the Ravine'

M Berkeley Oboe Quintet, 'Into the Ravine'^a
McCabe String Quartet No 7, 'Summer Eves'
A Williams String Quartet No 4
^aNicholas Daniel ob Carducci Quartet
Signum © SIGCD350 (61' • DDD)



This is not the first time that works by Michael Berkeley, John McCabe and

Adrian Williams have rubbed shoulders together on a disc. Metronome's 'A Garland for Presteigne' featured pairs of songs by Berkeley and McCabe with Williams's 'Red Kite Flying' in a programme subtitled 'Twelve New Songs Celebrating the Welsh Borders', and Presteigne once again provides a connection for them on Signum's new release, as all three works were premiered at the Welsh town's vibrant festival.

The connecting link is the Carducci Quartet, for whom they were written: Berkeley's title-track Oboe Quintet and McCabe's most recent string quartet in 2012, and Adrian Williams's Fourth in 2009. All three works take inspiration from non-musical sources, whether paintings by Rothko and Craxton (Berkeley), Keats's 'murmurous haunts of flies on summer eves' (McCabe) or the 'wild, open spaces' of the Welsh borders (Williams). Berkeley's *Into the Ravine* is flowing but tense, with the highest degree of dissonance of the three works, accentuated by Nicholas Daniel's peerless oboe, while McCabe's five-movement quartet – the finest work here and his most Classical in design, though unconventionally so – is alive with the panoply of a whole season (in which the flies are far from merely 'murmurous' at times). Williams's impressive quartet traverses some bleak, open landscapes before its wild, stormy finale.

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The Carducci give superbly vivid and thoroughly prepared performances that catch the varied expressive characters of each work, combining with Nicholas Daniel to great effect. Signum's sound is excellent. **Guy Rickards**

'Signs, Games & Messages'

Bartók Violin Sonata No 1, Sz75 Janáček Violin Sonata Kurtág Doina. The Carezza Jig. Tre Pezzi, Op 14e. Fundamentals No 2. In memoriam Tamás Blum. Like the flowers of the field.... Postcard to Anna Keller. A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners. Fanfare to Judit Maros' Wedding. Les adieux, Op 12 No 7. In nomine – all'ongherese
Jennifer Koh vn Shai Wosner pf
Cedille © CDR90000 143 (76' • DDD)



A fascinating, satisfying programme, bringing together three composers

whose work is rooted in their local cultures, absorbed to form highly personal styles. The sequence of short Kurtág pieces (alternating solos for violin and piano, apart from the *Tre Pezzi*) is especially effective, and the juxtaposition of humorous fancies with sharply etched poetic images is extremely stimulating.

Jennifer Koh and Shai Wosner have clearly made great efforts to enter the expressive world of all the composers, and the performances show a high level of technical assurance. The account of the Janáček is one of the finest I've heard. At his first entry, Wosner uses more pedal than most pianists, surrounding the violin melody with a halo of sound. The 'Ballada' creates a magical atmosphere, Koh and Wosner finding a wealth of tone colours within a restrained, delicate ambience so that the passionate outburst near the end is doubly striking. In the finale, the long lead-up to the climactic melody is perfectly paced, and Jennifer Koh's muted tone at the start imparts just the right feeling of tension.

Koh and Wosner emphasise the impressionistic qualities of the first movement of the Bartók, rather than its declamatory fervour. Here I feel Barnabás Kelemen and Zoltán Kocsis achieve a better balance: combined with the extraordinary verve and energy of Kelemen's bowing in the finale, it would lead me to recommend them above Koh and Wosner. But I'd still rate Koh and Wosner's performance highly; their playing, always thoughtful and imaginative, casts an individual light on this complex, endlessly absorbing work. **Duncan Druce**

Bartók – selected comparison:

Kelemen, Kocsis (5/13) (HUNG) HSACD32515

'Transfigurations'

JS Bach Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080 – Contrapunctus XIV; Goldberg Variations, BWV1087 – Canons (arr Lupiáñez) Biabo Fuggi, fuggi Corrette Concerto comique XXV Geminiani Three Sonatas Marini Sonate da chiesa e d camera – Passacaglia a 4; Sonata sopra Fuggi dolente core Merula Canzoni overo sonate concertate – Chiacona Pez Concerto pastorale – Passacaglia Traditional Bonny Christy. The Broom of Cowdenknowes. Bush aboon Traquair. John come kiss me now. The last time I came o'er the Moor. St Martin's Lane
Les Esprits Animaux
Ambronay © AMY039 (72' • DDD)



The title of this disc, 'Transfigurations', is an umbrella for Les Esprits Animaux's

latest journey into the musical past, although the programme itself takes some fathoming. Neither chronological nor governed by national origins, it is a creative exploration of sources of musical inspiration and their metamorphoses. Hence we hear works, often quite virtuoso, spanning more than a century and a half, that illustrate ground bass (trs 1, 15-16) fugue and canon (trs 2, 3), variation (tr 19) and the use of folk and popular operatic songs (trs 4-14, 17-18). The members of Les Esprits Animaux take as their mission the aim of reinvigorating our experience of Baroque music. Their interpretations are lively and affectionate, imaginative and alert to opportunities for taking time and adding ornamentation. Their own dazzling contribution – the finale to the array of divisions on 'John come kiss me now' they have assembled – confirms their skill and command of idiom.

Among the other diverse highlights are the arrangements of Bach: the excerpt from *The Art of Fugue*, intimately scored for violin, viola and cello, and the 14 Canons on the first eight notes of the Aria from the *Goldberg Variations*. Equally memorable are the three trio sonatas based on Scottish folksongs that Geminiani included in *A Treatise on Good Taste* (1749), preceded by simple, evocative performances of the folksongs themselves, especially when compared with Corrette's later *Concerto comique* for which he took inspiration from Rameau and Rousseau as well as a jolly *danse angloise*. Overall, a somewhat eccentric mixture but a highly enjoyable CD. **Julie Anne Sadie**

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