

The Narratio Quartet present early Beethoven string quartets with broad portamento and flexible tempos, a style championed by German musicians in the 19th century

Ben-Haim – selected comparison:
ARC Ensemble *Chandos CHAN10769 (9/13)*
Engel – comparative version:
Pittsburgh Jewish Music Fest *Toccata Classics TOCC0343*
Prokofiev – selected comparison:
Ensemble Contraste *Alpha ALPHA763 (9/22)*

Boykan

'Music of Martin Boykan, Vol 3'
Nocturne[a]. Piano Sonata No 4[b]. Piano Trios – No 1[c]; No 4[d]. Romanza[e]. Soliloquies for an Insomniac[f]
[f]Pamela Dellal *mez* **[e]Sue-Ellen Hershman-Tcherepnin** *fl* **[d]Jennifer Choi, [c]Yonah Zur** *vns* **[c]Nicole Cariglia, [a]Joshua Gordon, [d]Seth Woods** *vcs* **[f]Donald Berman, [d]Julia Den Boer, [bc]Yoko Hagino, [ae]Steven Weigt** *pf* **[a]Robert Schulz** *perc*
Bridge (BRIDGE9579 • 71' • T)



Best known for his writings on music (notably *The Power of the Moment*; Pendragon Press: 2011), Martin Boykan (1931-2021) was an esteemed teacher and composer – the quality of his output out of proportion to its size, as is confirmed by this third instalment from Bridge.

Eminently suited to such things it may be, the cello in *Nocturne* (1991) pursues its rumination only intermittently owing to the animated roles of piano and percussion. Lyricism of the most capricious kind is the watchword of *Romanza* (1999) for flute and piano; as might equally be said of the song-cycle *Soliloquies for an Insomniac* (2008) in its deft traversal from the confiding tone of WS Merwin, via the ominous marine images of Wallace Stevens and rarefied poise of Goethe (as idiomatically translated by Boykan), to the yearning resignation of Philip Sidney. Nor is there any tangible leave-taking in the Fourth Piano Sonata (2016) that was Boykan's last work – the halting eloquence of its Elegy (*in memoriam* Milton Babbitt) being framed with tensile Toccata movements then by a speculative Prologue and a pellucid Epilogue.

By his own admission, Boykan doubted the medium until writing his First Piano Trio (1975), which unfolds a finely honed trialogue whose purposefulness only becomes more confrontational towards the close. By contrast, the two continuous movements of the Fourth Piano Trio (2014) seek out an unlikely yet audible equilibrium which overrides their relative stasis then dynamism as surely as it brings about a warmly confiding conclusion.

Excellent performances from musicians who mostly worked with Boykan at first hand, plus fine sound and personable annotations from pianist and conductor Scott Wheeler, make for a persuasive introduction to the composer. Do also investigate the earlier releases in this series that feature Boykan's piano music and chamber works (7/17[US]). **Richard Whitehouse**

Brahms · Ligeti · Mozart · Schumann

Brahms Horn Trio, Op 40 **Ligeti** Horn Trio **Mozart** Horn Quintet, K407 (arr E Naumann) **Schumann** Fantasiestücke, Op 88 – No 3, Duett
Martin Owen *hn* **Francesca Dego** *vn* **Alessandro Taverna** *pf*
Chandos (CHAN20280 • 78')



The rhetorical question arises, listening to this particular instrumental line-up: why doesn't every composer write a horn trio? In the question lies the answer: because Brahms and Ligeti set an impossibly high bar. It says something for their success in defining the sound of the genre as a whole that, by their side, this

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Francesca Dego, Alessandro Taverna and Martin Owen play the Brahms and Ligeti horn trios, along with Mozart and Schumann arrangements – see review on page 53

transcription of Mozart's Horn Quintet comes across as effective, unfailingly congenial, but not so imbued with each individual element's fullest potential. The piano and violin often mirror each other rhythmically, and both play second fiddle to the horn, however stylish Francesca Dego's ornamentation or sensitive Martin Owen is to the more melodically interesting parts of his colleagues.

After her experience of recording the concertos with Roger Norrington (10/21, 10/22), Dego nonetheless makes a distinguished Mozartian. Her finespun tone translates well to Brahms, admitting a touch more warmth while doing more with the bow to complement Owen's rounded *cantabile*. Meanwhile all three musicians are balanced to best advantage. They attack the trio with gusto, but without getting in each other's way. Owen casts a spell of faraway enchantment in the *Adagio mesto*, written like the *German Requiem* in memory of the composer's mother, even while using a modern valved horn. Here, too, the sensitively spread chords and bass weight of Alessandro Taverna's piano make themselves felt to telling effect.

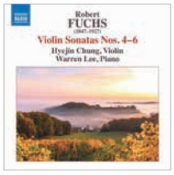
The sense of the uncanny so masterfully evoked by Brahms in the Trio became a hallmark of Ligeti's music, and this is a magnificently untamed performance, precise in its observation of the opening movement's many effects of space and distance, yet no less authentically Ligetian in the twisted-clockwork violence of the *Vivacissimo*. Dego, Owen and Taverna hold nothing back from the March without making it a brittle parody; thus the final lament unfolds, and then collapses, with all the more affecting directness of expression (Dego's handling of poetic non-vibrato style comes into its own here). The Brahms/Ligeti pairing is hardly new on record but, even without the substantial added attractions of Mozart and Schumann, this version sweeps the board. **Peter Quantrill**

R Fuchs

Violin Sonatas – No 4 in E, Op 77; No 5 in A, Op 95; No 6 in G minor, Op 103

Hyejin Chung *vn* **Warren Lee** *pf*

Naxos (8 574547 • 70')



Robert Fuchs is a largely forgotten name these days but in 19th-century Vienna he was very much an established part of the musical landscape, even if simultaneously a figure content to remain below the wider public radar. Born near Graz in 1847, he moved to Vienna aged 18 to study composition at the Vienna Conservatory with Otto Dessoff and Joseph Hellmesberger. By 1875 he was a professor of composition, teaching harmony and musical theory to Mahler, Sibelius, Wolf, Schmidt, Zemlinksy, Korngold and Schreker, while also composing a substantial body of orchestral and chamber works, the popularity of his six orchestral serenades earning him the nickname 'Serenaden-Fuchs' ('Serenade Fox'). It was around these years that he struck up a friendship with Brahms, who championed Fuchs's Symphony No 1 to his own publisher Simrock and declared Fuchs to be 'a splendid musician, everything … so fine and skilful, so charmingly invented, that one is always pleased'. He was also organist at the city's Hofkapelle from 1894 to 1905. So while the early 20th-century stylistic revolutions wrought by the likes of Mahler and Schoenberg quickly pushed to the side his more old-fashioned brand of melodic Viennese Romanticism – the ghosts of Schubert and Brahms hover strongly over its pure-lined lyricism and lucid textures – it's easy today to hear in it all the charm that won Brahms's admiration.

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