

A2

Paul HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

Complete Viola Works Volume 1

Der Schwanendreher - Konzert nach alten Volksliedern für Bratsche und kleines Orchester (1935)* [26:47]

Trauermusik für Streichorchester mit Solobratsche (1936) [7:33]

Kammermusik Nr. 5 op. 36 Nr. 4 für Solobratsche und grösseres Kammerorchester (1927) [19:23]

Konzertmusik für Solobratsche und grösseres Kammerorchester op. 48a [Frühe Fassung] (1929) [26:07]

Tabea Zimmermann (viola)

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin/Hans Graf

rec. August 2012, Jesus-Christus Kirche, Berlin Dahlem

MYRIOS CLASSICS MYR010 SACD [79:59]

There is something about good viola playing which lift its musical expression away from that 'alto' feel and brings us closer to the violin. Conversely my feeling for the violin is that it is at its best when there is a depth of sound which approaches the sonorities of the viola. Either way, if you see the viola as playing second-fiddle to the violin then please think again. If you need convincing then this first volume of Tabea Zimmermann's recordings of the complete viola works of Paul Hindemith may well do the trick.

From the first flourish of *Der Schwanendreher* we know we are in for a treat. Zimmermann's confident bowing and sense of natural expression take us beyond instrumental considerations, and we're immediately immersed in this renowned concerto with its integration of folksong melodies. Beautifully sensitive orchestral accompaniment completes this picture, and the warmth of the wind playing in the gentler sections of the second movement is an object lesson in 'less is more'. The colour and life in the final movement has a certain French joie de vivre played vivaciously in this account, giving plenty of reasons for the work being an unacceptably fun piece for the 1936 concert planned when the death of King George V intervened. The *Trauermusik* was written as a substitute in just a few hours, and its placement here is perfect, the music relating to the slow movement of the concerto, its integration of the chorale *Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit* a master stroke. All of the deceptively 'simple' aspects of this piece are nicely solved here, for instance the switch to the slower final tempo from 5:08, and that final chorale is marvellously atmospheric and heartrendingly moving.

The Kammermusik No. 5 is Hindemith's first concerto for the instrument he chose over the violin and it is hugely entertaining. The viola integrates and competes with muscular winds and brass and the balance is superbly found in this recording, the sense of conflict and triumph not undermined by the soloist being too close, while all of the notes are clear from all sections. The signing expression of the second movement is lovely but played without sentimentality in this recording, Hindemith's wit and wry humour elsewhere observed with a keen sense of detail while avoiding mannered over-emphasis. The military parodies of trilling clarinets and marching brass in the finale are performed here with gusto and just the right 'outdoor' weight.

Brass and winds are also a strong feature in the *Konzertmusik, Op. 48*, and the orchestra is indeed blessed with players of both power and refinement. Hindemith's superb orchestration but also the excellent Deutschlandradio/Myrios recording keeps everything beautifully transparent, and in a score which is replete with event and ever-changing musical discourse this version is a delight from beginning to end. The booklet describes the history of this work, and those of us used to the more familiar five movement version will be fascinated to know that this is the première recording of the six movement work which was Hindemith's original conception. This reinstates a *Langsam, Schreitende Achtel* fourth movement, which gives the opening of the now complete second part of the concerto a movingly nostalgic feel. The gains in this first edition version are palpable, but would be nothing without the deeply heartfelt performance we are given here.

This is a release which can stand its ground against all comers. There is a CPO release with an identical programme which has Brett Dean as soloist, CPO 999 492-2 which I've had for donkey's years as part of Werner Andreas Herbert's Hindemith 'complete orchestral works' set. These performances are very good and I hadn't really imagined them being bettered, but Tabea Zimmermann and Hans Graf now have the edge in a few ways. The First Edition première of *Op. 48a* is a valuable addition to anyone's collection, and the vivid clarity and stunning surround effect of the SACD recording is in this case also not to be sniffed at. In the end even Zimmermann's superlative playing might not quite have tipped the balance, but the character in the playing of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin most certainly does, and for this and all of the other good reasons mentioned I think this disc is a genuine winner.

Dominy Clements

Paul HINDEMITH (1895-1963)
Complete Works for Viola - Vol. 1

Der Schwanendreher (The Swan Turner) concerto after old folk songs for viola and small orchestra [26:47]

Trauermusik (Music of Mourning) for string orchestra with solo viola [7:40]

Kammermusik, No. 5, Op. 36, No. 4 for solo viola and large chamber orchestra [19:23]

Konzertmusik, Op. 48a for solo viola and large chamber orchestra (early edition) [26:07]

Tabea Zimmermann (viola)

Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin/Hans Graf

Recorded: August 2012 Jesus Christ Church, Berlin/Dahlem, Germany

MYRIOS CLASSICS MYR010 [79:59]

We are often told how significant a composer Paul Hindemith is in the annals of twentieth-century music. On the other hand we rarely see his greatly underrated works included on concert programmes, especially in the UK. If it wasn't for the *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber* (1943) and the *Symphony: Mathis der Maler* Hindemith's music would be heard live hardly at all.

I found this Myrios Classics Hindemith release to be a glorious surprise, near revelatory. Twice in recent years I have attended concerts in Berlin and seen renowned violist Tabea Zimmermann play both the Berlioz *Harold in Italy* with the LSO and Wolfgang Rihm's *Viola Concerto 'Über die Linie' IV* with the Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin (DSO Berlin). I witnessed at first hand just how expert a musician she is. For each of the last three years I have been fortunate to have seen the DSO in concert in Berlin and Dresden. On each occasion the orchestra was in quite marvellous form. I remain puzzled why this orchestra is not as celebrated as the quality of its playing deserves. Having firsthand knowledge of the excellence of the performers and of Hindemith's striking music my expectations were naturally high. In truth they were exceeded. This Hindemith release is quite stunning.

Der Schwanendreher is a concerto after old folk songs for viola and small orchestra and was written in 1935. It incorporates folk melodies into the writing was premiered in 1935 at Amsterdam by the Concertgebouw under Willem Mengelberg with the composer as soloist. It seems that the title was taken from the folk song '*Seid ihr nicht der Schwanendreher*' (Aren't you the Swan Turner?). Hindemith uses this in the third movement. I especially enjoyed Zimmermann's playing of the mellow and rather relaxing and even meditative central movement. A brisker central section with attractive burbling woodwind is marvellously performed by the Berlin players.

In 1936 whilst Hindemith was in England to play his *Der Schwanendreher* the death of King George V was announced. Realising that the generally cheerful *Der*

Schwanendreher had been rendered unsuitable by the solemn occasion Hindemith composed in a few hours the score *Trauermusik* (Music of Mourning) for string orchestra with solo viola. The score is cast in four brief movements played without a break. A performance of *Trauermusik* was quickly arranged for a BBC radio broadcast in London played by the BBC Orchestra conducted by Adrian Boult with the Hindemith as soloist. Here Zimmermann's playing feels genuine, compassionate and is suitably melancholic yet contains reasonably appealing melodies.

Scored for solo viola and large chamber orchestra the *Kammermusik* No. 5, Op. 36/4 is scored for a substantial number of woodwind and brass players. It was written in 1927. With the composer as soloist the work was introduced in 1927 at the Krolloper Berlin with the Staatskapelle under Otto Klemperer. In this appealing four-movement work the viola is required to play almost continuously. The extended second movement *Langsam* is particularly effective with the soloist maintaining a wistful and rather yearning quality against dark and generous wind accompaniment. I especially enjoyed the entertainingly boisterous final movement *Variante eines Militärmarsches*. It includes, rather tongue-in-cheek, a rather tawdry Bavarian military march.

Bearing a dedication to 'Darius und Madeleine Milhaud', the *Konzertmusik*, Op. 48a is scored for solo viola and large chamber orchestra. It seems that the Berliner Philharmoniker under Furtwängler with Hindemith himself playing viola gave the première of the original six-movement version of the work in March 1930 in Hamburg. A revised five-movement version was given in September that year at Graz played by the Städtisches Orchester Graz under Oswald Kabasta with the composer again as soloist. The original six-movement version, which was only published in 1993, is played here by Zimmermann. It is claimed in the booklet notes that this is the world première recording of the original edition. Prominent throughout, Zimmermann brings an intense and heartbreakingly yearning quality to the second movement which is marked *Ruhig gehend*. I was struck by the deep sense of introspection that permeates the fifth movement *Langsam. Schreitende Achtel*.

There is a heartfelt passion and robust edge to Zimmermann's playing which blows away the cobwebs and brings these works very much to life. Making a highly sympathetic partner the excellent DSO Berlin is warmly expressive and well detailed. Austrian conductor Hans Graf holds everything together with confidence. I am delighted by this wonderfully clear SACD with its vivid and warm sound which I played on my standard CD player. The slightly forward balance of the solo viola is very much to my taste. This is certainly a 'Record of the Month'. I'm so enthusiastic about this release that it will definitely be one of my 'Records of the Year'.

Michael Cookson

Hindemith: Complete Viola Works Vol 2 review – ardent and startling - Gramophone Review 4*/5*

Tabea Zimmermann (viola), Thomas Hoppe (piano)
(Myrios Classics [Fiona Maddocks @FionaMaddocks](#))

Sat 22 Mar 2014 20.07 EDT



For some of us who struggle with his music, [Paul Hindemith](#) (1895-1963) comes into his own in his compositions for the viola – whether with orchestra, piano or unaccompanied. He was a professional player himself, and wrote many works for the instrument. In the hands of the Berlin-based virtuoso [Tabea Zimmermann](#) and her pianist [Thomas Hoppe](#), the romantic richness of the early Op 11 sonatas (nos 4 and 5) are given full rein. The sometimes abrasive, ever poignant melancholy of the solo works, especially the 1937 sonata, is ardent and startling. Hindemith is blessed with exceptional interpreters. They command you to listen.

Classical-CD Reviews

Hindemith Complete Viola Works Vol. 2 Tabea Zimmermann

Hindemith: Sonatas for Viola and Piano Opp. 11/4, 25/4, (1939). Sonatas for Solo Viola Opp. 11/5, 25/1, (1937)

Tabea Zimmermann (va), Tomas Hoppe (pn)

Myrios MYR011 (2 SACDs)

Tabea Zimmermann devoted the first volume of her Hindemith survey to his concertante works for viola and orchestra. This, the second, covers the sonatas, three with piano and four unaccompanied. The works date from 1919 to 1937 and, at least as a first impression, suggest a clear stylistic development from melodic simplicity to gritty complexity later on. In fact, the progression is more complex than that. The first two works, a clear and open textured sonata for viola and piano and a much more introverted solo sonata, sound like they were written decades apart, but in fact they have consecutive opus numbers (11/4 and 11/5) and both were written in 1919. The liner note, by Hindemith expert Dr. Susanne Schaal-Gotthardt, cites both Bach and Reger as influences in the more knotty solo sonata. Indeed, Reger's voice, as expressed in his own solo violin works, comes through strongly, as does his 20th-century reinterpretation of Bach's models for solo string writing. The op. 25 and 31 sonatas are more in the Hindemith mainstream,

filled with clever musical devices, complex but clearly rendered, and beautifully suited to the viola. And the programme ends with two late sonatas, one solo from 1937 and one accompanied from 1939. The music here is more direct, muscular and modern, but melodic and engaging too. As an overview of Hindemith's compositional output, his sonatas for his own instrument make for a concise and representative survey.

Tabea Zimmermann's performances are excellent. Although Hindemith writes well for the viola, he demands a great deal from the performer. Some of the music is deeply expressive, and is presented as such. On the other hand, some of the music eschews emotion, such as the middle movement of op. 31/4, which is marked "with little expression", which Zimmermann not only adheres to, but also compensates for with the richness and complexity of her tone. The notes tell us that Hindemith often sidelined beauty of tone in the pursuit of other musical virtues, but Zimmermann insures that her sound, if not always "beautiful" as such, never fails to be interesting, engaging and satisfying. The fast passages hold no terrors for her, although she always retains an earthy quality, a real viola sound, never leading the listener to suspect that she is trying to imitate the violin. Some of the more discordant double stopping is presented in an astringent, throaty tone, but one that is very carefully modulated and served always by immaculate intonation.

Pianist Thomas Hoppe also has his work cut out but always rises to the challenge. Hindemith's accompaniment parts have reputation for being tortuous and needlessly difficult to play, but Hoppe makes them all sound logical and idiomatic. The recorded sound is quite resonant, adding to the richness of Zimmermann's tone, especially in the lower register. The piano sounds somewhat distant, and some of the detail in its overtones is lost, although the balance between the two players is ideal.

The Myrios label is a small and relatively new venture – if the catalogue number of this release is to be believed this is only its 11th disc – but it has poached some big name performers and is engaging them in very interesting projects. All their releases so far have been on SACD, and the engineering on this disc fully justifies that decision; even when hearing just the solo viola, the richness and immediacy of the sound is compelling. Volume 1 of Zimmermann's Hindemith was very well received: Volume 2 looks likely to attract similar acclaim.