

CD REVIEW



QUINCY PORTER

Viola Concerto
Speed Etude for viola and piano
Duo for viola and harp
Suite for viola alone
Blues Lointaines for viola and piano
Poem for viola and piano
Duo for viola and harpsichord
Duo for violin and viola

Eliesah Nelson (viola)
Northwest SO
John McLaughlin Williams, conductor, violin,
piano, harpsichord
Douglas Roth (harp)

DORIAN DSL-90911 DDD (73.47)

And about time, too! The complete works for viola by the finest composer of viola music since Hindemith!

I am incensed by a comment on Musicweb International by Rob Barnett who writes that a previous performance of this concerto left him cold whereas it is a warm and glowing work, gloriously beautiful and richly scored whereas some of Porter's other works have the New England severity about them.

For details about this composer please see my [article on this site](#).

As Herbert Elwell wrote, "Porter's music is so lithe and well-tailored and clear-headed". Howard Hanson has written that he "weaves golden strands of melody and his harmonies recreate for the ear of the listener the spirit of beauty".

His music is expressive, forthright and vital says Elwell.

The Viola Concerto is a masterpiece. It was written at the request of the Alice M Ditson Foundation and premiered by Paul Doktor in 1948 with Dean Dixon conducting the CBS Orchestra. William Primrose took it up and loved it for its warmth and that it was brilliantly written.

The work is flawless and as near to heaven as one can get in this life and the soloist is quite superb. She was born in Alaska, studied at the Cleveland Institute and at RAM and is a member of the Cleveland Orchestra made famous by the great George Szell. She has an amazing tone, perfect intonation, excellent technique and makes the Cinderella of the orchestra the most beautiful instrument. She admits to falling in love with this concerto and, as another violist has said, only a complete fool would do otherwise.

Of course, Porter was a magnificent violist himself.

There are further joys. The Speed Etude is a perpetual mobile for viola and piano expertly written for both players but shows off the viola's potential for fast music. The Poem was originally written for cello and piano and is a lovely song in ABA form. The Duo for viola and harp, or harpsichord is a rondo with two themes of contrasting tempi. The faster sections are pure entertainment.

The Suite for viola alone is another masterpiece premiered by the composer in Paris in 1931. Nadia Boulanger praised it highly as did Hindemith who also wrote music for solo viola.

Blue Lointains has a jazzy feel. Porter had formed a jazz band to defray the costs of studying at Yale and this

piece dates from 1928 when Porter was about 31. The rhythmic vitality is infectious. The Duo for violin and viola begins in a dissonant mood and ends in happiness.

There is no a poor or second rate piece on this disc.

The conductor, also the violinist, pianist and harpsichordist is the excellent John McLaughlin Williams, a 2007 GRAMMY award winner. The harpist Douglas Roth is also very fine, the harpist of the San Francisco Orchestra and his performance of concertos by Frank Martin and that splendid concerto by Ginastera have been acclaimed.

But the star is Eliesha Nelson. I have not heard such playing as this since Joseph de Pasquale performed the sumptuous Walter Piston Concerto.

This CD is a must, the recording of the year. Superlative!!!

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