

CD Review 14



JOHN ROSE String Quartets and Piano works.

String Quartet no. 1 Op 14,
String Quartet no. 2 Op 17,
Prelude and Fugue for piano Op 20a,
Prelude and two Fugue for piano Op 20b,
Essay on DSCH for piano Op 7.

The Edinburgh Quartet, Robert Melling (piano).
Divine Art dda 25092 (74.14)

John Rose is of Dutch descent and was born in London in 1928. The family emigrated to South Africa in 1940 and John attended the Diocesan College in Cape Town studying music with Claude Brown and later at RAM and then privately with Edmund Rubbra. For a while, Rose gave up composition but in 1993 returned to this with two major organ works the Prelude and Fugue of 1993 and the Scherzo-Improptu-Tocatta of 1995 which have been recorded by Kevin Bowyer. Rose has

written a setting of Psalm 42 for chorus and orchestra and Spem in Alium Nunquam for chorus, brass, timpani and organ. His two string quartets date from 1997 and 1999 respectively, the Essay on DSCH dates from 1970 and the Op 20 preludes and fugues from 2001. He has recently concentrated on writing songs. He has worked in adult education, founded and conducted the St Albans Chamber Choir and lectured in universities and in further education establishments in Glasgow where he now lives.

He is a very private man and is now plagued by a gradual hearing loss. I have found him to be a courteous speaker and knowledgeable about much music.

The String Quartet no. 1 has thematic links with the Essay and the organ works. To me, it has a slow beginning in two parts but builds up to an intense work with an elegance and strange beauty almost a passion that seems under constraint. It is fundamentally tonal and it seems to be introspective and deeply personal, music from the heart. Yet it is not slushy. The Edinburgh Quartet make a lovely sound. The work may take some getting to know, but it is worth it.

The String Quartet no. 2 refers to two motifs in Beethoven's Quartet Op 135 and extends an idea from Rose's Psalm 42. The sections are *lento-andante- tempo giusto-meno mosso- ground* which is an *allegro -adagio*. The opening is poignant and warm but, as with the first quartet and the quartets of Rubbra, it does seem a bit claustrophobic and intense. Close harmonies in quartets can give a heavy sound whereas when the intervals are more spaced as in Haydn we are set free from claustrophobia.

This work takes too long to get off the ground. As with its predecessor, it needs a stronger start. There is too much of close entwining and it does tend to meander somewhat aimlessly. About six minutes plus in we have a repeated six note theme which outstays its welcome becoming tedious. Eventually the fever subsides or does it? The music is too derivative, repetitive like a dog with a bone and this is wearisome. It could be said to be oppressive.

The Edinburgh Quartet are in good form, however.

The Prelude and Fugue Op 20a is well written with a clarity reminiscent of the great J S Bach. It is very impressive and the two movements have a welcome contrast. It has a very spiritual flavour and some gorgeous harmonies and Robert Melling brings out all the beauty and nuances to a satisfying effect. The Fugue is a mere method and, perhaps, somewhat antiquated but Mr Rose has made it fresh and attractive. The Prelude

and Two Fugues continues the linear clarity and I reckon J S Bach would have loved these pieces.

The Essay on DSCH owes something to the setting of Psalm 42. DSCH, of course, refers to Dmitri Shostakovich, and these four notes are prominent in Shostakovich's Quartet no 8 and the Symphony no. 10. As with the Quartet no 1, the music may take a while to get going but it builds up and becomes more varied and ends in a chorale type passage. There are parts of this work which may be too introspective but this essay is sometimes virtuosic and very well written for the piano and the pianist is reliable.

This is a very interesting disc and Divine Arts have done us well to produce this fascinating CD. The sound is excellent as are the performances.

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