

CD REVIEW 30

NORTHERN LIGHTS

English Cello Sonatas 1920-1950.

Ireland Sonata in G minor

Bainton Sonata; Scott Ballade

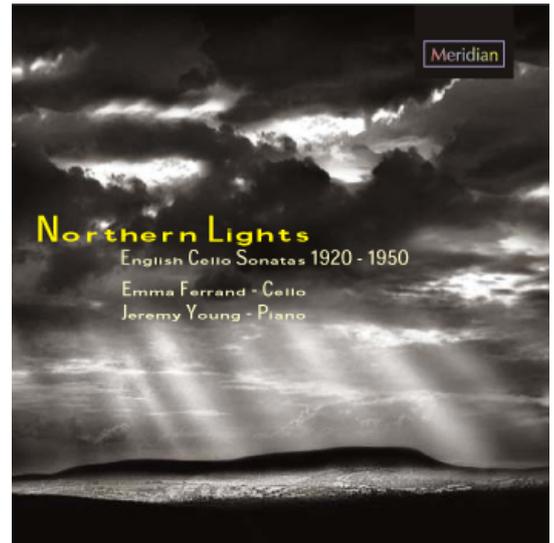
Rawsthorne Sonata

Ireland The Holy Boy

Emma Ferrand (cello)

Jeremy Young (piano)

Meridian CDE84565



This CD is so called because the composers all had some connection with the north of England. Ireland was born near Manchester, Bainton taught in Newcastle before emigrating to Australia in 1934, Cyril Scott had links with Merseyside and Rawsthorne was born near Manchester.

The soloists are quite superb and the sound excellent

The John Ireland Sonata in G minor was a revelation. It has an atmosphere wonderfully caught in this remarkable fine work which is often powerful and passionate. It was composed in 1923 and some say it was influenced by the Great War. What is certain is that it is very well written for both instruments.

While people claim that the Elgar Concerto is a notable work and the cornerstone of the cello repertoire this sonata is vastly superior. For example, Ireland understands the cello as did Walton and Finzi in their respective concertos. Ireland's quicker music for cello does not sound like the buzzing bee in the Elgar.

Ireland's music is not a wallow but pure and absolute music which often has a poignant romantic feel and, by romantic, we mean imagination and originality. The piano solo in the beginning of the second movement is some of the loveliest music you will ever hear and Jeremy Young has captured it beautifully. Emma Ferrand is also exemplary. She makes the cello sing and her playing goes straight to the heart as well as the intellect. Thankfully, she does not have the excesses and hormonal intensity of Jacqueline DuPre.

This sonata is a surprise. I would never have thought that Ireland could write such beautiful and compelling music. It is very moving and akin to Rubbra's Soliloquy for cello and small orchestra Op.57. This is special music. Wonderfully played.

Another surprise is the finale. It is infectious and full of character and has a humour that is sometimes fun and sometimes grotesque.

The Edgar Bainton sonata is in four movements and dates from 1924. Some has said that this work is heroic or in the style of an English pastoral. This is its world premiere recording. It does not have the scope of the Ireland but has much to commend it. The opening Allegro moderato is ambiguous and may be a little too introspective for some and has a sadness about it. The brief scherzo is worthy of its name employing pizzicato as well as bowing passages. At times, the piano sounds like laughter and there seems to be a story here.

The Lento is tragic in character and deeply felt. It is often painfully beautiful. The allegro molto finale uses previous material but is varied in quality.

Some of Bainton's orchestral music is praised and is available on Chandos. But it is his church music that is considered among his finest works.

The Cyril Scott Ballade of 1935 is a poor work which one cellist describes as 'as interesting as a slab of concrete on a gray day'. It is a tedious work and not worthy of any other comment.

Rawsthorne's Cello Sonata of 1948 is, along with his Violin and Viola sonatas, well written. As Rawsthorne was married to the excellent violinist Jessie Hinchcliffe until 1950, some of his best music is written for the violin and he certainly understands string instruments. The adagio introduction is both mysterious and atmospheric. The allegro appassionata is invigorating but the piano seems to have the highlights. That the movement is in sonata form gives it coherence. The central Adagio is a little too indulgent and rhapsodic for me and the finale Allegro-adagio seems to be in another style and a different piece altogether but contains good music.

Ireland's well-known The Holy Boy ends the recital.

An important CD with exemplary performers!

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