

CD REVIEW 51

English Violin Sonatas.

Susanne Stanzeleit and Gustav Fenyo.

Regis RRC 1376 (75.34)

DUNHILL Sonata no 2 in F Op 50

BANTOCK Sonata no 3 in C

STANFORD Sonata in D Op 11

This is a very interesting and important disc since it has three accomplished English sonatas beautifully played by two extraordinary artists whom, I am sorry to say, I had not heard before.

The sound is very good and the recordings date from 1994 and were made in St Michael's Church, Highgate, London.

Thomas F Dunhill is a composer I have always been interested in ever since my first girl friend sang his How soft upon the E'ning Air at a School Speech Day in 1961. Years later, my choir members sang this lovely song and The Cloths of Heaven, another exquisite song.

He was born in Hampstead on 1 February 1877 and studied at RCM with Franklin Taylor for piano and Sir Charles Villers Stanford for composition. Yes, the Dunhill tobacco business was his family.

Dunhill wrote a Symphony in A minor around 1916 which was performed in Belgrade in 1922. In fact, the composer had much to do with this area of the world. He wrote a light opera in the early 1930s called Tantivity Towers and, far better, were his cantatas for children. He wrote some fine chamber music and, as already indicated, his songs are very fine.

He wrote a few books — one on Elgar and, more importantly, one on Edward German.

He died suddenly in Scunthorpe on 13 March 1946.

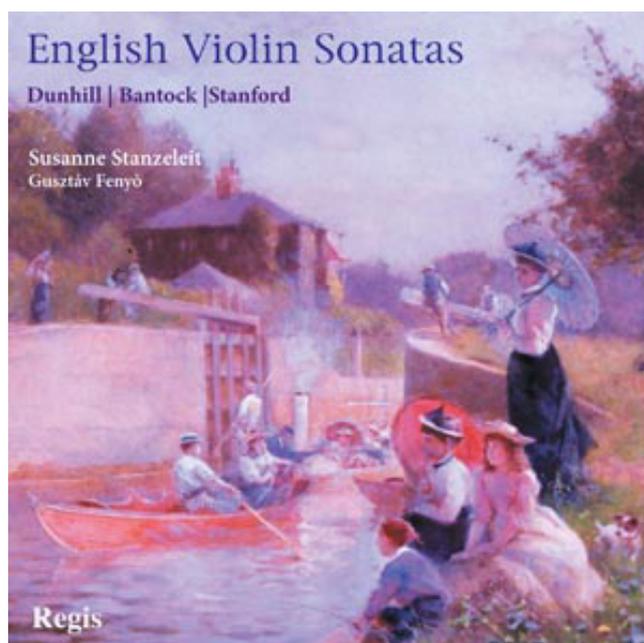
His late son, David wrote a book about his father with an introduction by Lewis Foreman but it does not treat the music as of paramount importance and this is a great pity. In fact, there is little said about the music.

The Sonata is a lovely romantic work which succeeds in consistent tempi for each of the three movements.

It may not be memorable for any theme as such, but it flows effortlessly and is sweet in the nicest sense of the word. It deserves to have regular appearances in recitals. The players excel in this and I was profoundly impressive.

I cannot say any more since I have not seen the music and no review is satisfactory without having the music to follow. This is the same for all three sonatas and the sleeve notes say nothing about the works.

Sir Granville Bantock is one of the greatest British composers. He was born in London on 7 August 1868, studied at Trinity College and RAM. He held professorships in Birmingham from 1900 to 1934, was knighted in 1930, pioneered much British music although some of which was not worthy. He was



a friend of Havergal Brian and, after Bantock died, a Society was set up for him in which the first president was Sibelius.

Bantock wrote four operas, choral and vocal works including the epic Omar Khayyam, brilliant orchestral works and tone poems, works for brass band and chamber music. His orchestration is second to none.

He travelled the world as a music adjudicator and died on 16 October 1946.

His Sonata is more profound and often has a concertante feel. As far as I can tell it is a very good performance but, again, not having the music eliminates a detailed review.

Sir Charles Villers Stanford was born in Dublin on 30 September 1852 and studied in Germany with Carl Reinecke and Frederick Kiel. Charles was a friend of Brahms and Offenbach. This Irishman was professor of composition at RCM from 1863 and then a professor at Cambridge from 1887 until his death in 1924. He was the conductor of the Bach Choir from 1886-1902, the year in which he was knighted. He conducted some of the Leeds Philharmonic Society concerts. He was an incredibly good teacher although some moaned that he was too strict. He taught Holst, Ireland and Vaughan Williams.

Stanford wrote seven symphonies, eight string quartets, concertos, six marvellous Irish rhapsodies, vocal and choral music.

In these days, some are praising Elgar and making up stories about what composers said of him. Some fool said that Stanford said that he wished that he was Elgar and written some of his works. Utter rubbish. Stanford wrote to Elgar one day and said, 'I am sitting in the smallest room in the house with your Cello Concerto before me but, thankfully, it will soon be behind me!'. I am aware that identical stories have been said about others such as Max Reger, but I have Stanford's letter here.

Elgar was an objectionable and loathsome man, always starting disputes with people like Stanford.

Elgar had no academic qualifications as a musician and he hated those who did. Several contemporaries of Elgar said of him that he and his music were tedious and pompous, that is to say foolishly and stupidly self-important.

Stanford suffered much abuse in his lifetime because people were jealous of his phenomenal talent. This problem still exists today with other composers.

But as for Stanford's sonata, it reveals his impeccable craftsmanship in a fine work which one expects from this composer and is never disappointed. Again, I would have preferred to have a score to follow.

The artists are especially good. Stanzeleit was taught by some of the finest violinists such as Kogan, Milstein and Vegh. She also studied with Kurtag and she has been a visiting lecturer and Head of strings in Wales and the Birmingham Conservatoire. She has been in two string quartets and now is the leader of the Maggini Quartet. She has recorded Bartok, Enescu and Delius as well as many contemporary works proving her versatility. She is a very gifted player and I am sorry that I have not come across her before. She has a lovely tone, almost bel canto, reliable intonation and undoubted musicianship.

But I will investigate her discs, as should you.

The pianist is of Hungarian origin and is a descendant of Joachim. He is not a snob either and neither is he limited since he plays contemporary works as well as the standard repertoire and some of those contemporary works are formidable to play.

There are many concert artists who ridicule modern music and refuse to play it saying it is rubbish. The truth is that they can't play it.

This CD is very significant. It is essential for both lovers of violin music and violinists and those interested in English music.

A very rewarding disc, and an example of excellent playing by those performers.

As an added bonus the cover picture is of a painting by Hector Caffieri — A Summer's Day on Marlow Lock which is very welcome.

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