

DAVID MELLOR
ALBUM OF THE WEEK

Tasmin Little
Schubert Chamber Works
Chandos, out now
★★★★★

Tasmin Little, one of the great joys of the British music scene, hits the big Five-O on Wednesday. And celebrates this milestone with a Schubert set of rare quality that shows off all her talents as a violinist of distinction.

The diminutive Little Tasmin, as I call her, is a pocket battleship; a whirlwind dervish of energy on and off the concert platform. She juggles the busy life of a travelling virtuoso with the many demands of a hands-on working mum. Typically, when I rang to confirm a few gee-whiz facts about her career so far, she was doing the school run.

She recorded her first album of the Bruch & Dvorák concertos 25 years ago, and last weekend was in Manchester recording her 33rd as a soloist. It's a typically imaginative affair, featuring the violin concerto of the tragically short-lived Samuel Coleridge-Taylor of *Hiawatha* fame.

Tasmin is now en route to becoming a national treasure, with a discography increasingly devoted to British music that deserves reconsideration, such as her recent award-winning recording of EJ Moeran's *Concerto*.

But she also takes on all-comers in more standard repertoire. Her *Lark Ascending* was in the classical charts for months, and last year's release of Walton's *Concerto* was voted one of the ten best classical CDs of 2014.

She won the 2011 Critics Award at the Classic Brits for a commanding account of Elgar's *Concerto*. One of my happiest musical memories was carting her and the conductor Richard Hickox off for a celebratory drink after a triumphant performance of the Elgar at the Barbican. My only sadness was that Richard didn't live long enough to do the recording, though Andrew Davis was, as always, an attentive partner.

Her kids keep Tasmin grounded, which has helped her to embrace the opportunities of the internet.

In 2008, with her *Naked Violin Project*, she became the first classical

CLASSICAL

TASMIN'S LITTLE BIT OF VIOLIN magic



artist to release a new recording online, for free. It created a sensation, and within a few months had been downloaded half a million times.

Tasmin is determined not to be locked in a box marked 'British'. So this new Schubert double album, with her regular pianist Piers Lane, and the cellist Tim Hugh, explores all the

music Schubert wrote for piano and violin, plus the *Arpeggione* sonata, where Tasmin leaves the two boys to it, and, to finish up, one of Schubert's most haunting farewells, the beautiful *Notturmo* for piano trio.

In terms of both quality and quantity – a generous two-and-a-half hours of music here – this is a winner, and may

well garner yet more awards. As the big birthday approaches, what else can I tell you about a woman I have long admired as an artist, and as a friend? Oh, yes. If you really want to wind her up, call her Tamsin (not Tasmin). Her shrieks of outrage when I did so could have been heard in Timbuktu.

The Mail
ON SUNDAY

Sunday 10th May 2015

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