

was published the following year (the Piano Quintet No. 2 is much later, written in 1952, and it remains unpublished). The opening phrases give a fine impression of what's to follow: Scott had a preference for rich, post-Wagnerian harmonies and he also took delight in sudden, surprising digressions and side-slips, so the music remains mobile and often surprising. Alban Berg may have dismissed Scott's music as too 'mushy', and maybe it is a little too florid and exuberant at times, but it's tremendously enjoyable and often has a distinctly continental flavour – there are hints of Debussy and Fauré, among others, and if we have stereotypical notions about what 'British' music sounds like, this large-scale work in four movements might well confound them. I have to admit that I've fallen for this ardent, sweeping piece in quite a big way, even if there is a little too much of it. As with the Bridge Quintet, the performance is very fine.

This disc should be of interest to anyone who enjoys exploring early twentieth-century chamber music, and not just music by British composers, since both Bridge and Scott were cosmopolitan figures. With unobtrusively clean sound and detailed notes, this can be warmly recommended if the repertoire appeals.

Nigel Simeone

## British Violin Sonatas Volume 1.

**Britten** Suite, Op. 6.

**Ferguson** Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 10.

**Walton** Violin Sonata. Two Pieces (both ed. Hugh MacDonald).

Tasmin Little (violin); Piers Lane (piano).

Chandos CHAN10770 (full price, 1 hour 2 minutes).

Website [www.chandos.net](http://www.chandos.net) Producer Rachel Smith.

Engineers Ralph Couzens, Paul Quilter. Dates

December 13th-15th, 2012.

### Comparisons:

Ferguson:

Stern, Hess (Testament) SBT1458 (1960)

Walton *Violin Sonata*:

Menuhin, Kentner (EMI Classics) 2 64131-2

(1950, 50 discs)

Advertised as Volume 1 of a proposed series, this bodes extremely well. The appetite is whetted, in this initial release, by the choice of three highly contrasted examples: their combined inclusion is deft indeed and makes one think amongst other things of the different currents flowing through British music immediately before and after the Second World War. Or maybe not flowing – I don't hear much continental influence at work, though there is surely more Stravinsky lurking behind the Britten Suite than one might at first suppose.

As it happens, none is new to disc. Tasmin Little's anthology – though I should immediately credit Piers Lane's equally sympathetic and involved contribution – starts bravely with a work, which although

by no means unknown, still surfaces comparatively infrequently, and feels like a rediscovery each time. Howard Ferguson (1908-99), editor and pedagogue as well as almost reluctant composer, was fastidious in the extreme, uncertain not only as to his true voice but even if he had anything interesting to say in it. On the evidence of this Sonata alone, such diffidence was misjudged: elegant and searching, expertly crafted, its three relatively compact movements explore an emotional landscape hard to pin down precisely because it is so individual – not for a moment could one mistake it for Britten, or Walton! Little and Lane bring to it every last ounce of expressivity and none of several previous recordings, least of all the live performance from the 1960 Edinburgh Festival by Isaac Stern and Myra Hess, can boast such a fine state-of-the-art recorded sound.

The Britten work – a Suite rather than sonata, but let us not quibble – likewise benefits from such generously extended advocacy. In the opening 'March', for instance, Little's rock-solid and secure harmonics, her playing *sul ponticello* and up in the highest stratosphere of the instrument's range, often at a miraculous *pianissimo*, are quite breathtaking. It's an early piece, the composer showing off not just his technical mastery in writing for strings but a relish for creating character-pieces – 'Lullaby', 'Waltz', 'Moto perpetuo' and so on – that enables him to forsake musical unity and instead immerse himself in almost wild contrasts. The concluding 'Waltz' alone, with its heady plethora of different tempos, ranges from the skittish, via the ironic, to the serious, and back again: Little holds it together brilliantly.

I recall first encountering the Walton Sonata on a fine 1950 Menuhin/Kentner LP (still around on CD, I was pleased to discover, though these days tucked away in a multi-disc Menuhin box) and being knocked out by its blend of melancholy lyricism and sensuous violinistic charm. Hearing it again after a long gap reinforces the impression, reminding one not just of Walton's characteristically bittersweet idiom but also of the cleverness of the conception. Two full-length movements of roughly equal length buttress one another, the one free-flowing but returning regularly to the initial idea, the other a Theme and Variations, where the theme starts gently but develops into something often defiantly spiky but sometimes also tinged with sadness. Two little Walton encores sit quite nicely here too, one of them the lightweight *Scherzetto* that separated the two movements of the Sonata. Their inclusion makes me slightly regret that room could not have been found for Britten's 1937 concert study *Reveille*, written for the same violinist, Antonio Brosa, who premiered both the Suite and the later Concerto.

However, I dare say we can all have some fun compiling our own wish list of

what we'd like to see included in this series as it progresses. Mine would include not just Vaughan Williams and Delius, John Ireland and Frank Bridge, but maybe Alan Rawsthorne's Sonata, one or both of Malcolm Arnold's two examples and even the Ivor Gurney Sonata, about which I was a little uncertain in these pages two months back.

Piers Burton-Page

## Corp String, paper, wood.

New

String Quartet No. 3. The Yellow Wallpaper<sup>a</sup>. Clarinet Quintet, 'Crawhall'<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>a</sup>Rebecca de Pont Davies (mezzo); <sup>b</sup>Andrew Marriner (clarinet); <sup>a</sup>John Tattersdill (double bass); Maggini Quartet (Susanne Stanzeleit, David Angel, violins; Martin Outram, viola; Michal Kaznowski, cello).

Stone Records 5060192780246 (full price, 1 hour 6 minutes). English texts included. Website [www.stonerecords.co.uk](http://www.stonerecords.co.uk) Producer Andrew Walton. Engineer Mike Clements. Dates May 15th-17th, 2012.

If, like me, you didn't quite get the title of this CD, have another look at the individual works, more slowly this time. The album's overall title indicates the rather whimsical nature of much of Ronald Corp's music, which may come as a further surprise to those who know him as a gifted conductor of the New London Orchestra and an experienced and equally gifted choral director. That he is a notable and prolific composer as well adds not only to his musical credentials but to our experience of modern music, for his voice may be – in these works – gentle and occasionally whimsical, but to those who have heard his larger-scaled compositions (the Piano Concerto and First Symphony on Dutton) and the big-boned *Laudamus* oratorio, in particular, know him to be equally at home in more serious, deeply felt and powerfully expressed structures.

Here we have three works for chamber-like ensembles, each quite different in emotional expression. The most refined in intent is the Third String Quartet, the latest of his quartets, all of which, at one time or another, have been recorded commercially. Unlike the first two, which are programmatic to some degree, it is an avowedly more abstract composition, and like the first two it is very well laid out for a string quartet, suggesting that it is not one of those pieces that will transfer easily to string orchestra, such is the genuine interplay of the individual lines which demand the characterization of a single musician. The quartet falls into three movements of which I feel (having studied this work during the past several weeks) the second and third are more compelling than the first. Not that there is anything amiss in the opening *Allegro piacevole* as such, but my interest was more readily engaged in the song-like central movement and in the more energetic finale. Nonetheless, this is an