



THE REFINED EAR

Solo works for violin and viola

Georg Friedrich Haas: “...aus freier Lust...verbunden...” (viola solo)

“de terrae fine” (violin solo)

Salvatore Sciarrino: “6 Capricci” (violin solo)

Manfred Stahnke: “Capra” (violin solo with scordatura)

Barbara Lüneburg: violin /viola

Coviello Classics COV 60610

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Barbara Lüneburg
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Barbara Lüneburg is one of an apparently increasing number of outstanding violinist/violists based in Amsterdam, a founder member of the Ensemble Intégrales as well as a soloist equally home with classical and contemporary composition, not to mention improvisation (not surprisingly, she's appeared with local notables Anne La Berge, Yannis Kyriakides, Cor Fuhler and, inevitably perhaps, The Ex). *The Refined Ear* – and you need one to appreciate the music on offer here – features four compositions, two by Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas (*...aus freier Lust... verbunden... and de terrae fine*) and one each by Manfred Stahnke (*Capra*) and Salvatore Sciarrino (*6 Capricci*). The Sciarrino piece isn't exactly new – it was written back in 1976 for Salvatore Accardo – but is, or rather should be, a staple of the contemporary violin repertoire. Its shimmering harmonics are as difficult to execute as they are fleeting and translucent, and Lüneburg's outstanding reading makes it all sound as if it was improvised, which isn't all that far from being the case, since Sciarrino apparently wrote four of them on four consecutive days.

The Haas pieces are tougher nuts to crack, due in part to their rigorous exploration of microtonal inflections; the solo viola work *...aus freier...* – the title comes from Haas' beloved Hölderlin – dates from 1996 and *de terrae fine* (for solo violin this time) from five years later. Haas might be best known for his ensemble works – notably the stunning *in vain* – and the viola piece in fact derives from an earlier piece for 10 instrumentalists entitled *...Einklang freier Wesen*, but if Bob Gilmore didn't tell you that in his ever excellent liners, you'd probably never guess. Dark and intense, this is probably what Thomas Bernhard would have liked to listen to while doing his ironing, had he lived long enough.

de terrae fine ("about the end of the world") was written in Ireland (which is, as Irish-born Gilmore reminds us, "on the edge of Europe" – though not exactly the end of the world.. ever spent an afternoon in Rochdale, Bob?) but if you're expecting any "local colour", forget it. It starts out as a slow, sometimes agonisingly slow, and fearsomely difficult study in intonation – at times Lüneburg has to handle sixth tones, and she does so with breathtaking accuracy (forget Mat Maneri, check *this* out) – but ends up with some mindblowing triple-stopped glissandi.

Hamburg-based Manfred Stahnke is also concerned with microtonality, having studied in Illinois with Ben Johnston at the end of the 70s, but prior to that he worked with Klaus Huber, Brian Ferneyhough and György Ligeti (and wrote his university dissertation on Boulez's *Third Piano Sonata*). Despite that heavy duty Euro-modernist baggage, *Capra* (1987) sounds like folk music from another planet. The four violin strings are tuned down to F-C-F-C (as opposed to the normal G-D-A-E), giving a whole new colour to the higher strings. When plucked it sounds remarkably like a mandolin, when bowed (once more Lüneburg has to get her fingers round some tricky double stops) it resembles a viol consort. Quite what Ferneyhough would make of it is anyone's guess, but from where I'm sitting it sounds magnificent, and makes for a spectacular ending to a superb disc.

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The 'refinements' on offer here come courtesy of a trio of composers in their fifties: the microtones of Georg Friedrich Haas, the harmonics of Salvatore Sciarrino, and the imagined vernacular of Manfred Stahnke. These disparate creations are held together by Barbara Lüneburg's forceful approach to her instrument, an aggressive passion that seethes beneath lyrical surfaces, waiting to emerge with teeth bared.

Haas's *...aus freier Lust... verbunden...*, for viola, is one of ten solo works that, played simultaneously, comprise the captivating *...Einklang freier Wesen...* (recorded by Klangforum Wien on Kairos 0012352KAI). Alone *...aus freier Lust... verbunden...* is a melancholic collection of gestures held together mainly by assertion, which works if the performer is able to make the interruptive silences discursively active participants rather than gratuitous obstacles. Lüneburg manages this magnificently; each expressive fade or frustrated swell engenders the following pause as a necessary corrective, and the piece is continually saved from disintegration.

Haas's *de terrae fine* (2001), a 20-minute work for solo violin quite unlike *...aus freier Lust... verbunden...*, takes shape as a leisurely alternation of ideas in which silence plays no assertive part. Haas builds an irregularly but inexorably building curve, from low, winding harmonics and ambulatory pizzicati to stabbing chords that repeatedly give way to squealing glissandi and lacerating parallel seconds and thirds. The discursive and unhurried result is one of the best pieces for violin of the new century, and Lüneburg's gripping performance is reason enough to recommend this disc on its own.

The classic here is Sciarrino's 1976 *Sei capricci* for violin. Lüneburg takes a ferocious approach to these studies in stifled lyricism, emphasizing the disjunction between the physical effort these pieces require and the elusive results. The vicious athleticism of this performance makes palpable a tension in Sciarrino's work that recordings usually fail to capture.

Finally, Stahnke's *Capra* requires a violin tuned to a pair of octave-separated fifths (F-C-F-C), and much of the music is accompanied or dominated by a harsh, necessarily vibrato-less open string. After this evocation of manic imaginary folk music concludes the disc, though, it is the faultless drama of *de terrae fine* that sticks in the mind, and Lüneburg's biting, passionate performance that make it stay there.