

## August Gramophone Choices

Trio a crazy whirl, the whole form lifted to another stage in its evolution. These players relish every second of extroversion before Beethoven reins in for what he called 'a sweet song of rest, a song of peace' – intent made explicit in the evocative marking *Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo*. Inner privacy returns; the Belcea reach under the wraps, again aware that expressions of solitude have their individual sense of time. And they space out the message, from a theme of simplicity in D flat transformed through hesitations in the C sharp minor second variation to its fragmentation and stilled coda in the tonic. Was the follow-through, a toss-up between 'Must it be?' and 'It must be', the 'difficult decision' in the *Grave* introduction to the finale, meant to be jocular? Joseph Kerman thought it a poor joke. The Belcea disagree but sense ambivalence, and go against received wisdom by postponing an answer until the coda of the ensuing *Allegro* when the slyly humorous objective eventually breaks cover. The last laugh?

Possibly; yet within the contradictions of his genius, Beethoven's most personal fervour may rest in the slow movement of Op 132, conveying a 'Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Godhead from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode'. The Belcea's grip on the atmosphere of profound gratitude and joy is absolute, changes of metre and mood laid bare through a numinous aura ineffably mysterious and circumspect. Remarkably, a complete command of gossamer traceries at the softest levels, heard in all performances, is heightened at the end; the final chord fades out in a wispy thread.

This is the Belcea single-mindedly fathoming the emotional recesses of the composer's psyche, every interpretation steeped in a pregnancy of feeling, a vast recreative experience that harks back to the untrammelled foresight of the Busch Quartet at its best – but reconsidered and revitalised for our time. Yes, it's that good. **G**



Three members of the Belcea Quartet

PHOTOGRAPHY: EIVY OTTERMANS

gramophone.co.uk



**CASELLA**  
Orchestral Works, Vol 3  
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra /  
Gianandrea Noseda  
Chandos CHAN10768  
'Good news: Vol 3  
in Chandos's Casella series  
effortlessly maintains  
the exalted artistic and  
technical standards of  
both its predecessors.'



**JANÁČEK**  
Sinfonietta. The Fiddler's  
Child. Taras Bulba  
Prague Radio SO /  
Tomáš Netopil  
Supraphon SU431-2  
'Supraphon's engineering  
team manage vivid  
reportage of constantly  
varying textures that  
frequently defeat even their  
most accomplished rivals.'



**SIBELIUS**  
Symphonies - Nos 1 and 4  
Minnesota Orchestra /  
Osmo Vänskä  
BIS BIS1996  
'The passion and  
sweep of the First  
is electric, rivalling  
Berglund's classic  
Helsinki version and  
overhauling those by  
Järvi and (dare I say it)  
Sir Colin Davis.'



**KATHERINE BRYAN**  
Flute Works  
Katherine Bryan //  
RSNO / Jac van Steen  
Linn CKD420  
'Exuberance of spirit  
coupled with the  
mellowness of her golden  
timbre lend the first  
movement a lightness and  
mellifluous fluency.'



**'LIVE FROM  
LUGANO 2012'**  
Martha Argerich and Friends  
EMI 721119-2  
'This collection treads  
the fine line between the  
immediacy and drama  
of live performance and  
the accuracy needed for  
the repeat listening of  
recorded performance with  
great dexterity.'



**MOMPOU**  
Piano Works  
Arcadi Volodos *pf*  
Sony 88765 43326-2  
'Volodos's records  
and appearances may  
be few and far between;  
but whether in his  
torrential if superfine  
virtuosity or in a  
more rarefied poetry,  
his command  
is phenomenal.'



**JS BACH**  
Cantatas, Vol 53  
Soloists; BCJ / Masaaki Suzuki  
BIS BIS1991  
'The flavour of these  
works is encapsulated in  
the etched dialogues and  
textural luminosity of a  
distilled musical language  
drifting gently towards a  
*galant* sensibility.'



**MACMILLAN**  
Tenebrae Responsories  
Choir of Westminster  
Cathedral / Martin Baker with  
Peter Stevens *org*  
Hyperion CDA67970  
'There are excellent  
recordings of this  
sequence, but inevitably  
the sound of the  
Westminster choristers  
adds something unique.'



**WAGNER**  
Opera Extracts  
Petra Lang *sop*  
Budapest Festival Orchestra /  
Iván Fischer  
Channel Classics  
CCSSA32713  
'Iván Fischer's work  
stands as some of the  
finest new conducting  
yet put on disc in  
Wagner's bicentenary  
year.'