

# American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings

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Yet there is something predictable in the way they approach a phrase—something that makes it all sound alike, so the listener loses interest.

Nothing here is tender or sweet; there is never any charm. They are rough and rustic—never smooth or dignified.

And thru it all there is no vibrato; and the violin sound is shrill, tinny, and unmusical. How can anyone stand the sound of a scraping bow on violin strings? Playing a violin with no vibrato is as unnatural—and as ugly—as singing with no vibrato. I'll never listen to this again.

VROON

**MOZART:** *Violin Sonatas K 378+454;*  
*Rondos K 250, 373*

Ruben Kosemyan; Natalya Mnatsakanyan, Margarita Grigoryan, p—Da Vinci 343—44 minutes

When I started listening to this I thought that the booklet and jewel box were mislabeled. I heard the unmistakable sound and style of Jascha Heifetz. I had to listen a while to hear a few tiny clues that this wasn't the old master. Ruben Kosemyan has come closer to sounding like Heifetz than any other violinist I've ever heard. He must idolize the man. Of course, if you're going to idolize a violinist, Heifetz is an excellent choice. Moscow-trained Kosemyan has absorbed every aspect of his great predecessor's style, down to the tiniest nuance, and I hear nothing original in his manner. Heifetz did record both sonatas and the Rondo K 250 twice each, so Kosemyan may have listened to these recordings and imitated them. The effect is very pleasing if you like to hear "Heifetz" in modern sound.

These are musical readings full of spunk and enthusiasm and free of period-performance-practice asceticism. They are red-blooded and unself-conscious and a perfect antidote to the timid, bookish readings that are too common these days. Best of all, it sounds like the performers are enjoying themselves. All of the musicians are excellent, and the recording is full, clear, and perfectly balanced. I just wish that they could have filled the disc out with one more sonata (though 44 minutes would have been a fair playing time for an LP in Heifetz's day).

Kosemyan plays 18th-Century violins made by Leopold Widhalm of Nuremberg and Nicolo Gagliano of Naples.

MAGIL

**MUCHA:** *Quartets 1+2; Piano Pieces; Our Journey; Wind Quintet; Epitaph in Memory of Jiri Mucha*

Patricia Goodson, Alena Grillova, p; Vilem Veverka, ob; Jan Machat, fl; Stamicz Quartet; Prague Wind Quintet—Brilliant 95463—79 minutes

English-Czech composer Geraldine Mucha had a long and difficult life encompassing two world wars and the oppression of Communism, but she managed to produce beautifully crafted music in a variety of idioms. Her father was Scottish, and she considered herself a Scotswoman, but she lived a great portion of her life in Prague. She married an exiled war correspondent, and settled in his native city, but fled the Communist regime for Scotland after the invasion of Prague in 1968, returning after the fall of Communism in 1989. Her music is infused with everything from Scottish folk tunes to Bartokian modes, but the Scottish voice is strongest.

These are world premiere recordings.

The earliest work here is the 1944 String Quartet, which has East European folk elements, including drones and modes, even though Mucha had not yet moved to central Europe. It combines charm with tight construction. The later Quartet, from 1970, is a contrast, tragic and forlorn. Both are played with great expressiveness by the Stomic Quartet.

The seven piano pieces, colorful and tuneful, are in an idiom that the authoritative notes call Scottish Impressionism. Patricia Goodson plays them with gentle authority. *Our Journey* from 2008, is a wistful duo for flute and piano, played with endearing lightness by flutist Jan Machat and pianist Alena Grillova. More varied in mood is the 1998 Wind Quintet, full of nostalgic Scottish references, elegantly performed by the Prague Wind Quintet. The album concludes with a touching variation piece, 'Epitaph' for oboe and string quintet—an elegy for Jiri Mucha, the composer's husband, who died in 1991.

Mucha's music was performed in her lifetime, but then largely vanished. There is a great push to resurrect the music of past women composers, so this release comes at a good time. The album will also please people looking for lost modern music in a romantic style, which Mucha exemplifies even in the spikier references to Janacek and Bartok.

SULLIVAN