

CDS

C.P.E. BACH Viola da Gamba Sonatas in C major Wq136 & D major Wq137
ALBOREA Cello Sonatas in C major, G major & D major
Jennifer Morsches (violoncello piccolo/Baroque cello) **Robin Bigwood** (harpsichord/organ) **David Miller** (theorbo/archlute) **Jane Gower** (bassoon)

BARN COTTAGE BCR 013

Interesting instrumental decisions on a disc of Baroque sonatas



At first it seems an unusual decision to perform C.P.E. Bach's two

viola da gamba sonatas on the five-string piccolo cello for which J.S. Bach wrote his Sixth Cello Suite. Jennifer Morsches, having found the music well fitted to the instrument's compass, took her cue both from Quantz, C.P.E.'s colleague at the Prussian court, who recommended the piccolo cello for virtuoso repertoire, and from the instrumental flexibility of the period to make her own arrangements, playing them on an instrument of 1735, just ten years before these sonatas were written.

In the event the high fifth string emits a similar nasal tone to the gamba, and the musicality and flair of Morsches's performances are such that one soon forgets to question her decision. C.P.E.'s revolutionary *Empfindsamkeit* (sensitive style) is everywhere evident, with Morsches leaning into the more expressive notes, dramatically timing the long pauses, and playing the melodic ornamentation with elegant feeling.

Bach shares this disc with the only three extant works of Neapolitan virtuoso cello pioneer Francesco AlboREA (1691–1739). Morsches gives

vigorous performances of these busy works, always allowing space for the music to speak, and embellishing with virtuosic ease. A more extensive continuo group broadens the timbre, and you can just imagine the light flooding in through the church windows in this open, airy acoustic.

JANET BANKS

BACH Viola da Gamba Sonatas BWV1027–9
Inviolata: Asbjørn Nørsgaard (viola) **Andreas Borregaard** (accordion)

GATEWAY MUSIC

An unusual but successful account of Bach's gamba sonatas



Playing Bach's keyboard compositions on the accordion may at first

sound like an unlikely proposition, but the instrument has an uncanny ability to impersonate a chamber organ. Some ten years ago, violist Nobuko Imai and accordionist Mie Miki recorded music ranging from Guillaume de Machaut to Bach and beyond, including the first gamba sonata. Now the Danish duo *Inviolata* – their name presumably taken from Machaut's piece of that name, which they also have in their repertoire – give us the complete cycle of three.

Asbjørn Nørsgaard, otherwise violist with the award-winning Danish Quartet, founded the likewise award-winning *Inviolata* in 2007. He and accordionist Andreas Borregaard are a closely attuned team that breathes and phrases as one. Nørsgaard's sparing use of vibrato brings forth some intriguing tonal mixtures, allowing the viola to blend

unobtrusively into the accordion's part-playing. He plays most of the music at the original gamba pitch, managing discreetly the few unavoidable octave changes.

Borregaard's handling of the keyboard part parades a wide range of colours. Only in a couple of instances did I wish for a more present bass-line, but otherwise Bach's polyphony is beautifully laid out by both artists. The lively, intimately balanced recording was made in the concert hall of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and is up to the highest standards.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

BIRTWISTLE Settings of Lorine Niedecker, Piano Trio, *Bogenstrich*
Lisa Batiashvili (violin) **Adrian Brendel** (cello) **Amy Freston** (soprano) **Roderick Williams** (baritone) **Till Fellner** (piano)

ECM 476 5050

Commanding performances of understated music



Lyrical, sensitive, restrained: they're hardly adjectives you'd use to describe

much of Harrison Birtwistle's uncompromising output, but they ably sum up the recent chamber works on this remarkable new disc, given beautifully nuanced performances by a starry line-up of soloists. Cellist Adrian Brendel is the hardest-working, appearing on every track, and although he can appear a little in the background in Birtwistle's thoughtful Piano Trio of 2011, he comes into his own in the astonishing *Settings of Lorine Niedecker* (1998–2000) – aphoristic, enigmatic songs for voice (here the expressive soprano Amy Freston) and cello. Brendel makes sure that every one of Birtwistle's scattering of notes has a story to tell, subtly adapting his tone,

vibrato or attack to respond to the voice, and never sounding like a mere accompanist. He's exceptionally sensitive, too, in the serious-minded *Bogenstrich* (2009), which mixes Rilke settings (sung gracefully by baritone Roderick Williams) with athletic commentaries for cello and piano.

Lisa Batiashvili makes up for Brendel's reticence in the Piano Trio with her commandingly assertive performance, bright and lithe, but the disc's true star is pianist Till Fellner, whose breathtakingly balanced, sensitive playing throughout the recording seems at one with Birtwistle's rather understated, considered aesthetic. The warm, generous, close recorded sound only enhances the disc's highly expressive performances.

DAVID KETTLE

CARTER String Quartets nos. 1–5
Juilliard Quartet

SONY 88843033832 (TWO DISCS)

A masterly completion of a much-lauded cycle of quartet performances



The Juilliard Quartet's recordings of the first four of Elliott Carter's

thorny yet hugely influential string quartets have every right to be considered definitive – the Juilliard players worked closely with Carter on them, and they were performed and recorded according to the composer's wishes. Committed to disc in 1990–91 and reissued here, they've stood the test of time, with passionate, impeccable playing of enormous character, which feels the ideal match for Carter's rugged, uncompromising sound worlds. The musicians seem to survey wide expanses of tough landscape in the sprawling First Quartet, and the Third – in which the foursome is broken into two duos, playing