



Soulful, gutsy playing: members of the Béla Quartet contribute to 'exciting times for Ligeti fans' with their new disc of string quartets

makeweights, the 1905 Intermezzo for string trio recalling the Russian school (Borodin in the outer sections, Shostakovich-in-embryo in the Trio), whereas the Gavotte suggests a Delian brand of melancholy. As to rival versions of the quartets, the gutsy Kontra Quartet (BIS) offer fine readings of both quartets but suffer from an excessively resonant recording; the Kodály Quartet (Hungaroton) are relatively underpowered, especially in the first movement of the First Quartet. Which makes this new CD a secure recommendation for both works.

Rob Cowan

Selected comparisons:

Kodály Qt (4/85, 1/86) (HUNG) HCD12362*

Kontra Qt (1/95) (BIS) BIS-CD564

Ligeti

String Quartets^a – No 1, 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'; No 2. Solo Cello Sonata^b

^aBéla Quartet (Julien Dieudegard, Frédéric Aurier

*vn*s Julian Boutin *va* ^bLuc Dedreuil *vc*)

Aeon © AECD1332 (50' • DDD)



Thinking about the Keller Quartet's recent pairing of György Ligeti's

quartets with Samuel Barber's Adagio for strings, I couldn't help but come up with

other 'good idea at the time' pairings for these groundbreaking string quartets: *The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan* or the Overture to *Iolanthe*, perhaps? Well, Quatuor Béla's cellist Luc Dedreuil offers us Ligeti's so-so student two-movement Cello Sonata; but in all honesty, and remembering the truism that most CDs are too long, not to too short, I'd have been satisfied with just the quartets.

As the Bélas amply demonstrate, Ligeti implants more than enough stylistic bombshells within the music itself and they need us to understand that his String Quartet No 1 – composed when he was still holed up in communist Hungary – is already recognisably Ligeti, impatiently punching past the expected models of Bartók, Kodály and Stravinsky. Who else but Ligeti in 1953 could have devised such a comprehensively contradictory structure – continuums of compressed chromatic cluster-counterpoint shattering against Dadaist non sequiturs? The group has co-opted the subtitle of Ligeti's First Quartet, *Métamorphoses nocturnes* ('Night metamorphoses'), as a marker of intent for the whole disc and they stress a continuity of compositional rationale between the two quartets, the First subtly parroting the jittery mood-swings of the mighty Second.

The abandon with which the Bélas dig into their strings at the beginning of the First Quartet – just listen to them go! –

tells us we're in for gutsy, soulful playing. This isn't cerebral, clean-cut modernism as portrayed by the Arditti Quartet. The menacing disorder of the Second Quartet – forms falling apart as Ligeti puts them together, the quartet placing us directly in the eye of the aptly marked *Allegro nervoso* first-movement storm – speaks the truth that rigid, obsessive order can, under certain circumstances, feel even more menacing than honest-to-goodness chaos. Cracking the code and penetrating Ligeti's wayward ambiguities of mood like no other performance, this disc, and Hannu Lintu's disc of orchestral works I reviewed in the February issue, suggest exciting times indeed for Ligeti fans.

Phillip Clark

Stg Qts – selected comparison:

Arditti Qt (1/97) (SONY) SK62306

Keller Qt (A/13) (ECM) 481 0026

Radigue

Naldjorlak I, II, III

Charles Curtis *vc*

Carol Robinson, Bruno Martinez *basset-hns*

Shiin © SHIIN3 (59' • DDD)



For 30 years Éliane Radigue devoted all her energies to creating electronic