

Article By Colin Clarke

DIALOGUE • Carol Rodland (va); Scott Kluksdahl (vc) • CRYSTAL 880 (55:37)

BARTÓK (arr. P. Bartók) 23 Duos. AUGUSTA READ THOMAS *Dream Catcher*. DEL TREDICI Cello Acrostic. PISTON Duo

This is wonderful programming. A total of 23 of Bartók's 44 beautiful Duos for Two Violins, Sz 98, are heard here in an arrangement for viola and cello by Peter Bartók: These are the 23 that the arranger thought the most suitable for conversion into the lower-ranged coupling of viola and cello. The present players liaised with Peter Bartók during the preparation for the current recording. Right from the start, the warm sound of both instrumentalists is clear. The impression left after a straight play through of all 23 is of the sheer variety of these pieces, and just how well they do indeed suit this combination. Take the lovely harmonium feel, achieved by stopping, to the "Wedding Song" (quite a sad wedding, though); or how they can convey brio in the famous "Hungarian March"; or how the "Dialogue," the 12th track here, really does sound like a conversation. With the happy pieces so morose ("New Year's Song" is decidedly lachrymose, to furnish another example, full of pathos), it is no surprise that the one named "Grief" is such a downer. Yet it is very eloquently done here; and it certainly puts the ensuing, agile "Dance from Máramaros" into relief. The "Pizzicato" Duo is fabulously done, and reveals the true excellence of the recording in its sense of presence.

This disc also presents the only available recording of Augusta Read Thomas's *Dream Catcher* for solo viola (Carol Rodland has also recorded *Pulsar* and *Incantation* for Crystal Records). The title is carefully chosen; although the music is rigorously structured, the composer likes it to imply a "captured improvisation," as she puts it. The performance here by the solo viola version dedicatee (premiered by Rodland in September 2011; the original violin score was first performed in Dallas in 2009) is heard in a most eloquent account. Rodland does indeed find the intended spontaneity; yet the fact that the work extends over nine minutes but is so eminently satisfying a musical experience underlines the musico-organizational activities behind it all.

Following on from this, and balancing the solo viola element to the disc, is a solo cello piece by David Del Tredici, *Cello Acrostic*; and again, performer and work are linked in its genesis. This is an arrangement by the composer of his own "Acrostic Song," the closing aria from his piece for soprano and orchestra *Final Alice*. The title comes from the fact that the initial letters of the epilogue poem to *Through the Looking Glass* spell out "Alice Pleasance Liddell," the real-life Alice for whom Carroll wrote his stories. The piece makes huge demands on its player, but what comes across most strongly here is Kluksdahl's musicality. This is a simply gorgeous performance of a most involving piece, a real highlight of the program.

Finally there comes some Walter Piston, whose music is always welcome in the catalog. There is another recording of the Duo for Viola and Cello on Crystal Records (*Viola View*, Crystal 833, reviewed a decade ago by Jerry Dubins in *Fanfare* 29:2). *Fanfare* critic Lynn René Bayley was also enthusiastic about a recording on Centaur by Sheila Browne and Wesley Baldwin (Centaur 2858, reviewed in *Fanfare* 34:1). By all accounts this was one of the composer's favorite works. The jaunty outer movements, given with such a sense of fun here, contain a central *Andante sereno* that is very interior right from the start. Long, aching lines project the so-called "prairie style" that this movement so perfectly exemplifies.

A remarkable disc that holds many treasures. FANFARE: Colin Clarke