



May/June 2012

HINDEMITH Forty One Pieces for Two Violins.¹ Sonatas for Solo Violin, op. 31, Nos. 1 and 2. • Ida Bieler (vn); ¹Georg Sarkisjan (vn) • COVIELLO CONTEMPORARY COV 61114 (67:39)

Early in his career as a violinist (before he specialized in the viola), Hindemith wrote a few solo violin etudes. He wrote to his publisher in 1925: “Violin students still study the way they did fifty years ago—it would be quite helpful to offer violinists some guidance on modern technique.” In the 1920s, “the musicologist Erich Doflein and his wife Elma, a violin teacher, developed a new violin method. . . which contained actual compositions rather than second-rate exercises” (from the notes to this disc). Over the years, Hindemith contributed many (typically, he wrote seven of them at a dinner with Doflein), as did Bartók. Bartók’s were published in 1933 as 44 Duos for Two Violins, Sz.98, and some of Hindemith’s have appeared under various titles. Forty one of Hindemith’s pieces were gathered together and published in 2009; this is their first recording as a set. Like Bartók’s works, these are far more than pure exercises, realizing the intentions of all concerned. They do progress in level of difficulty but—being meant for students—not to an extreme (nor do Bartók’s). Not every piece is interesting in its own right, but they come together as a set, each adding something to the totality. Listening to them consecutively, one soon settles agreeably into Hindemith’s world.

Ida Bieler could be described as a specialist in everything, from Bach to new-music premieres. Schooled by the masters—Ricci, Shumsky, Galimir, Milstein—she has become teacher and mentor to young artists such as twenty-six-year-old Georg Sarkisjan, who has won numerous competition prizes and made many orchestral appearances, both as concertmaster and as soloist. They seem eminently comfortable, with each other and with Hindemith. A warm, reverberant acoustic (Hochschule für Musik Saarbrücken) blurs individual lines slightly but helps make 44 minutes of two-violin music more palatable. The final two duets are multi-movement works, which explains using 49 tracks for 41 pieces.

The quality of music and of execution leaps from comfortable to magnificent in the two solo sonatas. No other recording combines such tonal suavity with this depth of understanding. The received impression is that Bieler is playing her own music, perhaps even improvising it. For which Hindemith—and you and I—can only be grateful. A marvelous disc! James H. North