

Penderecki Violin Sonatas nos. 1 & 2, Miniatures, Cadenza for solo viola (trans. Edinger) Ida Bieler (violin) Nina Tichman (piano) NAXOS 8.557253

At a time when the elitist avant-garde scene was dominated by the intellectually imposing post-Serialist and aleatoric preoccupations of Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, Krzysztof Penderecki emerged as an out-and-out sensualist. Forming sound worlds that were thoroughly contemporary in feel, Penderecki single-handedly managed to popularise forms of musical expression which had previously been closed to all but the most tenacious of listeners.

The First Violin Sonata and (three) Miniatures date from the 1950s, yet in the six years that separate them Penderecki graduated from being

a post-nationalist (lashings of Shostakovich, Bartók and Szymanowski) to an out-and-out Modernist, indulging in all manner of special effects and happenings (including having the pianist pluck the strings).

American duo Ida Bieler (a member of the Melos Quartet, whose tutors included Ricci, Shumsky, Rostal and Milstein) and Nina Tichman project the music's extremes of dynamic and expression with alacrity, relishing its chameleonesque changeability. They also manage to steer a convincing interpretative course between sweetening the bitter pill and inflicting an all-out assault on the nervous system.

The 1984 solo Cadenza was composed as a musical afterthought following the Viola Concerto

of the previous year. Bieler admirably captures its haunting atmosphere, if without quite the ear-tweaking sonorities of Daniel Hope (Nimbus). The ghosts of Shostakovich and Schnittke regularly haunt the coruscating textures of the five-movement Second Sonata and once again Bieler and Tichman sound totally captivated by the idiom. An unusually well-balanced recording and fine annotations from Richard Whitehouse round out an excellent release.

JULIAN HAYLOCK

