


## FEATURE REVIEW by Robert Maxham

 **THE NEW CANON: MODERNITY AND MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO • Wolfgang David (vn); David Gompper (pn) • GALLO 1285 (58:36)**

**DEBUSSY** Violin Sonata. **BARTÓK** Rhapsody No. 1. **KORNGOLD** Much Ado about Nothing. **SCHOENBERG** Phantasy. **MESSIAEN** *Thème et Variations*

Gregory Marion's booklet notes to Wolfgang David and David Gompper's recital of influential 20th-century works for violin and piano don't labor the title's perhaps contentious assertion that these works constitute a sort of new canon. It may be accidental, but it also seems that the recital's arrangement moves from the works that have penetrated the standard repertoire most deeply to those that have remained on its fringe.

In the first movement of Debussy's sonata, Gallo's detailed recorded sound offers a vibrant tonal portrait of the 1715 Bergonzi violin upon which David plays. David deploys a wide range of idiomatic devices, producing a wide range of effects (wider, at least, than one I remember from David Oistrakh's reading on a Kultur VHS, 1208). Gompper is equally sensitive to the ebb and flow of tempos throughout the movement—as well, of course, to the ebb and flow of dynamics, ultimately bringing the movement, with David, to a forcefully declamatory conclusion. In the second movement, the duo fully explicates the sense of the markings of the "Intermède: Fantastique et léger." There's more sheer fancy here than in almost any other reading I've heard, and the duo remains tantalizingly unmoistened by even the most ardent passages, as it does in the finale. Overall, David remains true to the violinistic style of the sonata as well as to the musical one. (So, recently, have Volodja Balžalorsky, with Christoph Theiler, on Cantabel 003.)

Bartók himself and Joseph Szigeti played the composer's First Rhapsody, as the notes point out, in their celebrated 1940 recital at the Library of Congress; while that reading may, in a sense, be definitive—or at least authoritative—David and Gompper play the first movement with breathtaking sweep, neither soft-pedaling its dissonant elements nor making them the performance's principal focus. In the second, they combine playful dance with stirring virtuosity, both technical and tonal.

In Korngold's suite drawn from incidental orchestral music to *Much Ado about Nothing*, David projects strength if not always warmth in the first movement, "Mädchen im Brautgemach"; nearly menacing resolve in the brief, quasi-comic second movement; melting tenderness in the longer third, "Garden Scene" (which has become a sort of encore number in its own right); and surprising élan in the finale, "Mummenschanz." Gil Shaham recorded the suite with André Previn as pianist (Deutsche Grammophon 439 886, reviewed by Walter Simmons in *Fanfare* 18:3); Philippe Quint recorded it too, with orchestra, on Naxos 8.570791, 33:2. By no means dull, Shaham's version seems to have had its edges filed, at least in comparison with David's more sharply etched playing, which creates, in "Holzapfel und Schlehwein," for example, a more comic effect.

Having established their credentials among the skeptical in the perhaps more familiar part of the program, David and Gompper bring a certain credibility to their readings of the less familiar part. In Schoenberg's Phantasy, however, they seem more aggressive but perhaps correspondingly less ardent than Frank Huang with Dina Vainstein on Naxos 8.557121, 27:6, which I described at the time of review as communicating "in a human way that transcends the specifics of musical style just as a face communicates in a way that transcends language."

Nevertheless, David remains a strong proponent of the work, which seems to adapt itself, as here, to various styles of playing it just as, say, Bach's solo sonatas and partitas do. Once again, David never seems to disregard the work's thorns, but he's not intent on impaling his listeners on them, either. Rather, in collaboration with Gompper, he virtually revels in the clarity he brings to the performance.

By comparison with what's gone before, Olivier Messaien's *Thème and Variations* sounds almost old-fashioned, especially in the duo's performance. They preserve the individuality of variations that almost flow into each other; and they conduct the whole set to a shattering conclusion.

Whether or not the works in question constitute some sort of new canon, as the CD's title suggests, will most likely be an issue debated more insightfully by appealing performances like these than by any number of colloquia. Recommended even to the wary. **Robert Maxham**