

STRAD MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2008

HELEN CALLUS Works by Prokofiev (arr. Borisovsky), Vaughan Williams, Tchaikovsky, Wieniawski, Bridge, Swain, Tertis, Schumann & Chopin; Helen Callus (viola) Phillip Bush (piano).

ASV CD DCA 1184

For her latest recording, Helen Callus has researched the many transcriptions made by the 'Father of the Russian Viola School', Vadim Borisovsky. In Tchaikovsky's *Ardent Declaration*, Callus is up against a 1951 recording by Borisovsky himself. Her dark, expressive sounds, on a viola by Gabrielle Kundert, compares very favourably indeed with the master's 18 3/4-inch Gasparo. Many of these pieces are slow, but the variety of styles and Callus' eloquence dispel any idea of monotony. Indeed, her virtuosity in Prokofiev's *Young Juliet* and *Mercutio* is admirable, with every note clearly in place in spite of the breakneck tempo.

Two other viola pioneers are represented on this CD: William Primrose with his transcription of *None But the Lonely Heart* and here Callus doesn't quite emulate Primrose's ability to sing out in double-stops high up on the A string), and Lionel Tertis with *Sunset*, an original composition redolent of the Edwardian salon, attractively paired with Freda Swain's *Song at Evening*.

Schumann's Adagio and Allegro op.70 may be considered an original piece, too, since the composer suggested the viola as an alternative to the original horn. Callus and Phillip Bush make the most of Schumann's harmonic complexities, and take the Allegro at a very brisk pace indeed. Michael Lieberman's idiomatic arrangements of Bridge and Chopin demonstrate that the grand tradition is very much alive.

I enjoyed this lovingly produced CD immensely, and hope there's more of the same to come.

-Carlos Maria Solare