

ny 39, also in E-flat. That similarity seemed me vague at best; but there's certainly a semblance in Fesca's main theme itself, notably the stentorian chords at 2:52 and the falling motif near the close-out (4:52). Like Mozart, Fesca soon surges forward in healthy and affirmative fashion, and Beer- mann apparently sees no need to slow down noticeably for the lyrical second subject. Following a vigorous fugato, the strings are obliged to toss off several pages of furious but high-entertaining busywork en route to the tired and ringing close.

Just as Fesca has the winds respond to the strings in the opening movement, so in the *dante* the strings are echoed by what sounds like a "cuckoo" motif in the winds, with an evolving melody suggesting one of Haydn's tented "walking themes", even unto the steady tread of the basses; yet the prevailing mood often points to Beethoven—an imaginative mix. In the fanciful Minuet, frequent turns of phrase suggest a courtly occasion. Beermann's bracing tempo sounds just fit for the high-spirited finale, whose main theme suggests one of the dances (No. 6) from Beethoven's *Creatures of Prometheus*, spelled a carefree strain that Beermann once again does no cause for undue sentiment.

The program is filled out with two overtures (in D and C) that Hagels assures us were not intended as "concert overtures" in the mantic sense but rather entrances for the court theater. The third example, *Omar und ila*, conjures an imaginary Orient of the type quite popular at the time; detached statements of trombone and winds set off tense tremolos that suggest Schubert's *Fierabras*. And we might hear Schubert in the furiously roiling strings; the winds seem the voice of reason—at least to no avail—but they win out in the end, led out with the requisite cymbals, bass drum, and skirling piccolo as befits the customary Janissary color.

*Grove's* Fifth Edition finds Fesca's symphonies "feebly scored"—I must wholeheartedly disagree—yet they state truly "in richness of modulation he approaches Spohr". That might seem faint praise these days; nevertheless with all three now readily available I found clear progression from strength to strength in playing them through one after the other. As entertaining as this First Symphony surely is, the opening Allegro of 2 is even stronger, 3 rather still; and Fesca's growth as a composer even more apparent in the slow movements—witness the striking cello part in 3:II. I could invite the gentle reader who heeded my orders of encouragement for 2 and 3 to seek it this splendid new recording of 1.

HALLER

**FETHEROLF:** *When Only the Moon Rages; Dream On, O Suns; Suite-Fantasia*  
Gamavilla Quartet—Albany 932—54 minutes

The Gamavilla String Quartet is a Czech group that commissioned the first work here, the composer's Quartet No. 1 of 2001. The music is based on "snippets of themes" from Wen-chung Chou's Cello Concerto; the title is from Dylan Thomas. It is a work of mystery and dreamy, whispery beauty, quite unusual in its effect.

The Duo for violin and cello is in five movements that take only eight minutes to play. It's also primarily lyrical, though with mechanistic interludes carrying it from one mood to another. It is played by quartet members Vit Muzik and Marian Pavlik. The Suite is for solo cello and is a more substantial work in five movements lasting 21 minutes.

David Fetherolf (b. 1956) began as a cellist, turning to composition in about 1980. He says this entire suite was "written in a single sitting as a free improvisation". Pavlik has some trouble with this work, and with reason. It requires finding the same high-register double-stops over and over again at one point—not easy to do under pressure. The work as a whole is pleasant, though not a great deal happens in it musically, and Pavlik has other troubles with pitch along the way. The rest of the music is a bit more substantial, though the program is on the short side.

D MOORE

**FINZI:** *Songs*

John Mark Ainsley, t; Iain Burnside, p  
Naxos 570414—64 minutes

Finzi's valuable contribution to English songs of the 20th Century is well represented by the three collections of songs on this exquisite release. He grouped his songs into what he called "sets" over the course of many years of deliberate and slow composition, as represented by *Til Earth Outwears*, Opus 19a, and *Oh Fair to See*, Opus 13b. An exception to that practice is *A Young Man's Exhortation*, Opus 14, a work he planned as a cycle. The ten songs of the cycle are in two groups of five, each preceded by a quotation from Psalm 90 (I: "In the morning it flourisheth and growth up" and II: "In the evening it is cut down, and withereth"). All 24 songs are settings of Thomas Hardy poems, except the six songs of Op. 24, which include only one Hardy text. Finzi strongly shared Hardy's sense of bleakness, anger at human suffering, and fatalism; and those sentiments are expressed poignantly in these songs. His overall tonal style is punctuated with dissonant "poison notes" (as Colin Davis once called them) that accentuate the bitterness.

Ainsley and Burnside give these songs a probing and sensitive reading. Ainsley is in excellent voice, with impressive control over dynamics and phrasing. His top notes tend to be harsher than his middle range, but that is not inappropriate in conveying the bitterness of these songs. Illuminating notes and full texts are included, though with Ainsley's impeccable diction texts are hardly needed. The recorded sound is clear and warm.

Song-writing was at the heart of Finzi's compositional life. If you are not familiar with his songs, this is a superb way to encounter them. If you are familiar with them, you will not find a better reading of them anywhere.

Good notes and texts are supplied.

R MOORE

**FORTNER:** *Violin Concerto*; see BRUCH

**FRANCK:** *Prelude, Fugue, Var*; see MASSENET

*Psyche & Eros*; see DVORAK

**FUCHS:** *Cello Sonata 2*; see BRAHMS

**GE:** *4 Studies of Peking Opera; Wrong, Wrong, Wrong; Yi Feng*

Kathryn Woodard p; Shanghai Quartet; Margaret Leng Tan, voice; Frank Su Huang, vc  
New Albion 2134—53 minutes

The *New Grove Dictionary* describes Ge Gan-ru (b. 1954) as China's first avant-garde composer. At first I found it hard to imagine that there could still be such a thing as an avant-garde composer. What hasn't been done? After listening to this release, though, I think that there is still, if not a real avant-garde, an avant-garde spirit that's very much alive in new music like Ge's. It has to do with the composer's attitude toward sounds and to the design of a composition.

In that light, the earliest work on this release—*Yi Feng* (Lost Style) for cello solo (1983) sets the tone for the later works. The 11-minute composition is written for a cello whose strings have been tuned in fourths an octave lower than usual, and the performer must also strike the body of the instrument as well as bow and pluck the strings in unconventional ways. As Kathryn Woodard points out in her informative notes, the sounds thus produced suggest audible ties to such venerable Chinese instruments as the pipa and qin.

The way these sounds unfold in the work suggests no clear pattern on a first hearing but, rather, a more complex network of correspondences where one might construct continuity in any number of ways. In this sense, Ge's work resembles John Cage's, though the individual gestures of Ge's music are quite different. Frank Su Huang commissioned the work, which was harshly criticized when it was premiered; the recording dates from the time of

the 1983 premiere and so carries the freshness and intense conviction that performers bring to music when it is quite new.

The *Four Studies for Peking Opera* (2003) is an impressive, 30-minute work that combines prepared piano with string quartet to evoke four distinct aspects of Peking Opera: the Prologue emphasizes repetitive phrases that accompany athletic or likewise demonstrative stage action; 'Aria' is more lyrical and contains a number of heterophonic passages; 'Narrative' is more discursive even while it maintains melodic richness; 'Clown Music' unfolds more rapidly and includes a few passages that remind me of Western music. The musical materials are mostly dissonant and complex, but Ge explores these sounds so thoroughly that I never feel overwhelmed by them. And once again, the succession of ideas in the music defies easy description, and Ge is not afraid to introduce elements that at first seem incompatible (for instance, a delicate, ascending figure for the string quartet at the end of 'Aria'). The performance is excellent.

My favorite work here is *Wrong, Wrong Wrong!*, a kind of solo operatic scena for a soprano who accompanies herself on a variety of toy instruments. It's hard to imagine anyone performing it except for Margaret Leng Tan, who has championed Ge's music for some time. Tan suggested the instruments from her own collection, and Ge's choices form a beautiful array of timbres, including a toy table harp and toy glockenspiel, various toy percussion, and of course Tan's beloved toy piano. The text, which dates from 1155, is an eloquent lament. Tan brings to this music the qualities that make her performances so unforgettable: an intensity and complete concentration that one senses even without seeing her, an unerring sense of timing, and a dramatic approach that emphasizes her great joy on the stage. I hope that a film of this performance will be released. All in all, this is a fascinating release.

HASKINS

**GEMINIANI:** *Violin Sonatas, op 5*

Anton Steck; Markus Möllenbeck, vc; Christian Rieger, hpsl—CPO 777225—60 minutes

These are Francesco Geminiani's own violin transcriptions of his Opus 5 cello sonatas. Both versions were published in the same year (1746 in Paris and The Hague; 1747 in London) and they are full of the spirit and inventiveness one would expect from this pupil of Corelli. The six sonatas are very well played, with a bold recorded sound that has little acoustic space around it (this is a radio recording). The sound can become rather wearing, so be sure to experiment with volume settings. The three players combine to produce a very big sound,