



FAURE: Violin Sonata No. 1 in A, Op. 13; SCHUMANN: Violin Sonata No. 1 in a, Op. 105; BARTOK: Violin Sonata No. 2, SZ 76 – Jade Duo – MSR Classics

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FAURE: Violin Sonata No. 1 in A, Op. 13; SCHUMANN: Violin Sonata No. 1 in a, Op. 105; BARTOK: Violin Sonata No. 2, SZ 76 – Jade Duo – MSR Classics MS 1510, 60:51 [Distr. by Albany] ****:



At first glance the idea of incorporating these three sonatas on one disc seems silly; after all, what could they possibly have in common, late Schumann, early Faure, and mid-road Bartok? Each a different nationality, and each with a separate and very distinct compositional ethos that relied on equally different artistic origins? Don't expect me to answer it—I can't! But what I can report is that by some miracle the Jade Duo's brilliance in coming to terms with the notion of this canned conglomeration was inspired from on high if anything ever was.

What strikes me most about this disc is not so much the idea of disparate pieces making for nice contrast in one recital, but of how similar these very dissimilar works really are. It is only a twenty year leap from Schumann's impassioned *First Sonata* to Faure's *First*, and even though the leap from late German romanticism to the nascent beginnings of the French harmonic revolution might seem a bit wide, it's really not. Faure was still in the throes of an age where the idea of pure passion and emotion expressed through creative harmony was in full swing, and Schumann, perhaps unknowingly, was also writing music then that touched the otherworldly spheres of instinct versus his heritage of strict allowance to the established forms. Any way you look at it, the connection is there, and one world does indeed touch the next.

The skip to the radical demythologizing of the folk-song-relevant Bartok from Faure is even a further leap along the continuum, and taken by itself the links between Faure and he are not as obvious. But this is a tripartite recital that must be taken as a whole, and when one listens to the Bartok with the structures and impassioned pleadings of Schumann still in the ears, while the Faure hovers midair like a unifying harmonic force—for there are similarities in what Bartok was doing 50 years later than Faure—the golden thread of violin art begins to glow anew. Even the often disheveled ordinances of the Hungarian master come into high relief when considered among the preceding works that set the stage for making his difficulties into something more easily apprehensible.

So far, marvelous. But it would mean nothing if the performers were not up to it. The Jade Duo, China-originated and only three years on the scene (they look like kids), appear here for the first time on record, and I was little prepared for the bold and almost throwback nature of these readings. They don't shirk on big-band presentation, and are not afraid of wearing each composer quite heart-on-sleeve. Fortunately, each composer can take it easily, and each responds with affection and overwhelmingly gracious power. MSR has given them a fine beginning, and I certainly hope they plan on following up this wonderfully-recorded studio disc.

—Steven Ritter

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