

CHAMBER REVIEWS



GRAINGER

Complete music for four hands, two pianos

Penelope Thwaites, John Lavender, Timothy Young (piano)
Heritage HTGCD403 290:49 mins (4 discs)

Some passions flare, then fade. Others burn forever, and that's clearly the case with Penelope Thwaites's love of that maverick spirit, Percy Grainger. 25 years ago or so the Australian pianist, with John Lavender, recorded three cherished CDs of Grainger's music and arrangements for four hands at one or two pianos. Passion undimmed, along with dexterity, she recently recorded a fourth, slipped into what otherwise would be a straight reissue of the original trio. Her companion at the keys is now Timothy Young, though the playing's flair and precision is unchanged.

So does the music's delights. Most of the new selection consists of arrangements, though we're never far from Grainger's harmonically throbbing world with the pieces by his fellow Frankfurt students or his adored Delius. Grainger's creative magic creates one near miracle: an almost convincing two-piano version of Delius's transcendental epic of vocal and orchestral haze, *Song of the High Hills*. But the shorter-spanned items work the best, like Balfour Gardiner's jaunty *English Dance* or the soaring romance of Addinsell's *Warsaw Concerto*. The biggest additional Grainger piece is his two-piano *Konzertstück 1896*, survival of an unfinished piano concerto written when he was sweet 13. Even by 1896 much of this movement would have seemed archaic; but if you want to hear the boy Grainger trying on the shoes of Mozart, Brahms, and other composers, Thwaites and Young are ready and eager to help.

As for the reissued recordings, listening again only makes the heart grow fonder, especially during Grainger milestones like *In a Nutshell* and *Lincolnshire Posy*. The music's contrapuntal tapestries radiate with extra clarity, helped by Thwaites and Lavender's rhythmic vim and the recording's acoustic spread, with each piano clearly delineated. Grainger might not be a 'great' composer, but I can't think of another who so quickly and quirkily enhances life.

Geoff Brown

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★